

**INDEPENDENT
SCRUTINY &
OVERSIGHT
BOARD**

A hand is shown typing on a laptop keyboard. A large, semi-transparent circular graphic with concentric white lines is overlaid on the hand and keyboard. The background is dark and blurred.

A PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ENGAGEMENT

For those who inherit national police scrutiny



The Independent Scrutiny and Oversight Board (ISOB) was established in 2021 to provide independent oversight of the Police Race Action Plan. As part of its final report, the ISOB has produced this companion document, a practical resource for whoever continues this work. Where the final report sets out what has happened, this document addresses what to do about it.

The framework that follows is not a formula. Every context and force is different, and the relationship between any community organisation or scrutiny body and any force will be shaped by specific histories and people. Instead, this framework offers principles distilled from the experience of 36 people who have done this work across a wide range of contexts.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN: WHAT TO KNOW & WHAT TO PREPARE

Engaging with policing on anti-racism is not an ordinary professional exercise. It takes place in a context shaped by decades of history, significant power imbalances, and an institutional culture that, in most cases, is not naturally oriented towards the kind of honest self-examination this work requires.

Understanding that context is vital.

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Master your brief. The problem is that people enter into these consultancies without real knowledge of policing, the architecture of power and the allocation of resources or operational policing priorities or forms of police accountability or systems change analysis. Then expect by the dint of the force of their nature or their moral status that they will appeal to the angels of their better natures, and they're, frankly, deeply disappointed.”

Civil society leader

Understand what you are entering

Policing is a hierarchical institution with a strong internal culture and a unique way of interacting with others. Police leaders usually spend their whole careers within the force and adopt its behaviours and assumptions. This does not mean they are bad people or leaders, but it does mean they often see the world and race equity work differently from community organisations and scrutiny bodies.

The voluntary nature of most anti-racism engagement with policing means that forces retain the ability to disengage without formal consequences. Knowing this going in and designing your engagement strategy accordingly is important.

Be clear about your objectives

The main difference between successful and unsuccessful engagements is whether people are clear from the start about the change they want to see. It is not about the process or documents, but about the specific, visible difference they want to make for Black communities.

This means focusing on outcomes, not just activities. For example, instead of saying "we want policing to improve its approach to community engagement," say "we want stop and search disproportionality in this area to drop by a set amount over a certain time, and for that to be tracked and reported publicly." Being specific can feel uncomfortable, but that is what makes it effective.

This also extends to ensuring that you understand your role, priorities, focus and stick to them. Otherwise, you are susceptible to the risk of being drawn into conversations that are outside the remit of your expertise.

Recognising the parameters of your focus means you can also advocate for the right people to be in the right rooms with you. Practical ways to protect this are to ask for material to be shared in advance, to request that meetings are recorded wherever possible, and to ensure an agreed record of the meeting is generated and circulated.

Know who has power

It is more important to reach senior leaders, even if they are resistant, than to work only with willing middle managers. Mandates for change happen at the top - by Chief Constables, Police and Crime Commissioners, elected mayors (from 2028), National Police Chiefs' Council leads, and College of Policing directors; implementation then occurs through middle management. If your engagement does not reach all these levels, it is unlikely to create lasting change.

Finding out who really holds power in a police force, and planning your approach to reach them, is one of the most important steps before you start. This means having honest talks with people who know the force well, especially Black officers and staff who can explain the informal power structures that are not shown on organisation charts.

As police leadership frequently changes, make sure commitments are built into the institution, not just tied to individuals. Get written commitments from the organisation, set up governance that holds new leaders to previous promises, and keep public records of what was promised and delivered. This way, new leaders cannot ignore past commitments.

Recognising genuine progress

A key skill in anti-racism work with police is differentiating between real progress and the appearance of progress. Police often have reasons to present themselves positively, and engagement processes can look the same whether they lead to real change or not. Being able to spot the difference is essential.



Signs of genuine progress

Genuine progress tends to have specific characteristics:

- Outcomes are improving in ways that can be measured and independently verified, not just reported by the institution.
- The people whose experiences the work is designed to improve are describing things as better.
- Commitments are being met on the promised timelines.
- Difficult questions are being answered honestly rather than deflected or glossed over.
- When things go wrong, as they inevitably will, the response is honest acknowledgement and course correction, rather than defensive assertion that things are fine.



