Thursday, July 8, 2021: National Webinar

Unpacking the Framework: How to Use Reconciliation to Repair Institutional Harm

Paul Smith, Rachel Teicher, and Danneile Davis of the National Network for Safe Communities (NNSC), an internationally recognized action research center at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York, discussed the need for and importance of using reconciliation, a method of facilitating frank engagements between harmed communities, authorities, and other institutions to address grievances, misconceptions, and historical tensions, and reset relationships.

NNSC focused on how to use this framework to acknowledge and repair institutional harm between law enforcement and survivors of intimate partner violence, and how Family Justice/Multi-Agency Centers utilizing a co-located service model can use this framework to strengthen and repair relationships and collaboration between law enforcement and onsite partners and the community.

About the Presenters

Paul David Smith is an educator and researcher. He has spent his adult life educating young people as a classroom teacher, mentor and community leader focusing on social justice and community empowerment. He has been honored as a Distinguished Educator by the National Society of High School Scholars. He is currently completing his PhD in Global Studies with a concentration in Leadership.

Rachel Teicher is responsible for managing direct technical assistance and support for the National Network's partner jurisdictions implementing strategies to reduce intimate partner violence, as well as strategies to strengthen police-community trust, particularly with survivors of intimate partner and sexual violence. Prior to joining the National Network, Ms. Teicher worked as the Director of Strategic Coordination in the New York City Mayor's Office to End Gender Based Violence, as well as the Director of Economic Empowerment, where she was part of the administrative team that oversaw the Brooklyn Family Justice Center.

Danneile Davis has spent the past decade working in the field of gender-based violence: as an activist, rape crisis advocate, and philanthropist. Having launched her career at Bain & Company's Chicago Office as a management consultant, she has since taken those skills to NNSC where she provides hands-on strategic advising and support for sites' data management to project managers, law enforcement executives, community-based organizations, and other leadership at NNSC partner cities across the country.

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Unpacking the Framework: How to Use Reconciliation to Repair Institutional Harm

with Paul Smith, Rachel Teicher, and Danneile Davis
The National Network for Safe Communities

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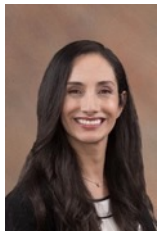
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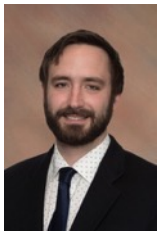
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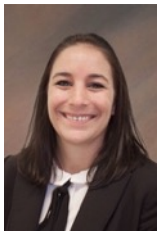
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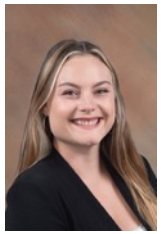
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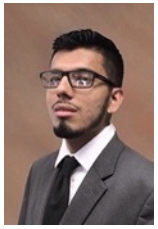
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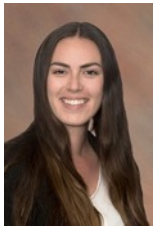
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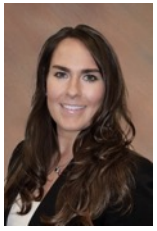
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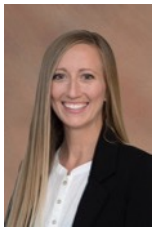
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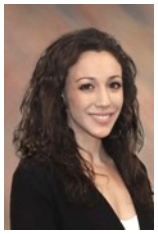
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Thank You!

Your Presenters

The National Network for Safe Communities (NNSC)

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Director, Reconciliation

Rachel Teicher
Director, IPV Intervention

Danneile Davis
Field Advisor, IPV Intervention

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at JOHN JAY COLLEGE

Reconciliation:

Unpacking the Framework

Thursday, July 8, 2021

Agenda

- Introductions & Overview
- Police-Survivor Mistrust
- Unpacking Police-Community Reconciliation
  - Framework
  - Implementation
- Q&A

Overview of NNSC

NNSC is an action research center that implements proven strategic interventions worldwide to **reduce violence** and **improve public safety**, **minimize arrest** and incarceration, **strengthen communities**, **enhance legitimacy**, and **build partnerships** between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

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NNSC and its partners operate on six core principles:

1 **DO NO HARM**

2 **STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES**

3 **ENHANCE LEGITIMACY**

4 **OFFER HELP TO THOSE WHO WANT IT**

5 **GET DETERRENCE RIGHT**

6 **USE ENFORCEMENT STRATEGICALLY**

Legitimacy and Violence Prevention

- Police legitimacy: the community's levels of trust in police, confidence in police efficacy, approval of police actions and willingness to collaborate

- **Low legitimacy** ties to **high levels of violence**

- Legitimacy can be strengthened with **effective violence prevention, procedural justice, community input**, and the **acknowledgement and repair of past and present harm**

Enhancing legitimacy is essential to violence prevention

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Data on Police-Survivor Mistrust

33% felt **less safe** after calling the police

43% of victims felt police **discriminated** against them

70% believed calling police would make things **worse**

80% of victims who had not contacted police are **afraid to ever call**

2 out of 3 IPV victims who contacted the police are **afraid to call again**

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Implications of Police-Survivor Mistrust

For Victim-Survivors

- Reluctance to access available public safety resources
- Feeling that police will not or cannot protect them
- Fear of being re-traumatized by the criminal justice system's response

For Law Enforcement

- Crime reporting doesn't reflect actual violence in the community
- Victims withholding crucial information makes it more difficult to investigate crimes
- Frustration with reluctant victims can create mutual mistrust and further hurt community relations

Building police-survivor trust is a critical component of addressing IPV

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Police-Survivor Engagement Can Build Trust

- Many survivors feel mistrustful of, cynical about and/or **estranged** from the criminal justice system

- This mistrust undermines law enforcement's ability to enforce laws and help keep communities safe

- By directly engaging with survivors, police can start to build stronger, healthier relationships grounded in mutual trust

Communities and Survivors of IPV Need Law Enforcement

But they need a **different kind of law enforcement** than they've been getting.

The goal of **trust building** is to build enough trust and understanding between police and communities that they can work together going forward.

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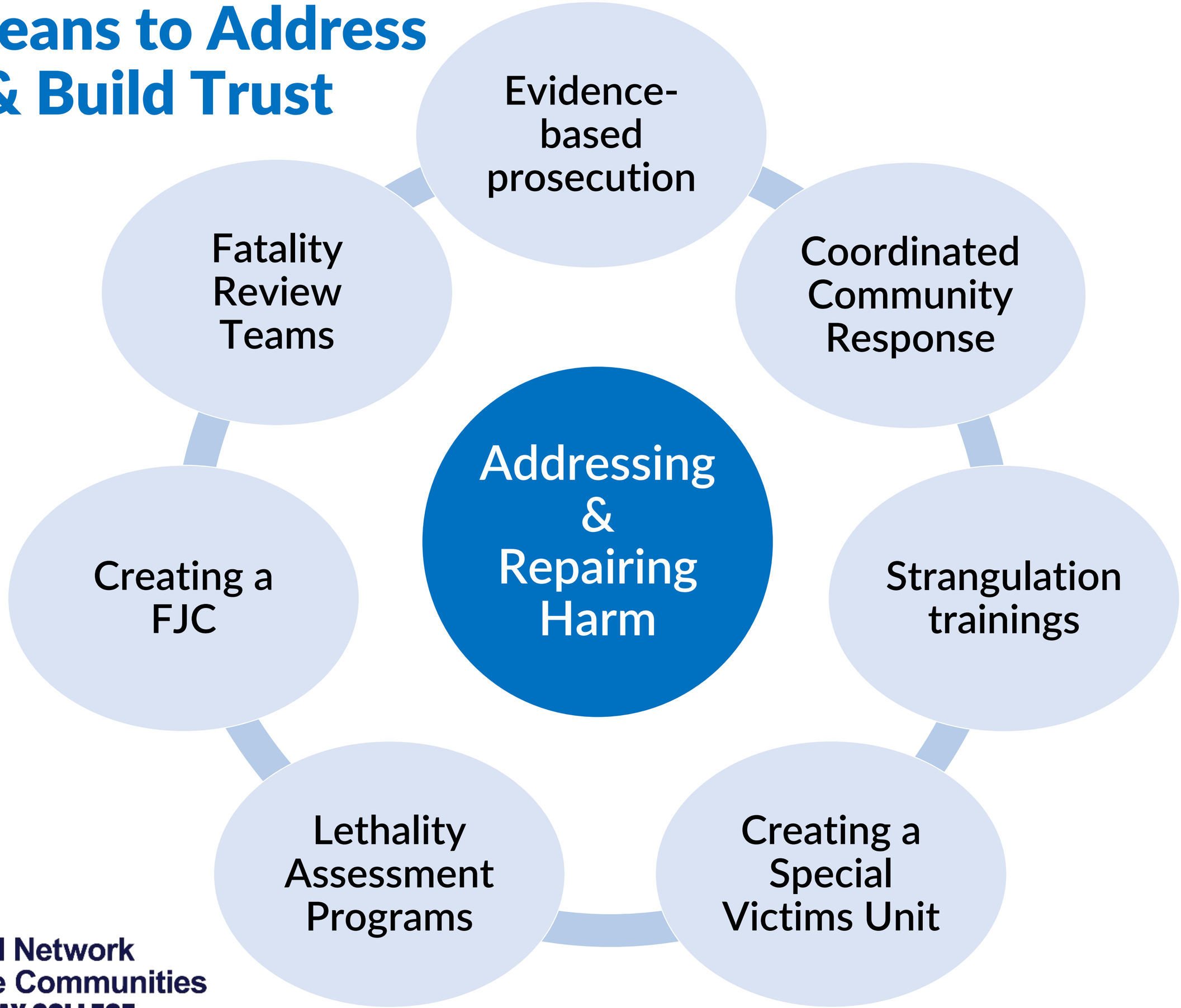
Many Means to Address IPV & Build Trust



