

Report to Our Community

2022



Overview

Founded in 2008, the Denver Police Museum is a designated 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with a mission to promote social impact by building bridges between citizens and the law enforcement of Denver, create opportunities for community understanding and engagement, strengthen the city's relationship with the community, and educate youth to inspire community involvement, responsibility, and a future generation of law enforcement professionals.

We are dedicated to actively creating community conversations where citizens can hear, see, feel, participate, understand, and appreciate the value of police in our lives. The Museum offers free tours of our collection on display and holds a variety of engaging programs throughout the community.

In 2017, we unveiled the proposed site of the Museum's new home with aspirations to develop a wide range of interactive exhibits featuring a permanent collection on display and spaces to hold educational and community outreach programs on-site.



Stakeholder Input Project

To guide our strategic planning efforts, the Denver Police Museum undertaken a comprehensive stakeholder input project that included a series of in-depth interviews with community members throughout the Denver Metro area. To date, dozens of interviews have been conducted with educators, law enforcement officers, parents, youth, nonprofit professionals, residents, faith-based organizations, local businesses, government representatives, and community leaders.

Building Bridges for a Stronger Future

Events in recent years have focused national attention on the profound fractures in trust between police and the communities they serve. More than ever, we are a divided community in need of new bridges that can create shared understanding. In 2020, we began to reexamine our role in our changed world to determine how the Museum could become a more active participant in uniting, transforming, and inspiring change. While strategies and tactics are forthcoming, the outcome of these conversations will shape the direction of the Museum's programs and how we work with others to address some of the region's most intractable problems.

It's clear that the Museum has a unique opportunity to positively impact police-community relations to help build a stronger future. We hope you will be inspired to get involved in helping us to turn our vision into a plan for action.

Project Goals

- Understand what interviewees see as important community needs regarding relationships between law enforcement and the community (youth, in particular).
- Gather ideas and input for how the Museum could play a positive role in strengthening police-community relations.
- Gauge reactions to the Museum's name and gather feedback on possible alternatives that reflect the vision for the Museum.
- Explore possible programming concepts and community involvement efforts.