Warning signs

Warning signs that engagement is becoming more about appearances than real progress:

- Meetings become more frequent, but the conversations in them become less honest.
- Requests for specific data are met with delays or deflections.
- Progress reports emphasise activity rather than outcomes.
- The language of race equity becomes fluent in policing communications without any corresponding change in the data.
- Community organisations, networks and civil society organisations that raise difficult questions find themselves gradually excluded from the process.
- Conversations concentrate on the tone, or delivery of critique rather than engaging with the substance of the recommendations or observations made.



There is something called initiative fatigue within policing. Every time there is a new thing, it gets layered on top. People become cynical.

They wait for it to pass. If you are seeing that pattern, it is a sign that the engagement has stopped being taken seriously."

Police Staff network representative

ENABLING CONDITIONS: WHAT MAKES PROGRESS POSSIBLE

Five years of ISOB scrutiny and 36 interviews point to seven conditions that help make real progress possible. No single condition is enough on its own; they work best together, and missing one makes the others harder to keep going.

1 Senior leadership that is genuinely and visibly committed, not merely formally supportive. This means leaders who speak about race equity in their own words, who demonstrate accountability when things go wrong, and whose commitment is visible across the institution rather than confined to dedicated teams or portfolios.

2 Clear outcomes with specific, measurable, directional metrics. Not aspirations or intentions, but concrete statements of where the force is going, how fast it expects to get there, and how it will know when it has arrived.

3 Communities should help design solutions, not just comment on plans that are already made. This means sharing power and data, and being truly open to changing direction based on community feedback.

4 Independent scrutiny must have access to data and the authority to challenge. If a scrutiny body cannot get the data it needs, or if its findings are ignored, it is not truly fulfilling its role.



5 Long-term relationships, built on mutual respect and real understanding of each other's situations, are important.

6 Consistently collected, high-quality data - broken down by race and other key factors - and shared publicly is essential for independent scrutiny.

7 Accountability should be built into structures, not just rely on individual goodwill. This can include legal duties, inspection systems, governance, or a mix of these.

NAVIGATING COMMON BARRIERS

The following are the most common barriers to progress, along with practical tips on how to spot and address each one, based on interviewees' experiences.

Performative compliance

Sometimes, police appear to do race equity work: writing action plans, running training, and holding consultations. However, do not make the real structural changes needed.

The data stays the same.

The best way to address this is to focus on outcome data from the start. Do not settle for process data or activity reports; look for real measures of improvement for Black people. If a force cannot show, with clear numbers, how stop and search disproportionality or trust in the Black community is changing, that lack of information is important in itself.

Leadership instability

Sometimes, a supportive leader leaves and is replaced by someone with different priorities. Progress slows or stops, meeting requests are ignored, and data sharing ends.

To guard against this, make sure commitments are built into the institution, not just tied to individuals. Get written commitments from the organisation, set up governance that holds new leaders to previous promises, and keep public records of what was promised and delivered. This way, new leaders cannot ignore past commitments.