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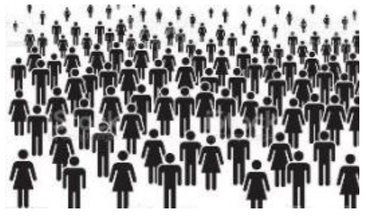
What are IPV Harms? Who is Harmed? How?

Interpersonal

Between individuals

To communities



Institutional

Within institutions

To individuals

To communities

Focus of reconciliation

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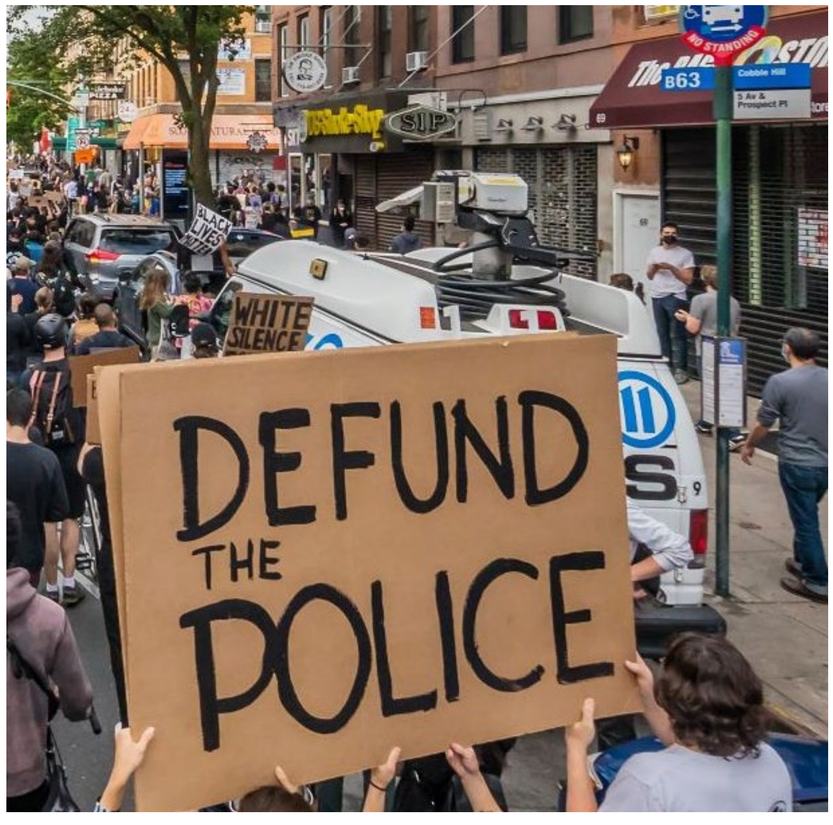
Current Moment Underscores These Harms

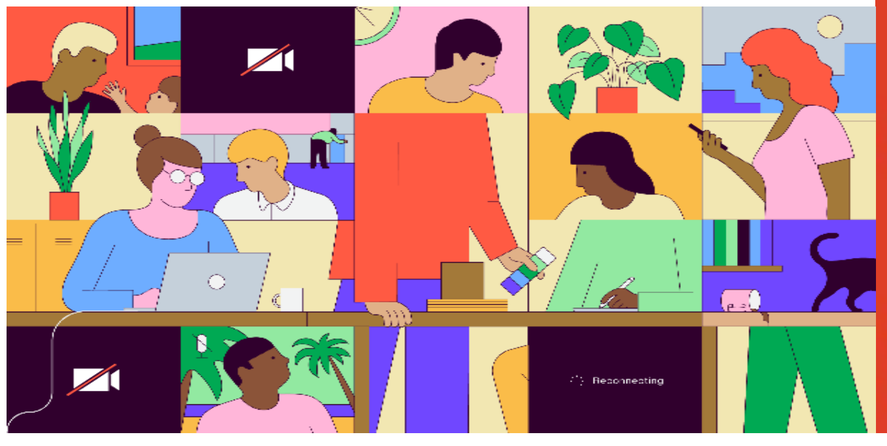
26 years in, the Violence Against Women Act hangs in limbo — while COVID-19 fuels domestic violence surge

USA TODAY



Don't Use Domestic Violence Victims To Derail Police Reform

HUFFPOST



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Theory of Reconciliation

Reconciliation is the structured process that public safety institutions and communities use to:

- ✓ **acknowledge and address institutional harm;**
- ✓ build relationships founded on **mutual trust, empathy, and understanding**;
- ✓ and using ongoing and collaborative **policy and practice change** to
- ✓ ultimately **strengthen legitimacy** and **reduce violence.**

Those with institutional power must take the first step

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Reconciliation as a Restorative Approach

- **Centers community** members' agency, voices, and needs

- Essential pillars: identify and **acknowledge harm**; engage stakeholders in an inclusive, **collaborative process**; collectively design plan to **repair harm**

- Demands **accountability** beyond "punishment paradigm"

> ***"It's not about returning to the pre-conflict status quo but about returning to one's best self that's always been there."***
>
> *Fania Davis, Attorney and Restorative Justice Practitioner*

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Why We Need a Restorative Approach

- Build relationships grounded in mutual trust, empathy, and understanding
- Enhance legitimacy, which can deter and interrupt IPV
    - Victims are likelier to report crimes earlier and more often, and to seek services
    - Increased collaboration with victims and communities can help institutions be more effective

Most importantly—it is the right thing to do

Reconciliation as "Front-End Accountability"

- There are limits to "back-end", or traditional accountability:
  - Can only address harm that has already occurred
  - Reinforces "punishment paradigm"

- "Front-end" accountability engages communities to **shape policy and practice** and **prevent harm** from occurring

- This **democratic process** is grounded in **procedural justice**, especially transparency

Key Elements of Reconciliation

1. Understanding Harm
2. Acknowledgement of Harm
3. Sustained Listening
4. Narrative Collection and Sharing
5. Explicit commitments to ongoing policy and practice change