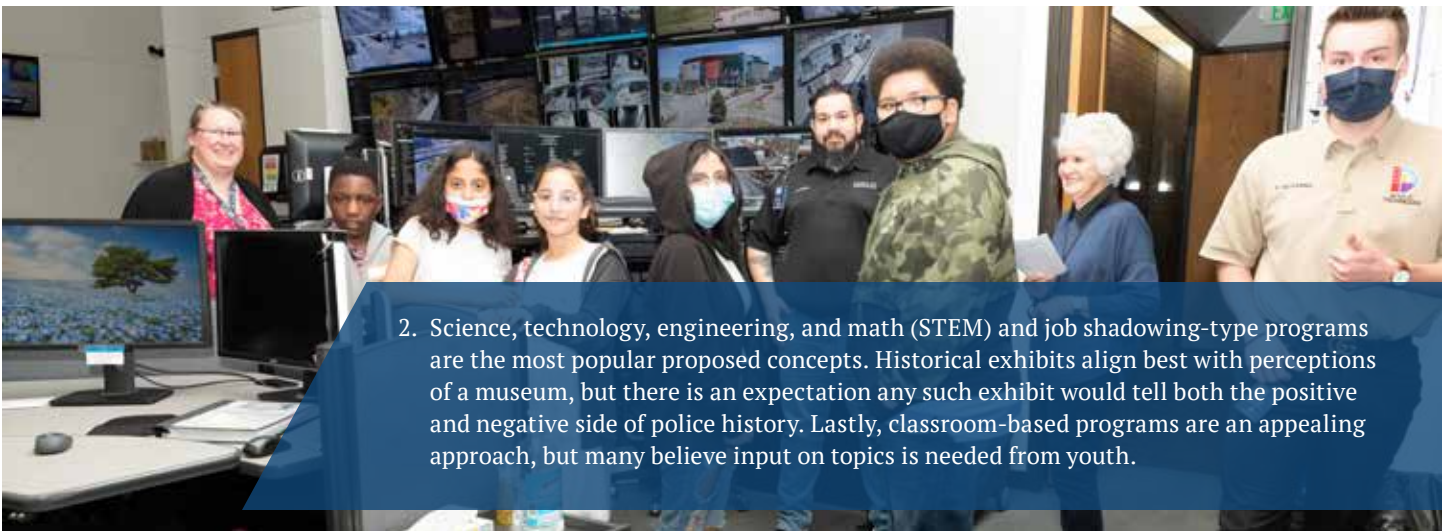


What We Learned

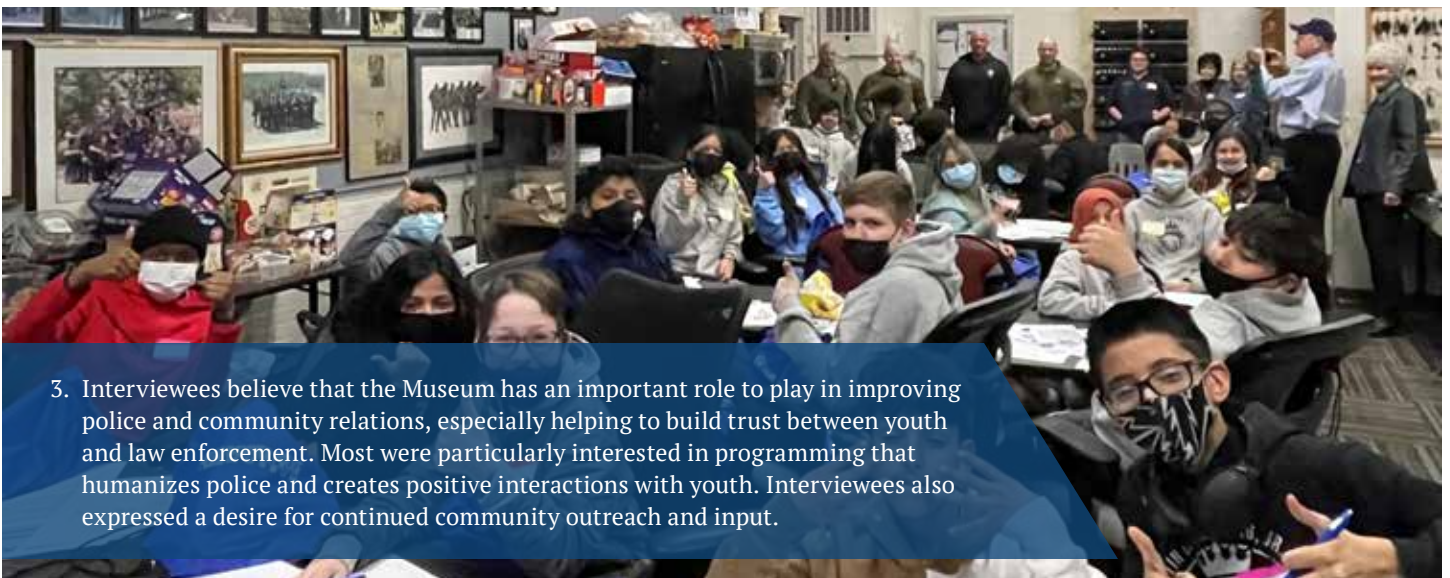


Key Findings

1. Interviewees recognize there is an increasingly strained relationship between police and low income and minority communities. Increased community participation, out of uniform, is desired to help build trust and positive relationships between communities, youth, and police.



2. Science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and job shadowing-type programs are the most popular proposed concepts. Historical exhibits align best with perceptions of a museum, but there is an expectation any such exhibit would tell both the positive and negative side of police history. Lastly, classroom-based programs are an appealing approach, but many believe input on topics is needed from youth.



3. Interviewees believe that the Museum has an important role to play in improving police and community relations, especially helping to build trust between youth and law enforcement. Most were particularly interested in programming that humanizes police and creates positive interactions with youth. Interviewees also expressed a desire for continued community outreach and input.

Public Safety

Homelessness and lack of support for police are seen as large safety issues in the Denver metro area.

- Many interviewees noted the increased homeless and transient population in the metro area is an increasingly important safety risk. Homeless camps in general are seen as an eyesore, but several interviewees said it was the associated drug use, sexual violence, and mental health issues in the camps that cause the safety risk.
- Importantly, many interviewees noted national narratives around “defunding the police” coupled with several members of Denver’s City Council pose a safety risk to all communities.
- There is an impression that police are not being supported and therefore are in increased danger.



