



NATIONAL NETWORK FOR SAFE COMMUNITIES

PRACTICE BRIEF:

TRUTH-TELLING AND RACIAL RECONCILIATION BETWEEN LAW ENFORCEMENT AND AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

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The following working document has been prepared for use in the Leadership Group process of the National Network for Safe Communities. The contents do not necessarily reflect the views of all participants or funders, but reflect a set of ideas that draw upon a range of National Network field experience, related research, and the Network’s founding principles. This document is intended to define and frame “racial reconciliation” in this context; why it is an important concept and discuss how it has been put into practice to date. This is intended to support discussion, analysis and further research and development on this topic.

I. INTRODUCTION

In American communities affected by high levels of violence and serious crime, which are predominately poor communities of color, there is a persistent gulf between law enforcement and these communities that is embedded in history and often furthered by current practice. This gulf is often explicitly raised by these communities; it is often not taken seriously by law enforcement. When it is addressed openly, a profound transformation in community-police relations is possible. The new relationship this work creates will directly support the efficacy of the National Network crime prevention strategies; it is one of the independent goals of the National Network. Community norms against violence and crime, freed to emerge as tensions with law enforcement ease, can carry much of the burden of crime prevention. Law enforcement actions, taken in an atmosphere of community legitimacy, will be more effective and cause less unintended harm.

“Racial Reconciliation and Truth Telling” is shorthand for a process of airing grievances and misunderstandings and grievances between minority communities affected by violence and overt drug markets and the law enforcement agencies that serve these communities. These misunderstandings and grievances are explicitly racial and prevent real working partnerships necessary for sustained public safety and healthy communities. In order to achieve a “re-setting” of this community-police

relationship, grievances must be openly acknowledged and some of these misunderstandings must be aired and de-bunked. Through this process, communities and law enforcement can come to see that (1) they misunderstand each other in very important ways; (2) both have been contributing to harms neither desires; (3) both want, in crucial areas, fundamentally the same things; and (4) there is an immediate opportunity for partnership that can concretely benefit both the community and its guardians.

Most of this work, and the most successful to date, has been done in the context of the National Network’s drug market strategy, which is focused operationally, at any given time, on particular markets in particular communities. The reconciliation process has thus far operated on a fairly small scale at any given time – a neighborhood – though this has had ripple effects, through community participants, into the larger city, and work in successive neighborhoods has in some cities brought the process to most or all high-crime minority neighborhoods. A key challenge for the Leadership Group is to map what has been learned so far onto the city-wide group and gang violence strategy. What follows is designed to set the stage for that work.

II. WHY RACIAL RECONCILIATION MATTERS

In distressed minority communities most affected by crime, there is a persistent and unaddressed, racially polarized gulf between law enforcement and community members. In black communities in particular, that gulf is embedded in hundreds of years of real history of legal oppression by various levels of the United States government, including law enforcement. In day-to-day interactions between law enforcement and community members – from traffic stops to searches – that history is not expressed or discussed. Yet it powerfully influences how affected minority communities understand law enforcement action.

Affected communities view present law enforcement actions through the lens of history, creating a narrative such as this: “The U.S. government, from the beginning of its history, has used law and state power as tools to oppress, exploit and damage black people and black communities (and, in different ways, brown communities). When the civil rights movement achieved full legal citizenship, outside conspirators had to find new tools to continue oppressing black communities. To this end, the government invented crack, passed draconian drug laws, and privatized the prison industry so that it could continue to exploit black people for monetary gain. The state of affairs in American ghettos today is just an unbroken continuation of history.” A body of formal scholarship documents these understandings and perceptions.¹

¹ Brunson, R.K. (2007), “Police Don’t Like Black People: African American Young Men’s Accumulated Police Experiences.” *Criminology & Public Policy*, 6: 71–101.

Alexander, Michelle. “The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness.” The New Press, 1 edition January 2010.

Law enforcement agencies have their own understandings and these, in turn, can play into those of the community. In policing, for example, an arrest is a good thing. Police norms are pro-arrest – even when an arrest does not solve the underlying problem. This can and often does lead to high-arrest strategies in troubled communities. Those strategies, in turn, are read by the community through the lens of its own racial narratives as further evidence that the point of policing is arresting and incarcerating young black and brown men rather than solving community problems. This fuels the “stop snitching” norm and prevents partnership with police. Law enforcement’s narrative – its understanding and explanation of why the community is silent – asserts that the community is living off drug money and is tolerant of crime and violence. This “corruption” narrative reduces law enforcement’s desire to engage in community partnerships and further fuels the pro-arrest norm.

