4390 Final Report

Agency: Public Safety Office, HRM government (2023 winter); Supervisor: Caroline Hemstock

Part 1: The nature of the agency and the work it did

The agency I worked in was the Public Safety Office under HRM government. It is under the division of regional planning. On its website it described in 2008 the municipal government made a commitment to address the root of crimes and victimization in Halifax, therefore the Public Safety Office was set up regarding the recommendation in 2009. The office was also in charge of developing and updating the public safety strategy, which guides the municipal government and stakeholders in building a safe and viable community. The projects mainly fall into a few branches: Safe City and Safe Public Space Program, the Community Mobilization Teams and the Women’s Safety Assessment. Some of their works under the Safe City and Safe Public Space Program include community gardens which promote healings between residents in communities, and local programs and services in communities such as Lower Sackville and North Preston where there were disproportionally high rates in violent crimes. Community engagement and consultations were also part of their jobs in developing strategies and programs. For the Community Mobilization Teams, it was a group of volunteers in selected communities what provide services and connections to local residents in case of emergencies. The goal in it was to bridge the gap between government and local residents. Examples where Community Mobilization Teams were useful include during a lock down with weapon threats and after hurricanes. Volunteers would have made connections with residents prior to emergencies, and therefore they could provide information to residents in a more direct way like texting. Lastly, the Women’s Safety Assessment was a tool for building safer spaces, such as streets, transit system, campuses and workplaces for everyone. The team which carried out Women’s Safety Assessment would have meetings with community members where needed, and the assessment would be carried out by going into the places and using the five senses and the guideline to spot unsafe features in the area. The most recent one being carried out was on Quinpool Rd, and there were two teams of around 10 persons walking on Quinpool Road between Beech Street and Robie Street, and the team was focusing on things like broken lights, dark arrays, uneven sidewalk and sharp corners of store display. The role of the Public Safety Office in these projects includes developing them, carrying out them, consultation with the public and consultation with other government agencies for support like human resources and financial support. Besides these projects, the Public Safety Office also has works on developing reports and recommendations to promote equity in government and public spaces, such as recommendations on addressing underrepresentation of Islamic Women in government roles by investigating the challenges they were facing, like language barriers and dress code, and developing recommendations or solutions to the CAO and the municipal government.

The Public Safety Office is located on the seventh floor at Duke Tower, which is one of the buildings on top of Scotia Square. The team itself is a small but growing team, therefore they are sharing the office with HRM Public Relations. Given the nature of the work (many of the works are direct public engagement), the staff spend quite a bit of time working outside of the office, and much of the work can be done remotely. Regardless, there is a weekly check in team meeting on Tuesday Morning, but not everyone is always able to attend. Some of the weeks have most of the team members attending, while some of the weeks had team members working somewhere else or even out of provinces, and therefore having a smaller team meeting. Therefore, most of the collaboration was done online on a specific MS teams’ channel.

Part 2: The work I did during the practicum

My work in the Public Safety Office included typing a minute of a meeting, updating a session of a drafting note, photographing in Women’s Safety Assessment and developing a briefing note on a topic that both of the office and I were interested in. Besides these, I have also attended various training courses including the GBA+ training and Afrocentric Training.

In the first week of the practicum, I attended the meeting which was as an introduction to the Public Safety Office and some of its work for a few new teammates. My task was to type the minute, which was similar to a meeting note of what the presenter had covered. Then, after the minute, my supervisor had me read the policies of HRM workplace and attend the first training, which was the GBA+, or Gender Based Analysis. It was an online training course offered by the federal government. The course covered points of assessing systemic inequalities, what is equity, importance of diversity, ways to achieve workplace equity and diversity, and points to consider. For example, the gender gaps in Canada and what could you do in workplace to reduce the gender gap. The course took around two and a half hours to complete the modules, and there was a final quiz at the end. And I got a certificate upon completion of the course. Then, after the training, my supervisor gave me the second task, which was to review the jurisdictional scan regarding anti-Muslim hate in a developing briefing note. The team had already gathered some information on what other provinces were doing in combating with anti-Muslim hate, like campaigns, policies and follow-ups to incidents. They also included the hyperlinks to the corresponding news articles following each point. However, some of the links did not work anymore or were outdated, and my task was to check all of the hyperlinks whether they were still working, did any information mentioned in the document had updates or changes, were there missing information, and to check if there were new campaigns and policies that were not covered in the original jurisdictional scan and adding that information. Most of the information in the document was up to date or required very minor changes, however I spotted a few broken hyperlinks and I have found a few new campaigns and I had made notes in the document and told my supervisor my findings.