Law Enforcement Interactions

Interviewees expressed the need for more positive interactions between citizens, youth, and law enforcement.

- Many interviewees explained how both law enforcement and citizens should listen to one another and talk about important issues. **Transparency and understanding** were elements interviewees talked about as being needed to develop better communication between both sides.
- The majority of interviewees expressed the need for building **better relationships between youth and law enforcement**. Many thought that this kind of engagement should occur informally, when an officer is not in uniform. Overall, interviewees expressed a desire for youth to have more exposure to officers in a **positive setting** which can help to **humanize officers** so trust can be established.
- One interviewee expressed concern about law enforcement officers facilitating the Museum’s programs based on a belief that minimal contact between youth and officers would be best.



Law Enforcement Interactions

Experiences with police are often determined by racial identity and socioeconomic status.

- Almost all interviewees acknowledged that while they believe many people, and youth, have positive experiences with law enforcement officers, a person's race and socioeconomic status can ultimately shape perceptions about police.
- For many Black and Brown youth, their first interactions with police are through traffic tickets or other law enforcement activities. This creates a negative perception.
- Furthermore, Black and Brown communities are more likely to have higher police presence.

"If [people] have relationships with the organizations and the police, there's an outlet, if [a] certain population doesn't have those relationships, I don't think they really have a relationship with the police. And I think by not having one, it defaults to a negative one..."



More involvement with the community and between officers and youth is needed to build trust and rapport.

- There was agreement among interviewees that Denver police as well as other metro area police departments need to be more involved in the community to build trust and rapport with the communities, especially youth, they serve. Some suggestions for doing this included:

1. Attend community events and neighborhood block parties
2. Interact with community members when not in uniform
3. Be transparent with communities about departmental priorities and crime statistics
4. Acknowledge some of the mistakes of police and enter into a dialogue with communities



“How we engage, building trust, hearing community voices, educating people about changes within the Denver Police Department. I think also...this museum [is] an excellent opportunity to engage the community and think about how the community voices would inform the vision for this project...”

“Spending more time, getting more personable with [officers], and doing meet and greets with the community so that there is a more relaxed feeling...Sometimes I know it’s difficult, but I think there needs to be time spent...a lot of [youth] don’t have that positive role model. A lot of [youth] look up to people that work in the community...”