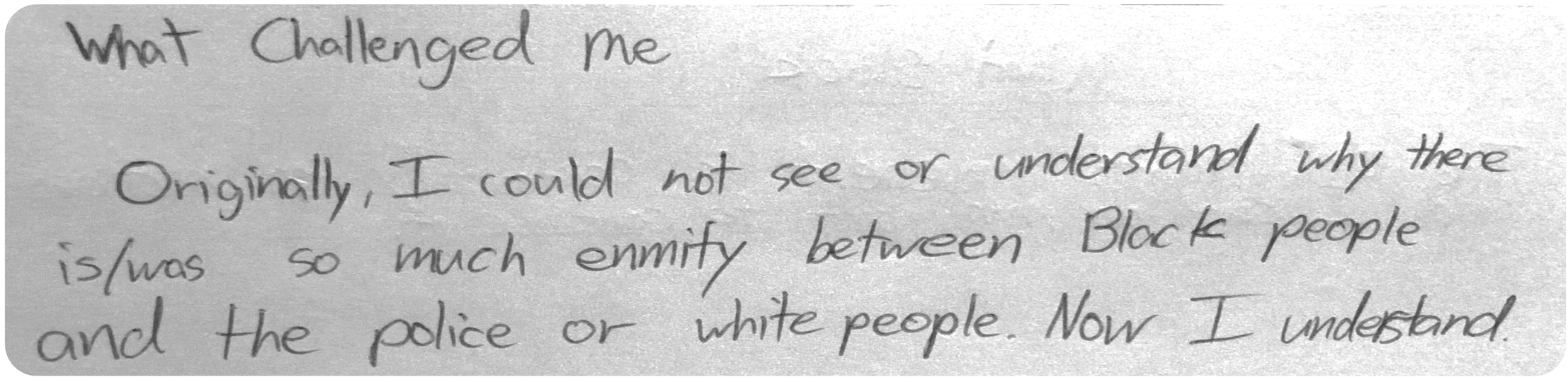
1

Understanding of Harm (Fact-Finding)

- **Establish consensus** with the community on the factual record of what transpired

- Thoroughly **research historical and present harm,** including archival records and community testimony

Birmingham police recruits learning about BPD history in the basement of the 16th St Baptist Church, September 2018



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2

Acknowledgement of Harm

- **Identify and recognize specific harms** the institution has caused the community

- Means more than saying sorry—must **sincerely take responsibility** for an action; **recognize reality of harm** done, and **express respect** for the position (fear, anger, etc.) of victims

Former Chief A.C. Roper of the Birmingham Police Department acknowledging harm to civil rights leaders and community, Aug 2017

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3

Listening Sessions

- Reconciliation requires **ongoing, sustained dialogue**

- Create **space where community members feel empowered** and all parties are encouraged to listen to and learn from each other

- Use themes from listening sessions to **inform policy and practice priorities**

Ongoing listening sessions between police and community members in Birmingham, AL

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4

Narrative Collection

- Responsibly collect and share narratives from community members and institutional representatives with the public

- **Expand the reach** of reconciliation to people outside listening sessions

- Recognize that **beliefs and perceptions matter**

Stockton Police Chief Eric Jones
at a community event, March 2017

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5

Policy and Practice Change

- **Communicate the commitment to change**: publicly express a vision and intent for new, restorative approach

- **Collaborate with community:** review fact findings, listening sessions, and narrative collection to **identify priorities**

- **Hold institutions accountable** and ensure **follow through** on improved policies and practices

Birmingham listening session

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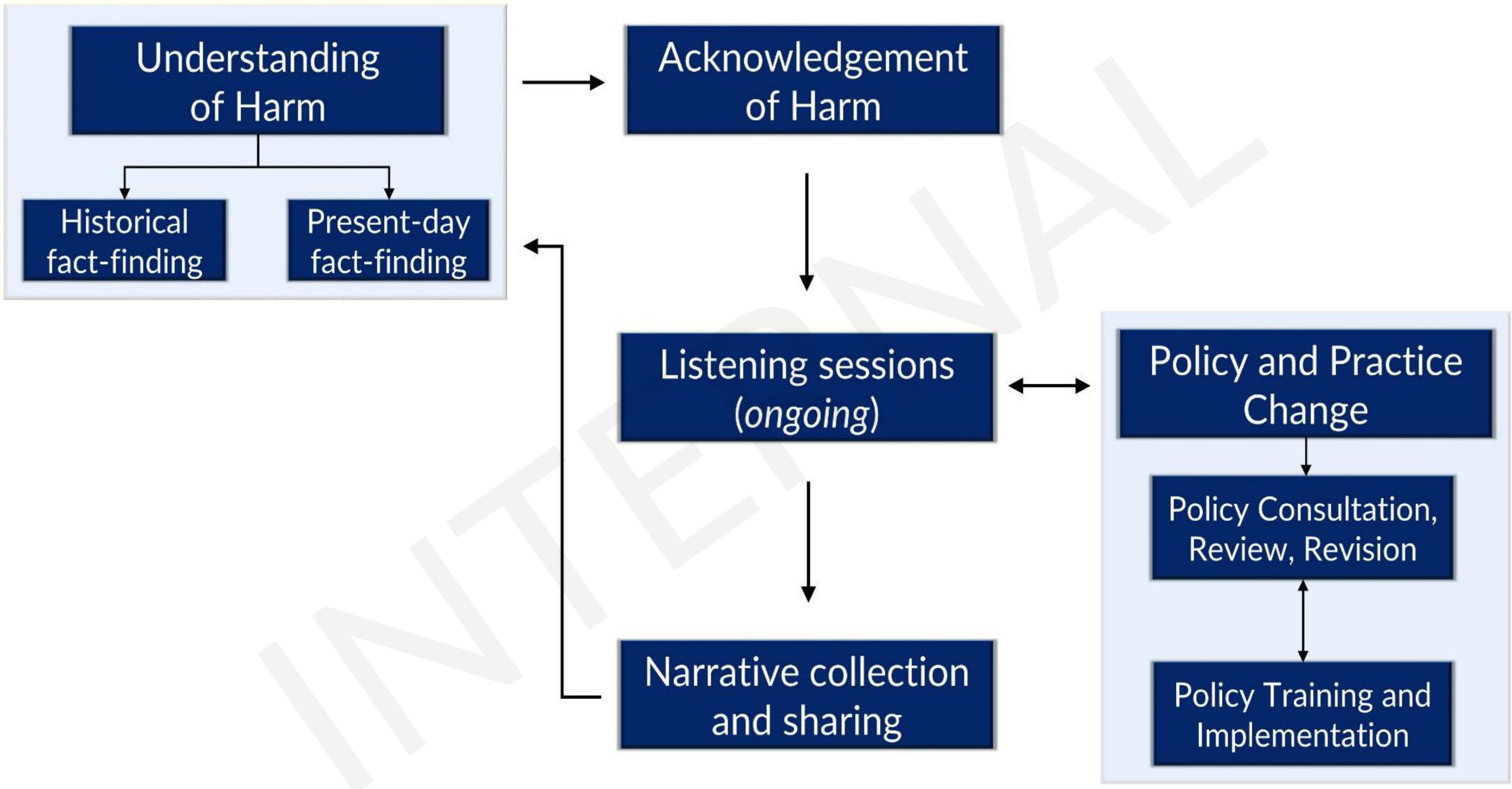
Reconciliation Framework: Process Map



Implementation: Reconciliation Case Study

BPD
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DEPARTMENT

ONE
PLACE
METRO ALABAMA
FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER

eliminating racism
empowering women
ywca
Central Alabama

*This project was supported by Grant #2014-MU- MU -K051, awarded by the Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this presentation are those of the presenters and do not necessarily reflect the official positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice or any of its subsidiary offices.

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Implementation: Lessons From the Field

Next Steps	Best Practices
• Secure buy-in from stakeholders	• Propose reconciliation work to key local leaders
• Identify potential resources	• Assemble **initial cohort** of partners/supporters • Connect with **experts**, TA providers • Research **funding** opportunities
• Set goals for implementation	• Determine key priorities • **Co-create scope of work**, budget, timeline
• Build coalition of the willing	• Ensure **strong executive leadership** & local governance • Design communication strategy • Leverage strategic, **interagency partnerships**
• Launch	• Embrace **restorative best practices** and change

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Key Takeaways

- Reconciliation is a **restorative** approach to center the needs of harmed communities, such as IPV survivors, and hold institutions **accountable** to **repairing harm** and **building trust**

- NNSC's reconciliation framework involves **5 key elements**: Acknowledgement of Harm, Fact-Finding, Listening Sessions, Narrative Collection, and Policy/Practice Change

- Implementation best practices include securing strong, **interagency buy-in** and **leadership** or "**coalition of the willing**", **community-informed** local governance, and embracing **restorative principles**

- Reconciliation can help reduce violence and is the **right thing to do**

Questions?