After updating the briefing note, I contacted a team member who was working with Halifax Transit and the Women’s Safety Assessment. She explained her work to me, and she discussed a few project ideas with me for my upcoming independent project. Before the start of my independent project, I had help with taking pictures in the Women’s Safety Assessment. The Women’s Safety Assessment happened on a night in early February on Quinpool Road, from 6:30 to 9. There were around 20 people, including the staff from the Public Safety Office and community members, and we split into two teams. My task in my team was to take pictures of anything that my team spotted on, like broken lights, good and poor examples of arrays. Besides the features that the team found, I also found a downed powerline and I have included that as well. Then, after the actual assessment, I transferred the pictures from my camera to my laptop and organized them into a document that had pictures followed by descriptions. And I submitted that document along with a hyperlink to the original pictures to the team.

Then, I started with my independent project, which was drafting a briefing note. I chose the topic to be investigating having an incident reporting system on Halifax Transit, rather than complaining to 311 or 911. An incident reporting system enable transit riders to report sexual violences or harassment happened on Transit in an easier way, and it could also better protect the victim as the victim does not need to be seen for taking with others in front of the perpetrator. The transit agency could also do better in responding as the reporting system could be monitored 24/7 and therefore they could dispatch supporting staff or police to provide help to the victim and arrest the perpetrator. Halifax currently does not have such system, and all reports were asked to be made to staffs directly, calling 311 or 911 in emergency, and they either do not ensure privacy or anonymity of the victim, or they are made as after report so support could not be provided in real time, therefore it worths for having a reporting system in Halifax Transit. In the briefing note, I provided an overview of sexual harassment on transit around the globe and in Halifax, then I discussed the advantages of having an incident reporting system, followed by a review of the current reporting system and protocol in different transit agencies in Canada and around the globe, possible drawbacks, things to consider and suggestions for Halifax Transit.

I also attended the Afrocentric training when I was preparing the briefing note. The training took place at the Purdy’s II, the HRM’s HR office and I learned the history of African Nova Scotian, their challenges, stereotypes and what could we do in combating with them.

Part 3: Self reflection and things I have learned

I learned about the operation of a government unit and the work it required to do in creating policies or strategies, as well as the barriers and challenges in the process. For example, I knew that participation in public engagement is lacking from specific groups of people, therefore the office would have to develop solution to make sure everyone were represented in the feedbacks to us, and to attract the groups to join our public consultation to make sure we could listen to feedbacks to them.

The practicum mostly matched my expectation. It was a division of the government, and the work it did was something that I expected. However, I was surprised with the nature of the office (many of the employees were working from home) as I thought an office work would be having the full team in the office. The team was also smaller than what I had expected, and I expected I would gain hands-on experiences in public engagement, which I did not. And also, there were fewer collaborations with other team members than I expected as most of my tasks were directed by my supervisor or independent projects.

From the practicum, I also learned about things that I did well and did not do well. For example, I was assured that my works were mostly high quality and exceeded expectations. However, I always underestimate the time I take in completing a task, and that is something I will have to work on in future. I was late for a few meetings at the beginning of the practicum, and I had addressed it by taking an earlier bus, and that was something I saw improvements.

Things that I will do differently if I do that again are starting my tasks earlier as mentioned above, and I will make more connections to other team members in listening to their work and learn from them. I was not that active in communicating with other team members, and I believe it was one of my weaknesses, and I would learn a lot if I had made those connections.

Part 4: General thoughts of the practicum

The objective of the practicum was to learn how the Public Safety Office works in developing policies and programs through observations (attending meetings) and to acquire new knowledge through independent projects.

I found the photo taking in the Women’s Safety Assessment was the most enjoyable task because it perfectly matched my interests. However, the briefing note was the most rewarding task because I learned a lot through my research. The task I found most challenging was the minute taking as it happened in the first week so I had never heard of the contents being discussed in the meeting, and the meeting was quite long, therefore it was difficult for me to stay focused on that.

In overall, it was a great experience with very nice supervisor and colleagues. The work time was flexible and there were choices of doing the work remotely for most of the tasks. The office environment was excellent for working independently, and I have definitely learned a lot through the practicum.