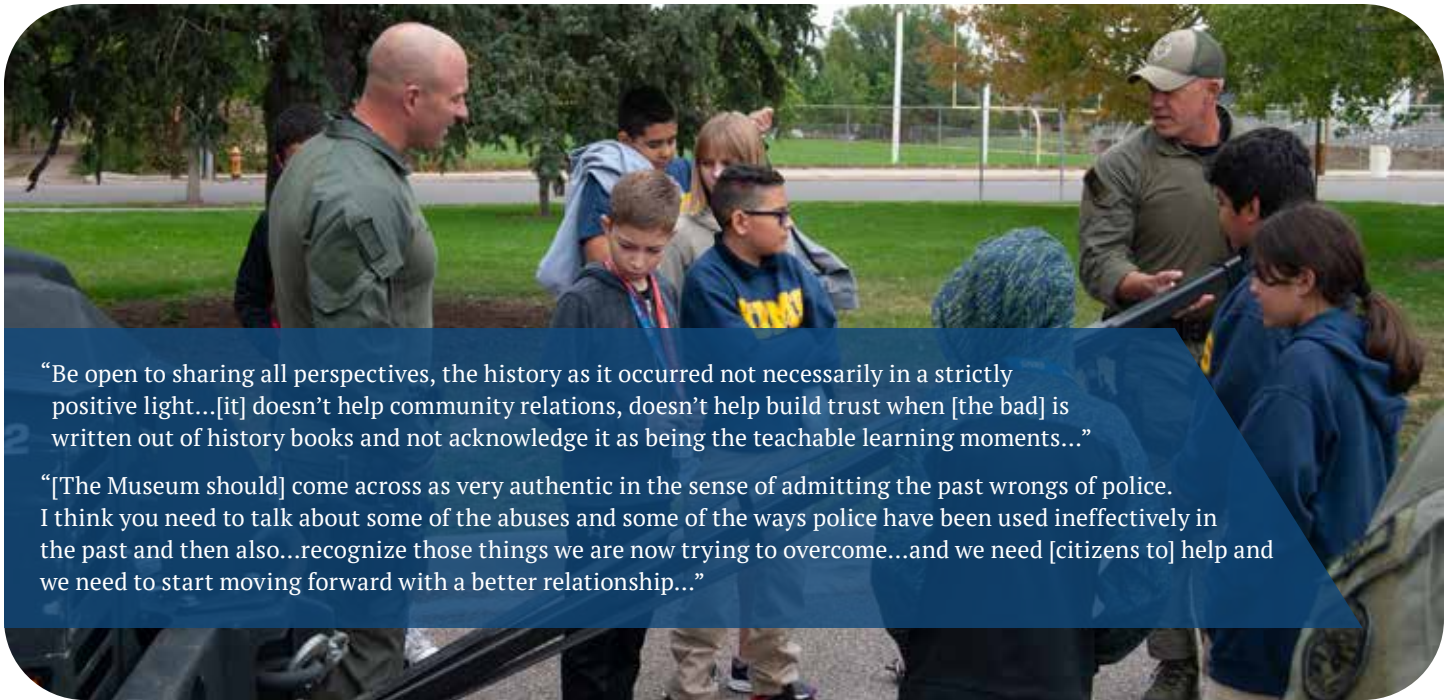


Transparency and Celebration

Interviewees emphasized the importance of telling the “whole story” of the police department—both good and bad.

- Many interviewees noted the importance of ensuring that the Museum will tell the whole story of the Denver Police Department, including a belief that historical exhibits must be transparent and talk about both positive and negative aspects of policing history.
- Interviewees expressed a desire for the Museum to celebrate the history of diversity within the department, including people of color and women.
- Interviewees also stated they expected historical exhibits to focus on recognizing officers with distinguished service or those who have been killed in the line of duty.





“Be open to sharing all perspectives, the history as it occurred not necessarily in a strictly positive light...[it] doesn’t help community relations, doesn’t help build trust when [the bad] is written out of history books and not acknowledge it as being the teachable learning moments...”

“[The Museum should] come across as very authentic in the sense of admitting the past wrongs of police. I think you need to talk about some of the abuses and some of the ways police have been used ineffectively in the past and then also...recognize those things we are now trying to overcome...and we need [citizens to] help and we need to start moving forward with a better relationship...”

Community Outreach

More outside input should be included from all aspects of the Denver metro community.

- Many interviewees applauded the Museum’s intent and efforts to reach out to them and gather community input.
- Interviewees expressed a desire for police to recognize the backgrounds, emotions, and past traumas of youth when interacting with them.
- A few interviewees noted that it would be beneficial for law enforcement to communicate their policing strategies to the community and for the department to have progressive leadership from officers.

“Make sure there is communication early on with youth directly as part of these conversations in terms of the type of topics and issues that they would like to learn about and have programs. And talking to educators, folks in our public-school systems, and others could be very helpful just to be able to make sure that programs and ideas are best fit for the kids as well...Youth outreach directly as part of [the Museum’s] conversations or at least people who are working closely to youth on a daily basis to try to get that perspective as well.”





“Police’ is a trigger word right now for a lot of our community members so utilizing law enforcement or law enforcement science type of regimen something that has a little bit more of the actions around what a police officer does opposed to the name police...”