Three reasons why this matters:

1. Community Social Control

The most important factors that influence whether a person obeys the law or not are whether he thinks doing so is right or wrong; whether those he cares about and respects think it is right or wrong; and whether the community he belongs to thinks it is right or wrong. Most offenders, even very serious ones, obey the law most of the time. Even in high-crime communities, most people obey the law most of the time.² The ability of the criminal justice system to impose punishment – what scholars call “formal social control” – is the least important influence on a person’s decision to commit or not commit a crime. The police are not present at every potential crime scene; most crimes that are committed are never reported (50%); most crimes that are reported are never cleared by an arrest (20% of those reported); and most arrests do not result in meaningful sanctions.³ What matters the most is the judgments of individuals, peer groups, families, and communities that to commit crime, or this crime, is wrong.

Scholars call this “informal social control,” and divide it into “internal” – conscience, shame, and the like – and “external” – peers, loved ones, families, and community. Common sense, ordinary experience, and a vast amount of research show that informal social control is far more potent, overall, than formal.⁴ The experience of affected communities with law enforcement, and the narratives that influence how these experiences are understood, discourage these communities from exercising informal social control over their most at-risk members. Law enforcement seeks to enforce laws against violence and drug trafficking. Yet, when state power is perceived as a racist oppressor, community members can’t ally themselves with state power no matter how much they detest the

² Papachristos, Andrew V., Meares, Tracey L. and Fagan, Jeffrey, Why Do Criminals Obey The Law? The Influence of Legitimacy and Social Networks on Active Gun Offenders (January 12, 2009). Yale Law & Economics Research Paper No. 373; Columbia Public Law Research Paper No. 09-199. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1326631>

³ Walker, Samuel. Sense and Nonsense About Crime, Drugs, and Communities: A Policy Guide, 7th Edition.

⁴ See, for example, Sampson, Robert J. “Crime in Cities: The Effects of Formal and Informal Social Control” *Crime and Justice*, Vol. 8, Communities and Crime (1986), pp. 271-311
Sampson, Robert J. & Laub, John J. “Crime and Deviance over the Life Course: The Salience of Adult Social Bonds” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 55, No. 5 (Oct., 1990), pp. 609-627

violence and damage. As a result, the community does not set the very anti-crime standards that are essential for effective community social control.

2. Legal cynicism

A growing body of research indicates that high-crime minority neighborhoods, with both the highest concentrations of violence and greatest law enforcement attention, often exhibit high levels of “legal cynicism,” or a lack of confidence in the integrity and capacity of law enforcement to ensure public safety. Neighborhoods impacted by very high rates of crime and violence generally have *less* tolerance for violence than other communities; yet the police are perceived as ineffective and illegitimate, leaving residents to “take matters into their own hands.” As a result, high levels of legal cynicism predict increased neighborhood violence and homicide rates.⁵⁶ In other words, *all else that predicts violence held equal*, neighborhoods where residents doubt the legitimacy and ability of law enforcement to keep them safe are more violent than other similar neighborhoods.

3. Implications for Law Enforcement Practice

The combination of anger at law enforcement for perceived injustice and legal cynicism produce a profound silence—the community members who could speak out against the crime and violence often don’t, concentrating instead on the damage of law enforcement practice. Law enforcement reads this as corruption and complacency. Law enforcement sees no one willing to speak out and only sees community activism and outcry directed at law enforcement. Law enforcement then draws the reasonable, if mistaken, conclusion that “everyone must be benefiting from the drugs (and the associated violence) or they would stand up against this.” Law enforcement becomes more aggressive in an effort to control the violence and community chaos. The more law enforcement takes actions that are aggressive and intrusive; legally correct but harming (through massive concentrations in particular communities) or outright legally incorrect, the more it feeds into the community narrative and prevents an effective partnership.

Community and law enforcement understandings are mirror images of each other.

Both sides blame each other for producing the current high crime and high incarceration outcomes as a matter of choice and desire. Yet both sides want the same: safety and security; for the intrusive and damaging law enforcement to stop; for those who chose to hustle to do so quietly; and to have the truly dangerous and disruptive controlled.