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Presenters: Danneile Davis, Rachel Teicher & Paul Smith

The National Network for Safe Communitites

1.5 Hours

July 8, 2021

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URBAN INSTITUTE

The National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice

Key Process and Outcome Evaluation Findings

Nancy La Vigne, Jesse Jannetta, Jocelyn Fontaine, Daniel S. Lawrence, and Sino Esthappan

August 2019

This brief serves as an executive summary of key findings from the Urban Institute's evaluation of the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice, an effort to promote changes in law enforcement culture, policies, and practices to enhance respectful policing and improve police-community relationships in six cities.

Many communities that experience high levels of crime and concentrated disadvantage—particularly communities of color—also distrust the police, making them less likely to report crimes and partner on crime prevention and violence reduction efforts (Johnson et al. 2017; Tyler 2008; Tyler and Jackson 2014). In 2014, the US Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs launched the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice (National Initiative). Spanning six cities, the initiative consisted of officer training, departmental policy changes, and community engagement designed to repair and strengthen police-community relationships by addressing the deep historical roots of distrust in the police among people of color and other marginalized populations.

National Initiative Evaluation Publications

This brief draws from findings represented in the following publications:

Views of the Police and Neighborhood Conditions: Evidence of Change in Six Cities Participating in the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice

Impact of the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice on Police Administrative Outcomes

Impact of the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice on Police Administrative Outcomes: Supplemental Materials to Impact Analyses

Learning to Build Police-Community Trust: Implementation Assessment Findings from the Evaluation of the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice

Background

Led by John Jay College of Criminal Justice's National Network for Safe Communities (NNSC), and in partnership with the Center for Policing Equity (CPE), Yale Law School (YLS), and the Urban Institute, the National Initiative brought together practitioners and researchers to implement the program in six cities: Birmingham, Alabama; Fort Worth, Texas; Gary, Indiana; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Stockton, California.

The National Initiative was organized around three core areas or "pillars" that research and practical experience suggest could generate measurable improvements in officer behaviors, public safety, and community trust in the police. The first pillar, **procedural justice (PJ)**, focuses on how interactions between police officers and members of the public impact community members' views of the police and their willingness to comply with the law and partner on crime prevention practices, as well as crime rates. The second pillar, **implicit bias (IB)**, focuses on how unconscious biases may shape police officers' interactions with members of the public and result in racially disparate outcomes even when those interactions are not overtly racist. The third pillar, **reconciliation**, focuses on how candid conversations about law enforcement's complicity in historic and present-day racial tensions and harms can repair relationships and foster trust between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve.

Core National Initiative interventions included (1) training and technical assistance for police officers on engaging with residents in a procedurally just manner, (2) trainings that helped officers understand and mitigate their personal implicit biases, (3) recommendations for changes to police department policies to promote more respectful and accountable policing, and (4) reconciliation discussions, during which police leadership acknowledged law enforcement's role in biased policing and sought to repair relationships with the community members that such policing has impacted the most.

The Evaluation of the National Initiative

The Urban Institute evaluated the National Initiative's implementation and impact to inform replications of and/or modifications to National Initiative components, and to guide future research on community trust-building efforts by police. The following questions guided the implementation and impact evaluations:

- Were National Initiative activities designed and implemented as planned?
- Were the National Initiative training and technical assistance activities effective in transmitting information?
- What interventions were designed and implemented?
- What interventions were designed and implemented specific to the target groups?
- Was the National Initiative associated with changes in residents' perceptions of the police and police-community interactions and relationships?

- Was the National Initiative associated with changes in residents' neighborhood conditions, victimization experiences, and perceptions of safety and disorder?
- Was the intervention associated with changes in police departments' practices (e.g., pedestrian stops, arrests)?

The implementation evaluation focused on National Initiative activities undertaken from January 2015 through December 2018, whereas the impact evaluation covered the period through December 2017. Researchers collected the following qualitative and quantitative data to support the evaluation:

- monthly teleconferences among the National Initiative implementation team that included partners from CPE, NNSC, and YLS
- publicly available information and media coverage of the National Initiative and issues pertaining to police-community relations in the pilot sites
- fieldwork that included observations of National Initiative activities and interactions between National Initiative partners and site stakeholders
- routine teleconferences with site coordinators, police chiefs, and other city stakeholders
- documents provided by the sites and National Initiative partners
- semistructured interviews with police and community stakeholders in each site
- learning assessment surveys of officers receiving National Initiative trainings in each site
- surveys of residents living in areas with high levels of concentrated crime and poverty/disadvantage in each site
- administrative data from National Initiative police departments on crime events and arrests, calls for service, pedestrian and traffic stops, and use-of-force incidents

National Initiative Implementation

Delivering the National Initiative components to all the officers in the six departments required a major commitment of agency resources to infusing new concepts into policing practice. The reconciliation framework also represented a substantial conceptual advance in the practice of improving relationships between police and communities, and implementing that framework developed new insights and innovations regarding how this could look in practice. Moreover, police departments made changes to their policies to build trust and institutionalize the changes they implemented through the National Initiative.

Training

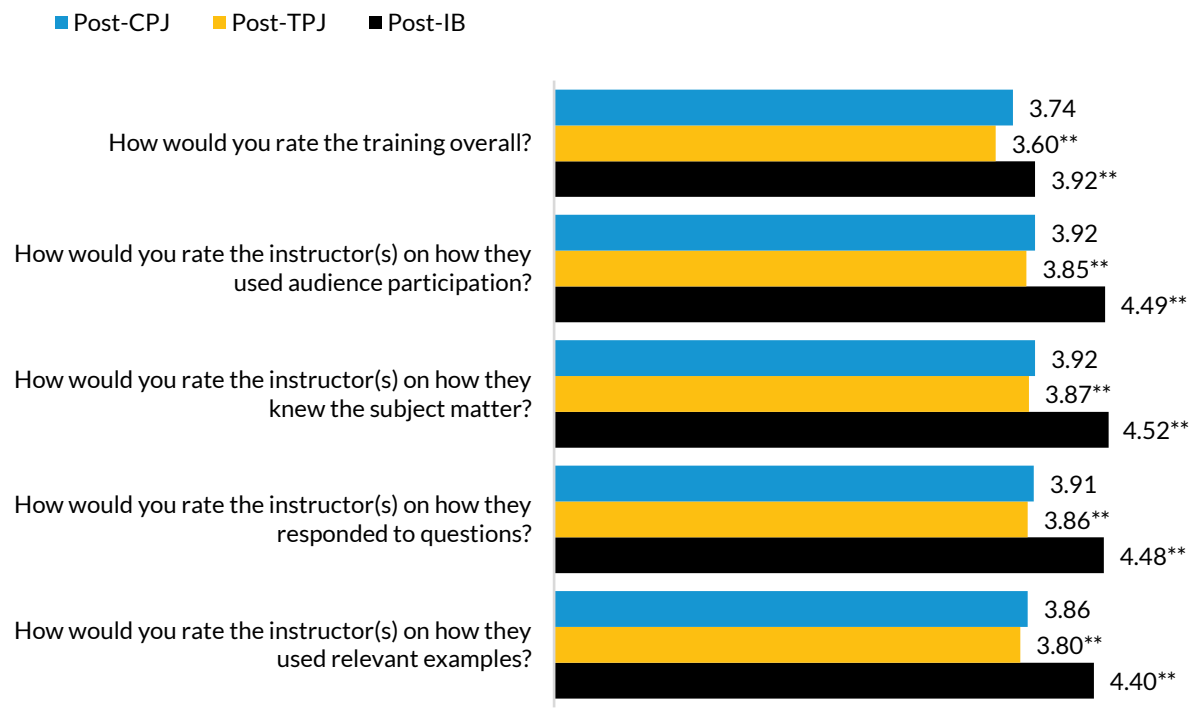
Training police officers in the concepts of procedural justice and implicit bias was a foundational component of the National Initiative. Between December 2015 and April 2018, every sworn officer in

the six police departments participated in three full days of training: the first day was devoted to conceptual procedural justice (CPJ), the second to tactical procedural justice (TPJ), and the third to implicit bias. This was the most resource-intensive National Initiative component for the participating police departments.