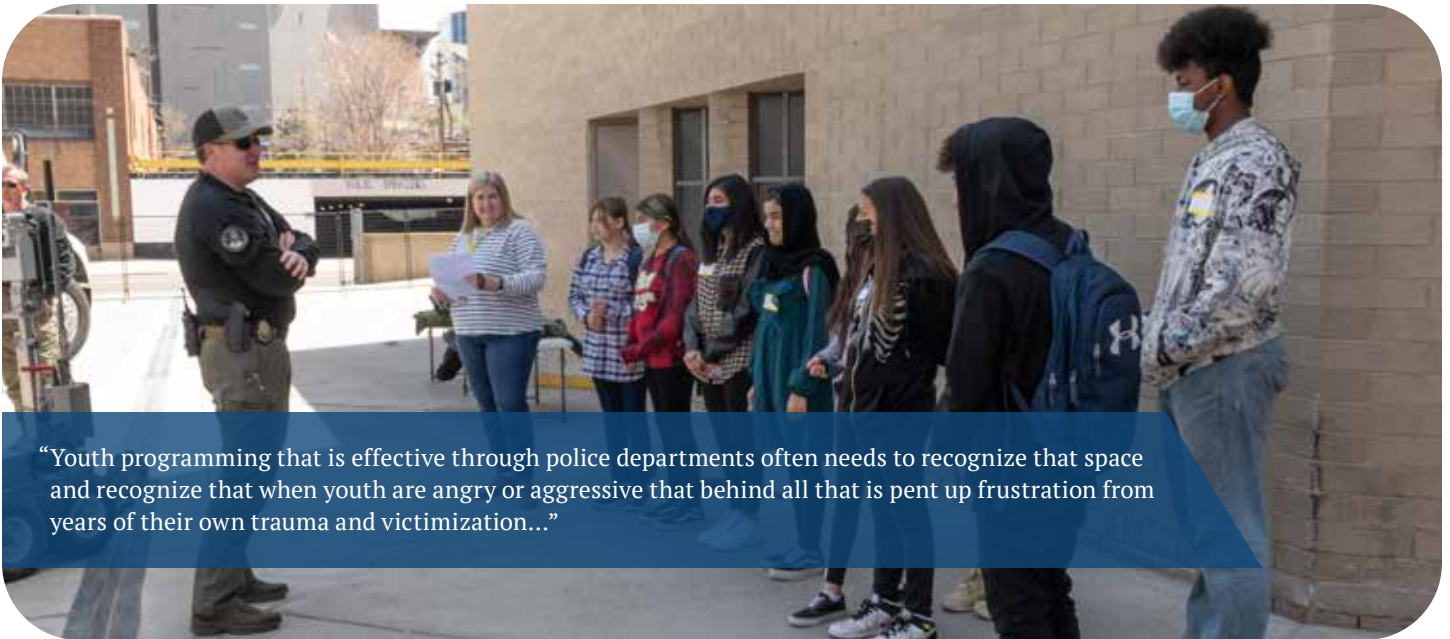
“Thinking about where the community is in that could also be helpful...maybe something like the ‘Denver Police Community Museum’ that tells the community that they have a place there...”

Museum Name

The name “Denver Police Museum” received mixed reactions from interviewees.

- Notably, several interviewees thought the name implied a direct relationship between the Denver Police Department and the Museum.
- Furthermore, many interviewees expressed an old-fashioned view of museums. Some wondered if the word “museum” might not be well aligned with the Museum’s aspirations. Interviewees suggested that the term “museum” may not fully represent the Museum’s vision and mission.
- Some interviewees suggested that the word “community” should hold a place in the Museum’s name, or that a tagline could be added to help better explain the organization’s mission.
- Some interviewees voiced concerns about the risk of having the word “police” in the Museum’s name while others were indifferent when asked about the name.
- Most interviewees were in agreement that the name is appropriate and believed that the name communicated the Museum’s goals.





“Youth programming that is effective through police departments often needs to recognize that space and recognize that when youth are angry or aggressive that behind all that is pent up frustration from years of their own trauma and victimization...”

Museum Programs

The Museum has an opportunity to develop a unique blend of programs to serve youth and the community.

- The majority of interviewees responded positively to the Museum’s proposed youth programming, including drug prevention, healthy relationships, online safety, gang prevention, and forensic science.
- One interviewee expressed concern about “nonprofit fatigue” and redundancy in programs that target youth.
- Many interviewees were especially interested in programs that introduced youth to officers in a positive and non-threatening environment.
- Interviewees believed that the Museum’s programs could help to improve police-community relations and build trust between officers and youth.
- Some interviewees noted that youth perceptions of police are shaped by parents and caretakers and indicated that family programming would be helpful as well.