Law enforcement and communities generally don’t engage with these issues in any effective way, and virtually never in a way that penetrates to the underlying historical and racial tension. They therefore continue unchallenged and essentially prevent functional partnerships. To forge a real law enforcement-community partnership these issues need to be aired and addressed. Nearly always, conversations between law enforcement and communities address *particular issues and incidents*: high levels of crime, racial profiling, an officer-involved shooting, etc. This “reconciliation” process instead

⁵ Kirk, David and Papachristos, Andrew V., Cultural Mechanisms and the Persistence of Neighborhood Violence (December 6, 2009). *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 116. Forthcoming. <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1081894>

⁶ Kane, R (2005). Compromised Police Legitimacy as a Predictor of Violent Crime in Structurally Disadvantaged Neighborhoods. *Criminology*, Vol 43, No 2, April 2005.

addresses the *context* in which these issues and incidents take place: in particular, what each side thinks of the other; why those views are in some part justified and in some part unjustified; why the most fundamental and damaging views on both sides are wrong; how these misunderstandings lead to outcomes neither side likes; how each side wants core things in common; and the prospect for a fundamentally different relationship and way of doing business new understandings bring.

III. PROCESS

1. Initiation

When these issues are raised, in the ways we usually currently do business, they are generally raised in open-door, public settings: community meetings, hearings, and the like. This approach is usually not productive.

Successful processes have begun very small, largely privately, and built from there. In this context, they have, to date, all been instigated by senior police officials, almost always chiefs. Those police officials usually know, personally, community figures who they know to be authentic, honest, and committed to the community. This work has begun by reaching out to such community figures; engaging with them in small groups in private; making progress; seeking their counsel on which community members to bring into the process; and continuing until a larger and more public engagement is possible. By that time, much of the work of the process has been done.

This engagement between law enforcement and community can occur at the start of strategy design and launch phase. In the drug market intervention, the engagement should take place at the beginning since conversations about drugs inevitably lead to race. It can start with citywide partners even before a target area has been selected. The exact timing of the engagement – and how it intersects with strategy development and implementation – needs to be further developed for the group strategy.

2. Who does law enforcement talk to?

There are usually two different segments of community figures that need to be engaged in this process:

- People of authenticity and standing who operate citywide—both individuals and organizations that have standing in the eyes of offenders *and* in the eyes of the larger community. They can include faith leaders and groups, elected officials, ex-offenders or other informally recognized persons around these issues. They should be identified according to *who they are* and *what they do*, not what their *formal roles* are: some activists are perfect, while some are poison; some faith leaders and politicians have the right community standing on these issues, while some do not.
- People of authenticity and standing in particular neighborhoods or smaller geographical areas, who either are part of the wider constituency but have a foothold in particular places or are groups/individuals that operate very locally.

The central operational moment in both the group violence and drug market strategies are the “Call-Ins” of core offenders. Those who you engage in this racial reconciliation work are often the same individuals who would be well-suited to speak in your Call-Ins. The community moral voices you bring into the partnership should be those who your specific group/gang offenders or drug dealers will listen to. Key figures include:

- Offenders and potential offenders are influenced the most strongly by people who they respect and perceive as authentic. Communities that suffer from violence are typically home to a number of **parents who have lost children to gun violence**. These parents have particular moral authority with group and gang members.
- These communities are also home to large numbers of convicted or formerly incarcerated people who have learned their own lessons about crime and violence and no longer wish to act in this way. They frequently feel a very powerful desire to give back to the community and have tremendous standing in eyes of younger offenders. Working with them in the call-ins, in street outreach, or in diversion programs, can be extraordinarily powerful. Therefore, **ex-offenders** are among the strongest allies we have in delivering an antiviolence message. In some jurisdictions some of these people work as formal “outreach workers” or “street workers;” in other jurisdictions they are involved in less formal ways.
- These communities often also have very **local, grassroots leaders** who group and gang members recognize as authentic and whom they respect. They are often not “traditional” community leaders—they are usually not elected or appointed officials. They are often grandmothers, neighborhood elders, barbers, coaches, clergy members and others.
- Almost all serious offenders also have people who are close to them, whom they care about and who care about them. These individuals can be parents, grandparents, other family members, friends, mentors or others. We call these individuals “**influentials**” as they have the greatest ability to directly influence individual offenders’ behavior in an ongoing way.