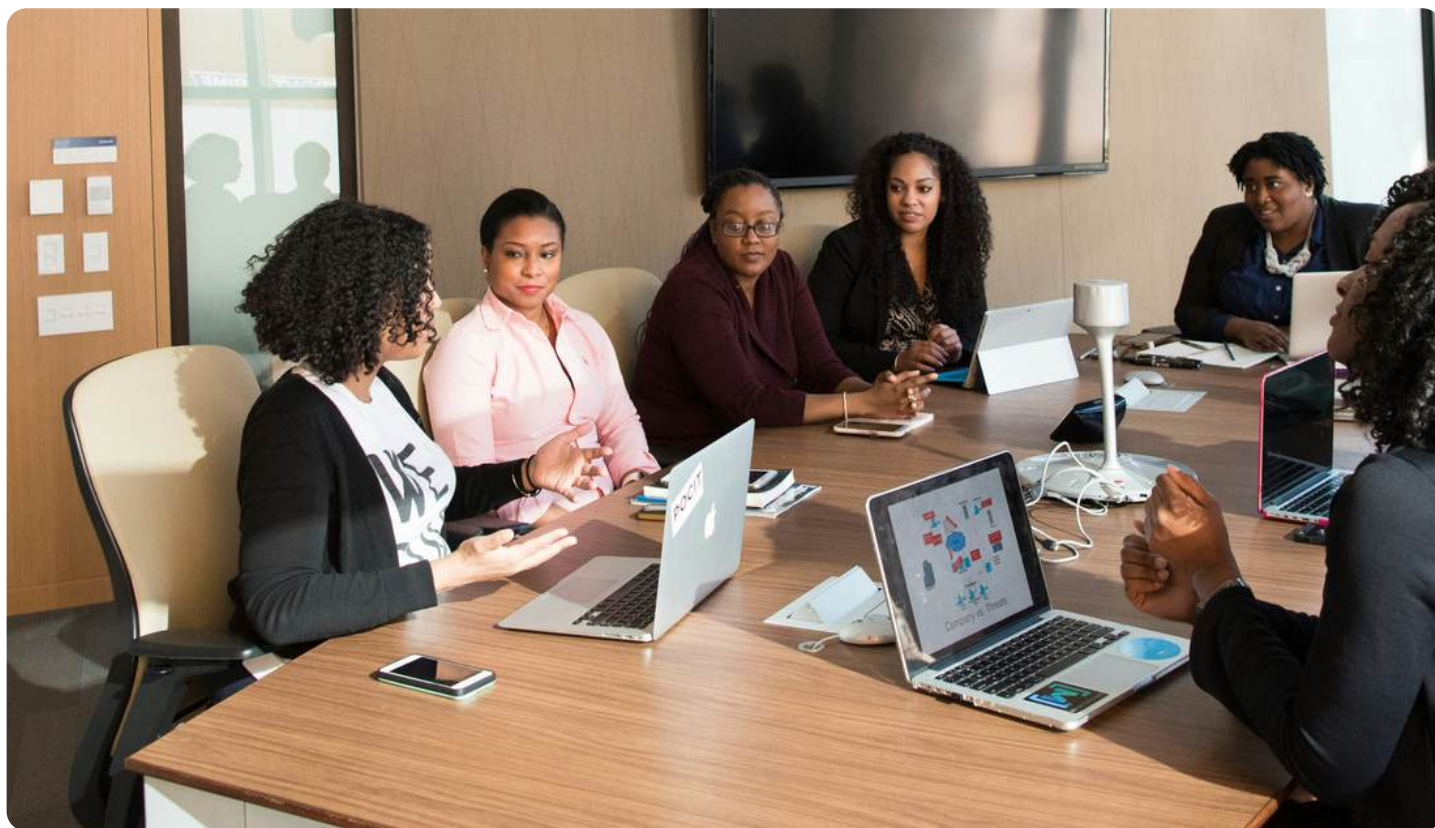
The credibility trap

Community groups and scrutiny bodies are sometimes told their concerns would be taken more seriously if they used a different tone.

This shifts the focus from the real issues to how they are raised.

It is important to notice this pattern. While it is natural to want to soften your approach, doing so is often not helpful. Calm, direct, evidence-based challenges, supported by data, work better than being overly accommodating.





Protecting yourself and your organisation

Working on anti-racism with police comes with real costs for both individuals and organisations. This is often overlooked, but everyone considering this work should understand it clearly.

The emotional cost is real. People who work with police on these issues, especially over long periods, often face defensiveness, gaslighting, and the frustration of slow progress. For those with personal or family experience of discrimination, this work can also bring up past trauma.

There can also be reputational costs. Organisations that challenge police publicly may lose access to information. Individuals who raise tough issues might be seen as difficult or not genuine partners. Being ready for this and having support in place is part of good preparation.

Practical costs matter too. Ongoing work with a large institution takes time for meetings, research, analysis, and sometimes legal knowledge. Community organisations, which are often small and under-resourced, bear these costs more heavily than well-funded police institutions.

Any future framework for anti-racism work with police must take these costs seriously and include ways to support those who bear them. This ensures scrutiny remains effective by supporting the people doing the work.

SCRUTINY TEMPLATES

Below are links to practical tools developed throughout ISOB's work, including meeting agendas, minute-taking templates, reporting formats, and engagement logs. These are shared as a resource for anyone setting up or running a similar scrutiny function, based on what worked for us in practice.

Select a link below to access the relevant template.

[MEETING AGENDA](#)

[MEETING MINUTES](#)

[DECLARATIONS
OF INTEREST](#)

[MEETING REPORT](#)

[ONGOING ACTIONS](#)

[INVOICE](#)

The Independent Scrutiny and Oversight Board (ISOB) exists to provide overview and external scrutiny of the Police Race Action Plan.

The focus of the Plan is on the experiences and concerns of Black people due to the starkness of the racial disparities present in policing's interactions with Black communities.

The ISOB is fully independent, and is chaired by public law and professional regulatory barrister, Abimbola Johnson.