Training surveys and stakeholder interviews indicated widespread (though not universal) receptivity to the content. Results from posttraining learning assessment surveys indicate that officers in all six sites were more likely to agree with procedural justice principles after the training. Although officer ratings of the trainings were positive across the board, they rated the implicit bias training more favorably than the other two training curricula (see figure 1). Stakeholders across all six sites considered the implementation of the PJ and IB trainings to be one of the National Initiative's major successes. Police trainers also developed innovations during training implementation, including community-facing versions of the trainings intended to convey the core PJ and IB concepts to community members.

FIGURE 1

Overall Training and Instructor Ratings



Notes: Valid *N* = 8,011. Response options ranged from 1 (unsatisfactory) to 5 (excellent). Statistically significant differences are indicated for post-TPJ relative to post-CPJ, and post-IB relative to post-TPJ, and were assessed using *t*-tests; **p* < 0.05, ***p* < 0.01.

Reconciliation

Of the three pillars, reconciliation was the most nascent and previously untested when the National Initiative began. National Network for Safe Communities developed a framework for a police-

community reconciliation process, something that had not existed in the US before the initiative launched. The process provided residents a space to raise issues and concerns, some of which led directly to changes in police practice. The reconciliation framework consisted of the following five key components:

- **Fact-finding.** Fact-finding yielded context about police departments' past harms (such as enforcing Jim Crow laws) and present harms maintained through policies and practices with detrimental effects on safety, equity, and justice.
- **Acknowledgment of harm.** Police leadership delivered acknowledgments of harm that recognized the police's past and present harms, as well as ongoing problems that fuel mistrust between the police and community.
- **Sustained listening.** Listening sessions were designed to be intimate and nonadversarial to encourage community members to share their experiences with and insights about law enforcement candidly.
- **Narrative collection and sharing.** Narratives captured community members' perceptions of police and the police's perceptions of communities.
- **Explicit commitments to changing policy and practice.** Departments made such commitments in areas identified through the listening sessions.

Each listening session convened different populations of focus, ranging from residents in heavily policed African American communities to youth and members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Though the reconciliation process was implemented in all six cities, the timing and quantity of sessions varied across sites during the evaluation period (table 1).

TABLE 1

Reconciliation Listening Sessions by Site

Site	Date of first listening session	# of listening sessions (through 12/2018)	Areas of focus
Birmingham	8/2016 10/2016 (circles)	19 3-week series of intensive small-group circles	Internal police department, intimate partner violence survivors, Latinx/immigrant communities, LGBTQIA+, neighborhood, youth
Fort Worth	12/2017	3	Neighborhood
Gary	4/2017	6	Intimate partner violence survivors, neighborhood
Minneapolis	8/2016	8	African Americans, clergy, Latinx, LGBTQIA+, Native Americans, neighborhood, youth
Pittsburgh	11/2018	3	Youth
Stockton	10/2016	20+	Community organizations, group violence intervention client, LGBTQIA+, neighborhood, racial/ethnic communities, youth

Policy Change

The National Initiative was based on the premise that improving public trust in police required new thinking and practice, and changing law enforcement policies was a critical method of embedding and sustaining that new thinking in the police departments. Policy changes occurred throughout the implementation period, in part because the sites identified changes to policy and practice through a variety of mechanisms, including CPE policy reviews, model policies developed by YLS, internal reviews of existing policies and practices, and reconciliation conversations. Table 2 summarizes policy changes resulting from or influenced by National Initiative activities.

TABLE 2

Policy Changes during the National Initiative Implementation Period, by Department

City	Policy changes
Birmingham	▪ designated a sergeant as a liaison to the LGBTQIA+ community (September 2016) ▪ modified policy language to explicitly reinforce commitment to unbiased policing (2017) ▪ protection from abuse orders provided to all precincts by court rather than stored only in the precinct where the order was awarded, or rather than survivors being responsible for providing the order (2017) ▪ created new command-level position overseeing all community engagement (October 2018)
Fort Worth	▪ revised general order on bias-free policing (February 18, 2016) ▪ created standard operating procedures for Procedural Justice Unit (November 2016) ▪ began reporting use-of-force, arrest, stop, and discipline policies and statistics online (2017) ▪ revised general order on sexual assaults (July 2017) ▪ issued new order on racial profiling that reaffirmed the department's commitment to unbiased policing (January 2018) ▪ revised general orders on use-of-force/force options and reporting uses of force (March 2018) ▪ revised departmental mission statement to add commitment to respect the sanctity of human life and preserve the rights and dignity of each person in the community (March 2018) ▪ created new Police and Community Relationships general order, including role of Procedural Justice Unit (July 2018) ▪ added a duty to protect the safety and physical health of arrested and detained people to the department's Arrest Procedures General Order (August 2018)
Gary	None
Minneapolis	▪ added transgender/gender nonconforming policy (June 2016) ▪ amended use-of-force policy to prioritize sanctity of life for both officers and civilians (July 2016) ▪ added policy requiring officers to intervene in incidents in which other officers use excessive force (July 2016) ▪ began tracking race and gender on traffic stops and other stops (September 2016) ▪ changed body-worn camera policy to require officers to turn on cameras as soon as they begin responding to 911 calls (July 2017) ▪ began reporting officer use-of-force, complaint, stop, crime, and arrest statistics online (2017) ▪ failure by an officer to comply with a lawful investigation of misconduct shall be deemed an act of misconduct (September 2018)
Pittsburgh	▪ created ethics document (2016) ▪ added procedural justice concepts to evaluations of field training officers and recruits (2016) ▪ added order on transgender and gender nonconforming employees (August 2016) ▪ began posting policies online (January 2018)

Stockton	▪ added procedural justice language to general order on how canines are deployed (May 2016) ▪ modified field training officer evaluations to add demonstration of PJ practices, and required supervisors to evaluate officer understanding of PJ in considering transfer/special assignment requests and promotional examinations (2016) ▪ mandated that officers receive annual mental health training ▪ mandated that officers make every attempt to mediate and defuse situations with people experiencing mental health crises (July 2016) ▪ added policy stating that "sworn personnel of the Stockton Police Department shall not stop, question, detain, arrest or place 'an immigration hold' on any person solely on the ground that he or she may be a deportable alien" (January 2017) ▪ added PJ language to rules and regulations regarding conduct toward the public and fellow police members (May 2017) ▪ tenets of procedural justice added to equestrian unit order (June 2017) ▪ policy on release of body camera footage (July 2017) ▪ Unmanned Aircraft System policy created with community input (November 2017)

Impact Evaluation Findings

Analysis of Administrative Data on Police Outcomes

To examine the degree to which the National Initiative interventions were associated with changes in crime rates and police practices (particularly reductions in racially biased policing), Urban analyzed administrative data from each agency on various outcomes of interest using structural break analyses. Access to data was extremely limited and uneven across sites; however, this was not because agencies declined to share the data with the evaluation team, but because most do not routinely collect the data of interest in an electronic format amenable to extraction and analysis. For example, only three of the six agencies routinely collect data on use-of-force incidents in a format that was extractable for purposes of data analysis. Of those agencies, two observed reductions in such incidents. Changes in calls for service, violent crimes, and property crimes were mixed across sites, while changes in the rates of pedestrian and traffic stops were more consistent: a decrease occurred during the National Initiative's primary activities, but rates returned to previous levels by the end of the observation period in December 2017. Arrest rates across all demographic groups generally declined across sites.

Community Perceptions

A key component of the evaluation was an in-person survey of a sample of residents living in neighborhoods experiencing high rates of crime and concentrated poverty in each of the participating cities. Residents were asked about their views of the police and police-community relationships, their perceptions of crime and neighborhood conditions, and their willingness to partner with the police on crime control and prevention. We conducted two waves of these surveys to assess the degree to which perceptions improved or worsened during the National Initiative implementation period.

The baseline survey, conducted before National Initiative activities were implemented, showed that residents of neighborhoods experiencing high crime rates across the six cities held largely negative views of their local police department and their neighborhood conditions, yet believed in the rule of law and were willing to contribute to crime control and prevention efforts (La Vigne, Fontaine, and Dwivedi

2017). The second wave of surveys, administered after a period of sustained National Initiative implementation, yielded similarly negative perceptions of the police, but those views were markedly more positive than at baseline (see table 3). Importantly, when analyzing the survey data by key sociodemographic groups, perceptions of the police among Black respondents became considerably more positive.