How to identify these people in your community:

Most communities already have people doing this work. These figures are often (but not always):

- Engaged in street outreach
- Working in prisoner reentry field
- Grass roots leaders in affected neighborhoods
- Faith leaders
- In existing groups (mothers of murdered children)
- Coaches
- Prominent, local public figures

3. Preparation work with law enforcement

In the successful work to date, there have been initial conversations with law enforcement alone by someone we will call here, for lack of a better word, a “framer.” The framer is a person who law enforcement are willing to engage with in good faith, who explains to law enforcement what the community thinks of them, why, and the ways in which these understandings and misunderstanding have been driving the community to bad behavior. It is, in effect, a process of *translation* – of community narratives and norms – to law enforcement. These conversations have to date begun with the chief and a select group of usually senior staff.

Translating community narratives and norms

Key matters law enforcement needs to understand about community beliefs:

- A large number of disenfranchised minority community members look at you as racist conspirators getting rich off the drug trade and the arrest and incarceration of young men of color. **You must take this perception seriously.** It is wrong, but as long as it is believed it is enormously consequential.
- Much of the deeper historical narrative on which this belief is based is absolutely true. Until relatively recently, in historical terms, the law was a tool of deliberate racial oppression. You need to understand and acknowledge the real history of slavery, Jim Crow, reconstruction and other forms of legal racial oppression that have beset minority communities up until very recently. These issues are living memory for many in the black community, and strong parts of collective history and memory. They influence how almost everyone in affected communities sees and understands your intentions and actions today.
- You hear many of these things, frequently and directly, from the community, and do not take them seriously enough to respond. When the community says it thinks drug enforcement is a racist conspiracy and law enforcement does not explain what it does and why it is not a racial assault, there is little reason for the community to change its mind.
- Street-level law enforcement frequently involves unlawful activity—be it outright corruption or common but illegal practices like unjustified street stops, illegal searches, corner clearing, and the like. Because of the community’s perspective, these actions get amplified and become entrenched in its narrative.
- Legal law enforcement actions performed with disrespect add to the narrative. Actions might be legal but will still not be well-received when taken in volume, are limited to certain areas, and/or involve disrespectful treatment of community members.
- Actions you take with the intent of protecting the community can in fact harm the community—e.g. high, concentrated levels of stop-and frisks; arrests; prosecution and incarceration do active harm to neighborhoods.⁷ Men we blame for wanting to deal drugs may have been walled off from legitimate work by their felony histories. Families we blame

⁷ Rose, Dina R., Clear, Todd R. Incarceration, Social Capital and Crime: Implications for Social Disorganization Theory. *Criminology* Volume 36, Issue 3, pages 441–480, August 1998

for not controlling their kids may be rendered dysfunctional by the incarceration of parents. This does not mean that they did not commit crimes or that their arrest, prosecution and sentences were not legal and justified. The normal “legal and justified” conversation, however, misses the fact that legal steps taken with the full intent of protecting the community can do the community unintended harm.

- Much of the way community members experience these dynamics is vicarious. A resident need not be touched personally to experience them. Some individuals and/or neighborhoods have been traumatized because of their negative interaction with police. Many more experience a kind of vicarious trauma by means of the community narrative rehearsed at the barbershop, beauty shop, club, church or corner where stories of police misconduct are recounted. When you add media coverage of use of force incidents like Oscar Grant, Amadou Diallo, Sean Bell and others, a communal anguish and anger occurs that is hard to define or express. Communities and individuals can feel smoldering resentment even if local law enforcement misconduct has not be especially egregious.⁸
- In the highest-crime, most violent neighborhoods, very few people are seriously criminal and violent. Research shows, typically, that around 5% of 18-24 year old men drive most of the violence and drug crime in the most active neighborhoods. Most residents neither drive the problem nor endorse it. Treating them as if they are and do is profoundly alienating
- What we read as disengagement, complicity, and support for criminality is often a silence brought on by that alienation. Most people in dangerous neighborhoods hate what’s going on, but they will not stand with law enforcement that is viewed as either unhelpful or an oppressor.
- The community does not understand what is taken for granted behind closed doors in law enforcement: that what we are doing is not working in these neighborhoods, especially with respect to drug enforcement. Many people in the community believe that law enforcement is all-powerful, can do whatever it wants, and is deliberately allowing the drug trade to continue in order to arrest young black men and protect their own jobs and interests.
- We often give communities no good choice in dealing with the offenders in their midst. Communities do not want to be besieged by crime, but they don’t want their children imprisoned either.