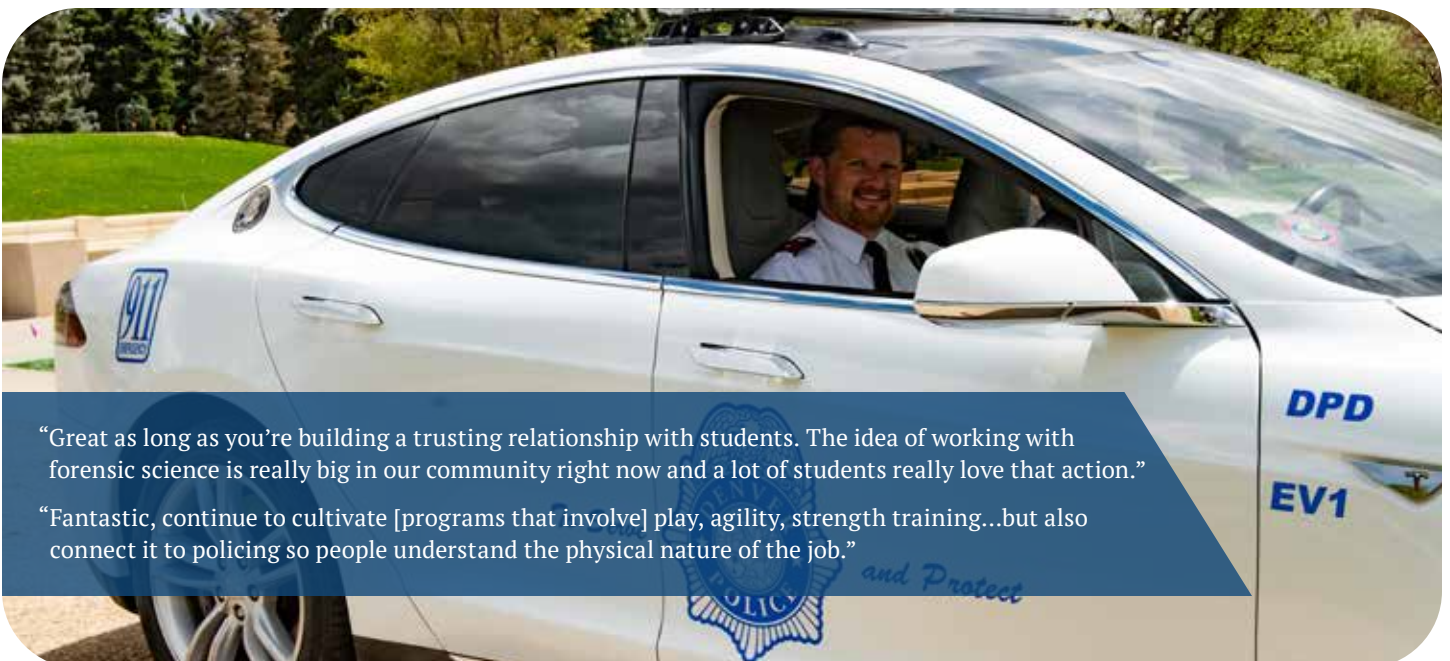


Career Exploration

Job shadowing-type programs with law enforcement was a very appealing concept to interviewees.

- Interviewees thought job shadowing-type program concepts were important and good opportunities for youth to interact with police.
- Due to SWAT and 911 Operator duties being so different, interviewees thought providing options for both would be important.
- A few interviewees suggested other components that could be added to the Museum's programs such as athletic events and physical fitness, education about health equity, and inclusion for those with special needs.

"I think they're two really separate types of jobs...I mean there's going to be some kids that might be very interested in the forward-facing role of a police officer, and there's going to be others that prefer to be more of a support system, so I think they're both really neat."



"Great as long as you're building a trusting relationship with students. The idea of working with forensic science is really big in our community right now and a lot of students really love that action."

"Fantastic, continue to cultivate [programs that involve] play, agility, strength training...but also connect it to policing so people understand the physical nature of the job."

Moving Forward

Continue to gather input and invite more community voices in to help shape the Museum's vision.

- A youth advisory council was perceived as a step in the right direction for building positive relationships between police and their communities.
- There was a belief among interviewees that the museum must be close, but not too close, to the Denver Police Department. There is need for the Museum to set a tone of impartiality and address some of the tougher topics and police history.
- Interviewees noted many opportunities for the Denver Police Museum to partner with existing cultural institutions and organizations to provide programming.
- Lastly, some interviewees noted the need to ask youth what programs they would be interested in, as proposed topics seemed to have a perception of being what police may think youth are interested in.



Thank You!



DENVER POLICE
MUSEUM