Nonetheless, we observed notable variation among respondents across the six National Initiative cities. In particular, residents' perceptions of and experiences with their local police department, police-community relationships, and neighborhood conditions improved considerably in Minneapolis and Stockton. In Fort Worth, though residents' perceptions of some of their neighborhood conditions improved, there was no measured change in residents' perceptions of the police or police-community relationships. In Birmingham and Gary, residents perceived improvement in some of their neighborhood conditions and the police and police-community relationships. Finally, in Pittsburgh, though residents perceived improvement in some of their neighborhood conditions, their perceptions of the police and police-community relationships grew more negative.

TABLE 3

Scale Differences by Wave

Perceptions of the police and neighborhood conditions

	Wave 1 (*n*=1,278)	Wave 2 (*n*=1,202)
Perceptions of police and police-community relationships		
Procedurally just treatment by police[a]	2.88	3.04**
Police legitimacy[b]	2.83	3.01**
Police bias[b]	3.35	3.20**
Police alignment with community concerns[b]	2.61	2.80**
Legitimacy of the law[b]	3.80	4.00**
Relatability of the police[b]	2.83	3.01**
Willingness to partner with police[c]	3.54	3.61
Perceptions of neighborhood conditions		
Neighborhood safety[d]	3.15	3.41**
Neighborhood disorder[e]	2.94	2.62**
Frequency of neighborhood crime[f]	2.10	1.87**
Personal victimization experience[h]	0.16	0.14**
Vicarious victimization experience[h]	0.29	0.20**
Concerns about various property and violent crimes[g]	2.60	2.36**
Precautionary behavior[c]	2.82	2.70*

Notes: Statistically significant differences were assessed using *t*-tests; *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$.

[a] Scale from individual item response options ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always).

[b] Scale from individual item response options ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

[c] Scale from individual item response options ranging from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely).

[d] Scale from individual item response options ranging from 1 (dangerous) to 5 (safe).

[e] Scale from individual item response options ranging from 1 (not a problem) to 5 (big problem).

[f] Scale from individual item response options ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (daily).

[g] Scale from individual item response options ranging from 1 (not concerned) to 5 (very concerned).

[h] Share of respondents reporting "yes."

The evaluation findings show promise for the National Initiative model and suggest that the initiative was moderately successful in achieving its intended goals of training officers to be more equitable and respectful of community officers and improving police practices and police-community relations. However, we are unable to conclude that the National Initiative activities were the sole causes of the measured improvements in residents' perceptions. Changes in community conditions and incidents within the departments and in American policing more broadly could have influenced residents' perceptions of the police and their neighborhood conditions. Nevertheless, the results suggest key and notable improvements, particularly in the cities that implemented the training early on and engaged in comprehensive and extensive reconciliation conversations.

Key Takeaways

The National Initiative was an experiment in improving police-community relationships using a variety of approaches, methods, and messengers, and innovation occurred throughout the implementation process. Our evaluation of this complex, multisite learning effort yielded several key lessons for effectively implementing police-community trust-building efforts and for future studies of similar efforts.

Perhaps the most important finding concerns the degree to which agencies implemented the various components of the initiative: although all six sites ultimately implemented the trainings, made changes to policies and practices, and engaged with community members in reconciliation conversations, some did so more thoroughly and robustly than others. This unevenness in implementation was fueled by the challenges agencies faced during the initiative, particularly with respect to leadership changes. **Police leadership is critical for successfully and thoroughly implementing this type of ambitious undertaking**. Yet turnover in chiefs is common in American policing, and four of the six National Initiative departments experienced a change in police leadership during the implementation period. Changes in police leadership particularly disrupted the reconciliation and policy change work, delaying progress even when the new chief supported the work.

Training was a significant accomplishment of the National Initiative. The procedural justice and implicit bias training for officers was the initiative's biggest component: surveys indicated that officers bought into what they were hearing and indicated that such training is a good method for translating evidence into practice. **Ensuring that procedural justice trainers were "credible messengers"—** seasoned officers who were well-respected by the rank and file—was instrumental to that success**.** This was necessary for overcoming officers' resistance to discussions about the racial history of policing, the perspectives of community members who distrusted the police, and implicit biases. However, delivering 24 hours of training to every sworn officer **placed a heavy resource burden on the trainers and the departments**. Finally, important innovations developed during training implementation, particularly **community-facing trainings** and **internal procedural justice** (applications of procedural justice principles within police departments).

The National Initiative **developed a reconciliation process for police and communities**, substantially advancing the practice of police-community trust building. The implementation evaluation found that successful reconciliation listening sessions required **police to be open to hearing community perspectives and to refrain from reacting defensively to critical or emotional statements.** Importantly, reconciliation listening sessions led directly to policy changes in several National Initiative sites, and they played a part in the **extensive policy change processes** in the participating cities.

The process that produced these changes and lessons was not seamless, easy, or consistent across sites. The National Initiative partners had to overcome officers' **skepticism that outside experts were sufficiently informed about local contexts and could provide new insights** to strengthen police-community relationships. **Community involvement in the National Initiative developed more slowly than police involvement**, in part because community-focused components like the reconciliation process and the community-facing trainings were implemented at later stages. Partners' and departments' communication with communities was not as strong as police and community stakeholders desired. **Local contexts affected the implementation process**, and factors such as police leadership stability and the dynamics underlying relations between police, political leadership, and the community could facilitate or impede progress.

Successfully implementing the National Initiative and addressing these and other challenges required **committed and skilled local site coordinators**. Pairing the six sites with peer communities was a key facilitator of success. **Sites benefited from peer exchanges with other National Initiative cities;** the exchanges also helped improve site partner morale, made implementation more consistent, and allowed sites to share innovations.

The **observed improvement in community perceptions** on measures the National Initiative sought to affect, such as trust in police and police legitimacy, is a very promising finding. Though the citywide nature of the National Initiative interventions and the absence of survey data from comparable communities prevents us from making causal claims, the movement of community perceptions in the intended direction supports further applications, refinements, and evaluations of the interventions. That improvements in community perceptions were not observed in every site suggests that local contexts and implementation fidelity are important. Finally, it is crucial to note that although community perceptions improved in the aggregate, **views of police and police legitimacy remain largely negative in the neighborhoods most affected by crime and disadvantage**. In short, even where perceptions improved, there is still ample room for improvement.

The National Initiative was an ambitious and complex undertaking, consisting of multiple trainings, policy changes, and community engagement activities. Evaluations of such initiatives are always challenging because it is difficult to discern which components yielded impacts, and because historical, social, and political contexts substantially limit researchers' ability to make causal claims about the impacts of any one activity or factor. The **alarming dearth of reliable administrative data with which to conduct the impact analysis** exacerbated those challenges during the National Initiative evaluation. Detailed, accurate measurements of police administrative data are crucial for assessing the impacts of such complex program implementations. The sites had varying degrees of unavailable or inconsistent

data, complicating data analyses and interpretations across sites. For example, the only measures that all five data-providing sites were able to provide pertained to violent and property crimes. Although changes in crime rates are of interest, they are not the most appropriate metric for assessing the changes in police officer behaviors that the National Initiative aspired to improve.

Agencies committed to enhancing police-community relationships should make **collecting data on outcomes such as arrests and use of force by race and ethnicity** a priority. Doing so will not only help them track improvements in those metrics, but could also enable the routine public release of such data as a trust-building measure, as two National Initiative sites began doing. Moreover, this evaluation suggests that collecting data from community members on their perceptions of the police is critical for assessing the impact of efforts to make policing more equitable and respectful. Cities and others undertaking or supporting such efforts should consider investing in that kind of community data collection. Future evaluations could also work to **connect training more directly to behavior change**, and **track residents' perceptions over longer periods and compare them with those in matched comparison areas**. The National Initiative provided an opportunity to meaningfully expand knowledge on police-community trust building. Though much was accomplished and learned through the initiative, much remains to be done. The history of policing in the United States and the immediate needs of communities most impacted by crime, violence, and policing demand it.

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MICHAEL FRIEDRICH OCT 23, 2019

In Stockton, California, city and law enforcement leaders are attempting to build trust between police and communities of color. Why is this so hard to do?

Standing before the congregation of the Progressive Community Church of Stockton, California, Eric Jones, the city's police chief, apologized.