4. Preparation work with communities

Similar preparation work has been necessary with the key community figures first approached about these issues. The “framer” also needs to “translate” law enforcement to these figures. In practice, this has often been done with a very small number of key law enforcement present.

⁸ Brunson, R.K. (2007), “Police Don’t Like Black People: African American Young Men’s Accumulated Police Experiences.” *Criminology & Public Policy*, 6: 71–101.

Translating law enforcement narratives and norms

- Law enforcement thinks the community doesn't care about the crime and violence, that everybody's living off drug money, that the community is complicit. **You must take this perception seriously.** It is wrong, but as long as it is believed it is enormously consequential.
- This misunderstanding is supported by the fact that there are few strong, consistent, public community voices against crime and violence; by that fact that police misbehavior gets loud community attention but misbehavior by residents gets very little, and especially by community silence about homicide and serious violence.
- Law enforcement frequently looks at, especially, young men not finishing school, not taking entry-level work, using kids as low-level drug operators, and the like, and concludes that there is no longer any moral center in the community. They hear the lack of elders' voices in favor of community standards and conclude that there are no meaningful elders.
- Law enforcement hears constant community reference to historical grievances and hears it as excuse and victimhood.
- Law enforcement knows that much of what it is doing is ineffective, particularly with respect to drug enforcement, but cannot think of anything better to do, given its perception of community complicity.
- An arrest and a prosecution is a good thing in law enforcement culture, even if it doesn't resolve the crime problem. Officers care about their jobs, have been trained to do them in this way, and are judged by their superiors by their activity. Law enforcement is organized to produce arrests, even when it doesn't help.
- Law enforcement mostly doesn't understand, or take seriously, the unintended consequences of, for example, high levels of felony records and incarceration in a community. It tends to assign responsibility for those bad outcomes, such as contributing to high levels of unemployed men, on communities themselves.
- Law enforcement genuinely believes that many of your young men are sociopaths. They see bad behavior, such as corner dealing and drive-bys, as clear evidence of their character, and does not think about lack of other choices, peer pressure, community norms against calling the police, and the like.
- Law enforcement sees "stop snitching" and unwillingness to come forward as fear or complicity, not as anger against law enforcement.

IV. LAW ENFORCEMENT-COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: TRUTHTELLING AND RECONCILIATION

- A. **Content of Law Enforcement Engagement with the Community.** The following are core elements that have been addressed in this work to date. There may be additional or alternative content, framings or approaches that will work for other communities.

1. An acknowledgement of harm and/or ineffectiveness (these are not mutually exclusive):

- Option 1: An outright apology for the unintended consequences of traditional enforcement and a recognition of a range of bad actions and practices. This can include an admission of inattention to community crime concerns; outright illegality (unfounded street stops, search and seizure violations, profiling, etc.); abuse that is not illegal (rudeness and disrespect; concentration and aggressiveness of stops, arrests and incarceration) but amounts to unreasonable conduct; fringe criminality and misbehavior amongst law enforcement that can't always be prevented (e.g. brutality, theft, sexual favors, promoting drug dealing and the like).
- Option 2: A recognition of damaging but unintended consequences of legal law enforcement action. This can include acknowledging the impact on communities of concentrations of felony records; the damage to families and communities that come with severe concentrations of incarceration, including the recognition that some things that law enforcement or other outsiders blame on individuals or communities are the unintended consequences of official actions.
- Option 3: A recognition that traditional law enforcement actions aimed at addressing violence and drugs have not been successful. Law enforcement and communities desire and need the most serious crime and disorder problems to be resolved and that hasn't happened. This can also involve a frank public statement of what is often said behind closed doors: the drug war cannot be won.

2. Direct engagement with community misperceptions of law enforcement intentions:

- Affected communities will often say: *Why are you only picking on us? There's more dope in suburbs.*
- Law enforcement can say: *We are really going where the violence is. We are drawn by violence and disorder. You and we know that your community is suffering the most from the violence.* Providing hard data around key crime issues can be very powerful here, and underscores that law enforcement is not being driven by prejudice or politics.

It is very important to say clearly what law enforcement actually thinks but often does not articulate: that choices about drug enforcement are often in fact choices about violence and public disorder. It is true that white communities have high levels of drug sales and use. They do not have high levels of violence and public drug dealing. Drug enforcement and high levels of policing in high-crime communities are intended to protect the community.

- Affected communities will often say: *Police could switch drugs off if they wanted to—but they aren't.*
- Law enforcement can say: *We don't know how to fix this either—we can't keep drugs out of country, out of this city, or out of this neighborhood, or keep them from being sold. We know this is doing terrible damage but we aren't letting it happen.*
- Affected communities will often say: *A few powerful kingpins could just be taken out by law enforcement, but they don't take them out. Law enforcement wants this and is benefitting from it.*

- Law enforcement can say: *The larger drug market doesn't work like this. If there were only a few people, we would go get them, but that isn't how it is. Multiple buyers and sellers flow in and out of the market all the time and even when we arrest many of them the market continues unchanged.*
- Affected communities will often say: *If cops couldn't come in and arrest all of our kids for drugs, they wouldn't have jobs and make overtime. There wouldn't be any reason to run all the prisons, and so the prison industrial complex would collapse and the upstate white correction officers couldn't make union wages. The whole drug war is just an investment vehicle for rich whites.*
- Law enforcement can say: *This isn't a conspiracy; if drugs went away we would still have lots of work to do. The drug markets are way to complex; we can't stop the drugs from coming in or from being sold. But the cartels aren't controlling your kids and whether they shoot each other in the street. If we work together, we can deal with what is going on in our streets.*

3. Direct engagement with community misperceptions of law enforcement actions:

- Affected communities will often say: *Drug dealers are on the corner and you just drive by them. You could stop them if you wanted to, but you don't so you must not care or be benefitting.*
- Law enforcement can say: *It takes a lot to make a drug case and prosecute it. There are constraints on the district attorney's time and resources, and we have to consider the practice of the local bench. Even if all of this can be navigated, no meaningful consequences will usually come out of pursuing such cases. We know what is going on, but addressing it is not as easy as it looks. That doesn't mean we support the dealing or are paid off to ignore it. Similarly, it is not that easy to shut a drug house down. We aren't making or letting that happen.*
- Affected communities will often say: *Much of the law enforcement action is focused on arresting black men on drug charges. This is racism.*
- Law enforcement can say: *Drug enforcement is often the best tool we have to address violence. All those young men we just arrested were members of the most violent gang in the city and drug arrest is the best tool we have. We don't do this because we don't like young black men.*

4. The Way Forward: Law enforcement can say:

- *We are really frustrated too. We are trying to do a good job. We want the community to be safe, but what we are doing isn't working well enough. We recognize that arresting ever increasing numbers of people of color has not reduced the violence/drug dealing. We don't like this either and would really like to do better. We haven't known how to do that—but we may have a way now.*
- *We understand that most people in the community are not acting dangerously, and we understand that some of those who are, are under terrible pressure or feel like they have no other option. We want them to be safe, and to be able to ask us for help, too. We understand that some of the people committing violent and drug crime in your neighborhood don't even live there. We understand that outsiders, mostly white, coming in to your community to buy drugs are doing terrible damage, and we want to stop that.*
- *We understand we have given you a very difficult choice because as we try to protect you, we have asked of you to tell us about people in the community so we can put them in prison. We understand that while you want the*

crime and violence to go away, your people are important to you. We know that has been a really difficult decision. We think there is a different decision that we can make together now.

- *We would like to do things differently and in a way that respects the neighborhood; that respects the rationality of everyone; that focuses our serious attention on those few individuals who are really hurting the community—and only puts them in prison if they keep hurting the community or don't respond to an ultimatum to stop or to a genuine offer of help.*
- *We understand what you want. Less crime and violence; fewer arrests and incarceration. We want the same. We don't get up in morning to put black men in prison. There is a way to increase your safety and put fewer people in prison. We think that's a great deal.*
- *We believe that offenders in your community will listen to you. We understand that we have no moral standing with them, but you do. We believe that we can work with you to create safe ways for you to engage with them and set community standards, and that that will be very powerful.*
- *Would you be willing to partner with us to try something new that would let us back off and would let you step forward?*

All of this adds up to the following conclusion:

- Your anger is justified. Law enforcement has been used in the past as a tool for systemic, racial oppression and exploitation. Law enforcement are also doing systematic – but unintended – damage today. These things are true.
- Yet, nobody can set standards about right and wrong for your community except you. Nobody from the outside can do this. If the only voice telling young men not to shoot people or sell drugs in public is law enforcement – or any other outsiders – nothing will change.
- You are not publicly, clearly and as a community articulating what is right and what is wrong to those who most need to hear it. Instead, the community has focused on conspiracy narratives – this allows the small number of offenders to justify their actions and lead the police to incorrectly believe that the community sanctions their behavior.
- The most important thing you can do is to make it clear to the street guys who are driving the violence and the drug markets that the community wants them to stop.
- We cannot do this alone, from the outside. We have often acted as if we could, we have often actually thought that we could. We've learned that that's wrong. We need to do this together.
- We want to change, and to work on this with you.