It was July 2016, in the furious days after the police shootings of Philando Castile in Falcon Heights, Minnesota, and Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Those were followed closely by the deadly ambush of police officers in Dallas, Texas, and in Baton Rouge after protests over the Sterling killing. Nationwide, police departments were assuming a protective posture as outrage roiled cities like Chicago, Philadelphia, Atlanta, and Los Angeles. But Jones was out in his community, talking about the role of police in everything from pre-Civil War slave-catching to Jim Crow enforcement and the carceral policies of the War on Drugs.

"This needs to be said," the white police chief told the largely African American congregation. "There was a time when police used to be dispatched to keep lynchings 'civil,' That's a fact of our history that we need to acknowledge."

In a video of his speech, Jones looks oddly marooned in his uniform on the giant church stage.

"Now, *I* didn't do that," he continued. "But the badge we wear still does carry the burden, and we need to at least understand why those issues are deep-rooted in a lot of our communities."

The parishioners murmured in affirmation—and perhaps surprise. "My, my, my," one said.

At the time, Jones didn't know how this apology would be received. "I was nervous the first time I did it," he told me later. "I know just the way you do it is so important, and you have to be sincere."

That apology marked the beginning of an unprecedented truth-and-reconciliation process with communities of color in Stockton, a high-poverty city in California's Central Valley that for years has been struggling with a familiar American crisis. When Jones took over as chief in 2012, its annual murder rate was higher than Chicago's. That year, the city of 300,000 saw 71 homicides and an overall crime rate more than twice the national average. A municipal bankruptcy had slashed the size of the police force, and it could barely keep up with 911 calls.

After two decades of zero-tolerance policing tactics, a history of local abuse, and high-profile officer-involved shootings, there was a deep well of mistrust between police and the Stockton communities most beset by violence. A career Stockton officer, Jones had begun taking steps to improve, training his officers on fair practices and using more focused, less invasive strategies to prevent violence. But he came to believe that they wouldn't make real headway on addressing the city's public safety issues unless he embarked on something more radical: not just apologies but atonement.

Police Chief Eric Jones arrived in Stockton in 2012, promising to repair the broken relationship between law enforcers and the community. (Michael Friedrich/CityLab)

For the last two years, the Stockton Police Department has been working toward reconciliation using a trust-restoration script devised by American criminologists and international experts in transitional justice. Along with a host of departmental reforms, police in Stockton have held a series of dialogues and workshops designed to repair their shattered relationship with the communities they serve.

Rather than broad gestures at police "accountability" that promote measures like body cameras, the city has committed to changing departmental norms wholesale. It's an uncertain, and maybe never-ending process, one that almost certainly will not conclude with a telegenic Hallmark display of forgiveness. What it might yield instead is a foundation for real trust and greater community control.

According to a new study from the Urban Institute, Stockton's reconciliation efforts are showing results. In the highest-crime, most disadvantaged areas of the city, residents' views of both police and the conditions of their neighborhoods have improved significantly since 2015. Those views turn out to be important for a whole range of reasons, but especially because they promote cooperation.

Whether this process has achieved anything approaching actual reconciliation is a different and more complicated question, one that raises all sorts of corollary questions about what the term means and to whom, and what a satisfactory objective would be in the first place. Those questions are both important —communities of color have historically been mistreated by police, and continue to be—and somewhat moot: It appears that simply *trying* to reconcile produces promising benefits.

It's also incredibly rare. Few American public officials are willing to acknowledge their institutional role in maintaining racist hierarchies. So why are police doing it in Stockton?

Engineering trust

The reconciliation process began as part of a three-year, $5.75 million trust-building initiative of the Obama-era Department of Justice. Announced in 2015, in the wake of the shooting of Michael Brown and the eruption of unrest in Ferguson, Missouri, it aimed to "promote more equitable, just, and respectful policing practices and improve relationships and trust between law enforcement and community members."

Stockton was one of six cities—also including Birmingham, Alabama; Fort Worth, Texas; Gary, Indiana; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—that not only attempted reconciliation but also conducted trainings for police on improving procedural justice and reducing implicit bias, both concepts with decades of scholarship behind them.

Reconciliation was the most radical and least tested idea. Designed by David M. Kennedy, a criminologist at John Jay College, the process draws from the experiences of international transitional-justice commissions like the ones in post-apartheid South Africa. The point is to address historical and recent police abuse of communities of color so they can collaborate to improve public safety.

"Regardless of the presidential administration now, we will continue to do this work. It's a moral imperative."

While Kennedy was developing this idea, I worked for him as a researcher. I sat in on closed-door sessions where he synthesized advice from experts on truth-telling; I went into the field to observe the reconciliation process in practice and interview its participants. It was no secret how important it all was to him. In Kennedy's memoir, *Don't Shoot: One Man, a Street Fellowship, and the End of Violence in Inner-City America*, he explains how integral he believes racial reckoning is to stopping urban violence. No matter what you think of American policing and what its the future should be, we live with police today. It's increasingly clear they must do *something* about their racist past if they want the standing to do their job without causing further harm.

Kennedy began his career trying to engineer partnerships between police and largely black communities to stem the devastation of the crack epidemic in the 1990s. But age-old mistrust prevented those partnerships and perpetuated the problems. "You do not see that kind of issue in places that have not been horrifically mistreated at the hands of the state and its authorities," he told me. In those neighborhoods, he believed, the fundamental legitimacy of the police was broken. Residents may have hated living amid crime and violence, but they did not trust the police to help them.

In 2003, Kennedy facilitated reconciliation meetings in a few troubled neighborhoods of High Point, North Carolina. "It was absolutely terrifying," he said. "In general, being the person who brings race to the fore and insists that people pay attention to it is a terrifying place to be." Yet he saw how powerful it could be. Police chiefs apologized for the ills of traditional drug enforcement. Black residents aired grievances and spoke with officers to unravel mutual misconceptions of one another. Slowly, they began to cooperate on solutions that closed down local drug markets.

The DOJ initiative offered a chance to test this approach on a citywide scale. In 2015, Kennedy convened police executives, community leaders, and international experts. Priscilla Hayner, a member of the United Nations standby team of senior mediation advisors whose work on truth-seeking informed reconciliation processes in Sierra Leone and Peru, was particularly influential. "Perhaps the most important aim of any truth commission should be to prevent further violence and rights abuses in the future," Hayner writes in *Unspeakable Truths*, her authoritative 2001 account of the subject. "[M]ost commissions recommend reforms in the military, police, judiciary, and political systems in the hope of preventing further abuses."

With this guidance, Kennedy and his collaborators outlined the elements of a process specific to the context of American policing, one that would ask police to conduct a historical fact-finding process, acknowledge the harm their profession has done, listen to accounts of survivors, and change their official policies based on what they learn.

A difficult conversation

On a broiling evening in July, a group of three uniformed police facilitators, five Stockton police officers, and 18 residents gathered around conference tables strewn with magic markers and Super Sticky Easel Pads in a borrowed room of the Maya Angelou Southeast Library. The officers wore plainclothes, but in that uniform golf-shirt-and-chinos way that still lets you know they're officers—and their service weapons were visible, holstered on their hips.

Scott Meadors, a captain and 28-year veteran of the Stockton Police Department, stood at the front of the room in full uniform, leading the workshop. Part training, part listening session, and part history lesson—based on "fact-finding" research that Harvard historian Elizabeth Hinton conducted in Stockton—these interactive monthly "trust-building workshops" are one form the community reconciliation process takes in Stockton today. Most of the officers were white; most of the residents were black. (The department as a whole is 57 percent white, 5 percent black, 28 percent Latino, and 8 percent Asian, a proportion somewhat askew from the city at large, where 23 percent of residents are white, 12 percent are black, 40 percent are Latino, and 21 percent are Asian, according to a 2018 equal employment report.)

"Equal application of the law," Meadors said. "When that was said, what was popping into your mind?"

Skip Roberts, a retired Stockton high school coach, stood to speak. Once, near his house in South Stockton, he told the group, a cop pointed a shotgun at him, saying he fit the description of someone officers were looking for. "It was some 22-year-old," Roberts said. "I'm in my 60s." Everyone laughed. "I'm thinking it's a profile, basically."

That's what Roberts thinks about, he said, when Meadors talks about equal application of law. "I mean, that's instilled in me from childhood."