B. Content of Community Engagement with Law Enforcement

As these processes have actually played out in practice, communities have usually responded very well to the overture and content of the engagement by law enforcement. The reaction is often along the lines of “this is what we've been waiting for” and “when do we start?” We have, therefore, much less to say here than above. The following community reactions also seem to be common:

- Community: *Your officers are behaving very badly in the neighborhood.*
- This has taken two forms, so far. One has been specific accounts of serious misconduct, such as falsified warrants. Such accounts should be pursued quickly and decisively, and the community directly apprised of developments by senior officers. Another has been more general accounts of disrespect, rudeness, aggression, and the like. Here, law enforcement can say something like, *we disapprove of that, we don't condone it now, we will work harder to prevent it, and we want to work with you on that. But we don't think that should stand in the way of moving forward right away. We're not perfect, just as the community isn't perfect. We can still do the gang and drug work right now. We think that will be a way to immediately make things better in the community, build better understandings between your community and ours, and bring forth better behavior on both sides.*
- Community: *We can't move on this until there's work for offenders."*
- Here, law enforcement can say something like: *We'd like for everybody who wants it to get a job, and part of what we'll do is to do everything we can in that direction. But the work we want to do together now is about homicide and overt, chaotic drug dealing, and we believe that there's no excuse for that. Most of the violence isn't about making money anyway, it's about disrespect and beefs and the like. But regardless, no matter what, there is simply no excuse for killing. There no excuse for dealing drugs in ways that rip the community apart. We think it's right to move on those things right away, and that dealing with them will make it easier to work on job development and similar initiatives. And we think that it's vitally important that people in your community know that you believe, without reservation, that there's no excuse for killing and creating chaos.*
- Community: *"We want more than for just the killing and the drug dealing to stop."*
- Here, law enforcement can say something like: *So do we. We can work with you on the crime problem, that's what we do. We believe that when the community is safe, everything else will get much easier, and that that's the right place to start. But it shouldn't stop there. We want to build into our planning, from the beginning, what will come after. And we think that you should hold other parties accountable, not just us: the city, the schools, the politicians, the service providers, the faith community. We can't do this alone, and neither can you. There are things we can do to help there, and we'll do them.*

V. COMMON GROUND

Experience shows that historical and present tension between these communities and law enforcement hides several crucially important areas in which the majority of law enforcement, community members, and offenders can find common ground. We do not, usually, understand that all these groups want the same thing. They do. They are:

- Everybody wants the community to be safe. Misimpressions aside, community residents hate the violence and chaos, and nobody has a higher stake than offenders, who are victimized at extremely high rates.

- Everybody wants the community to be calm. Even most offenders who wish to, or will, continue hustling would like to do it without constant fear of both the streets and law enforcement.
- There are a few offenders nearly everybody in the community wants taken away. Most offenders are not violent, and especially not seriously violent. The relatively rare who are – the shooters, stickup boys, and true sociopaths – scare everybody.
- Everybody would prefer that the community take the lead in creating public safety, and that the police play backup. Even law enforcement would like it if community standards did much, or most, of the work that they now do.
- Everybody would prefer that when law enforcement is used, it is used as economically as possible. Even most in law enforcement want to send as few people as possible to prison.
- Everybody would like to see anybody who really needs, and means, it get help. Even law enforcement would rather see a seasoned offender become a taxpayer than go to federal prison.
- Everybody would prefer to see the current tension and animosity go away. It serves no one.

The reconciliation and truth-telling process is a way to find this common ground, and the National Network group violence and drug market strategies are a way to act, in very concrete ways, on that common ground. In so doing, fundamentally different relationships are established, and the stage set for even greater and more fundamental progress.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

This is a crucially important area for further development and refinement. How to do this work well in different kinds of communities; in different political climates; with different political mandates and local leadership; how to scale it and sustain it are key questions for the National Network Leadership Group to address.