When Meadors asked what he meant, Roberts said that in the low-income San Francisco housing project where he grew up, the cops would "get you in the system"—meaning the criminal-justice system. When he moved to Stockton, "just about every young African American male I met had been arrested or in juvenile or something."

Stockton resident Skip Roberts (standing) addresses a group of police officers and community members at a trust-building workshop. (Michael Friedrich/CityLab)

Trevor Womack, one of Jones's deputy chiefs, stood up. "I think what you just offered right there is one of the most important things in this entire training for me," he said. "So I grew up in North Stockton. I never, ever had an experience where I was stopped by the police. No one that I knew was ever arrested. Nobody I knew was shot or killed."

That was the understanding—or lack thereof—that he took to his first assignment as a 21-year-old white cop, when he was detaining and pointing his gun at residents of Southeast Stockton, he said. "I wish I could go back to the day I started and have this kind of conversation. I would have been a whole different police officer."

Stockton has been having conversations like this since early 2017, when Jones first began holding the small, intimate listening sessions that Kennedy envisioned. Behind the badge, he felt a profound sense of obligation. "I was part of that street policing during the crack epidemic," he told me. "I felt like it was both my department's and my personal responsibility to get to the root of why that mistrust is there and do something to change it. The work we were doing really added to the racial disparities we've seen in the criminal justice system."

It would be a mistake to act as though reconciliation is wholly dependent on police—as though communities of color lack agency, and activist groups like Black Lives Matter didn't force the issue of police abuse nationally. Police, however, are the agents of the state; it's hard to overestimate their power. None of this can happen without a willing police force, and particularly without a willing executive.

And even when you have that, it still takes some extra luck. Stockton enjoys a rare confluence of features that have helped set the table for this process. It has the enthusiastic support of Mayor Michael Tubbs, the 29-year-old city leader who has pledged to turn Stockton into a laboratory of progressive initiatives to address crime and poverty. And relations between Stockton police officials and the Stockton Police Officer's Association are uncommonly cordial—unlike in many other cities, where police officials frequently clash with the union that represents the rank-and-file. That comity has made it easier for officers to accept the process.

In 2012, a billboard promoted Stockton's embattled police department. In that year, Stockton became the largest U.S. city to file for bankruptcy, and its homicide rate was worse than Chicago's. (Ben Margot/AP)

As a researcher, I observed the first three Stockton listening sessions. These weren't your usual town-hall-type gatherings, where police explain away citizen concerns. They were smaller and more vulnerable. Local organizers chose around 15 participants for each, and Jones sat in a circle with them. One of Kennedy's research assistants facilitated the conversations. At the first session, organizer and lifelong Stockton resident Tashante McCoy-Ham brought together survivors of murdered children—her own mother among them. McCoy-Ham's brother, Terri, was shot and killed in 2012 during a personal dispute**.** The room vibrated with weird anticipation.

Seated in a circle with residents at the center of the big brown carpeted conference room, Jones made a version of his apology. For McCoy-Ham, this act was important. "You can only get so far without acknowledgement and accountability. Reconciliation doesn't exist without those two things," she told me. "It was awkward, but it was also powerful at the same time."

Jones spent hours hearing stories from community members whom police had traumatized. Many residents addressed deep neighborhood and family grievances, from the indignities of routine street stops to hair-raising stories of how the police had mishandled their children's homicide cases. McCoy-Ham told me she didn't have adverse experiences with police growing up, but she described their suffocating presence in her neighborhood. "They had a group of cops they called the 'jump-out boys,' because they'd literally pull up and jump out if they'd see groups of males on the corner hanging out," she said. "They were definitely profiling."

In the aftermath of her brother's murder, her view of Stockton police grew extremely dim. "They were somber. There was no conversation, no follow-up," she told me of her family's interaction with the department. McCoy-Ham and her mother told Jones it was excruciating never to hear the official story of Terri's death from authorities, and instead to learn about it in bits and pieces from the streets.

In the weeks that followed, the department looked more deeply into her brother's case and invited her to the station to apologize and share what they knew. Through that process, she and her mother have gotten some closure. She has gone on to work with the department, holding workshops with cops on trauma and helping to provide information to survivors of recent homicide victims. "It felt really empowering to know that my voice mattered, and that it mattered in a way that was going to change the game for other families," McCoy-Ham said.

Today, the department continues to hold listening sessions and trust-building workshops with youth, LGBTQ, and other groups that have been alienated from police. The point, said Jones, is not just to make amends for the past but to build future legitimacy: "This is part of the healing process between our communities and police."

Changing the script

In August, the Urban Institute released its final evaluation of the DOJ initiative. Researchers measured residents' perceptions of police, safety and neighborhood conditions, and practices like street stops and arrests, comparing levels from 2015 to 2017. The findings suggest a transformation.

Community surveys found that residents who held negative views of local departments ended up with views that were "markedly more positive," and perceptions of the police gained particularly among black residents. "When you aggregate across the six cities, we saw measurable, statistically significant improvement in their views of police, their degree of trust, their belief that police in general act in a procedurally just manner," said Jesse Jannetta, a senior policy fellow in the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute.

Out of the six test cities, the results in Stockton were the strongest. Residents' willingness to cooperate with police on neighborhood problems increased. So did their views of safety and police legitimacy. Calls for service have increased. Violent crime has declined even as the police make fewer arrests. And officer-involved shootings dropped by 80 percent last year—a major indicator of change to activists.

Other outcomes make graphic how trust can influence neighborhood safety. The department receives more anonymous tips and solves more cases, and its homicide clearance rate jumped from 40 percent in 2017 to 66 percent in 2018. Criminologists say homicide clearance creates an important feedback loop: It demonstrates that police are serious about protecting vulnerable communities, which goes a long way toward establishing legitimacy, in turn promoting more community cooperation on solving violent crimes. Conversely, in cities like Baltimore, where murder rates have soared in recent years, police routinely solve under 30 percent of homicides annually.

Lifelong Stockton resident Tashante McCoy-Ham has been active in advising local police on the reconciliation process. "You can only get so far without acknowledgement and accountability," she says. (Michael Friedrich/CityLab)

Of course, no reckoning would matter if police were not also changing harmful practices. In 2017, Stockton created a community advisory board of residents like McCoy-Ham, whose feedback informs policy changes aimed at fairer, more compassionate, and less damaging policing. These include creating new de-escalation protocols, mandating mental-health training for officers, prohibiting stops based solely on the suspicion that a person is undocumented, and adding procedural justice-informed rules for conduct with the public and fellow officers.

"Stockton is the place where we saw the most across-the-board improvement," said Jannetta. While there's no way to separate the effects of reconciliation from the other interventions, he said, Stockton "certainly did the most extensive reconciliation work of any of the six sites," conducting more than 20 listening sessions by the time of the report.

But several other cities under the DOJ initiative also reported progress in their own tentative steps toward reckoning with the past.

“Come from behind the badge and give me an honest answer.”

In 2016, A.C. Roper, the first black police chief of Birmingham, apologized to the “foot soldiers,” who marched on the front lines of the Civil Rights Movement, for their brutal mistreatment at the hands of his department. “The elder statesman of the foot soldiers said he’s been waiting all his life for that,” said Roper, whose own father was a civil rights activist in Birmingham. “Some people will say, ‘Why would you apologize for something that you didn't do?’ Well, the organization I led did it. And there's no one from the past who could come back and give a heartfelt apology.” He went on to hold listening sessions with youth of color, victims of domestic violence, and LGBTQ organizations. But in 2017, a new mayor was elected and a new chief appointed; reconciliation efforts have since stalled, according to T. Marie King, a lifelong Birmingham resident who served as community liaison for the DOJ initiative.

King thought the reconciliation work was a good opportunity to develop trust. “Regardless of how people feel about police officers, they are needed in our communities,” she said. But reconciliation can be fragile, and fleeting. “When you slow it down, people lose interest, or people feel unheard. And once that happens, then you almost have to go back to square one.”

Minneapolis saw its reconciliation efforts wind down in a similar fashion. In 2016, with the city reeling from protests over the death of Jamar Clark, a young black man killed by police officers, Police Chief Janee Harteau spoke to leaders from a range of advocacy groups about policing’s “awful and racist” past. “I am not responsible for it,” she told them. “But I can apologize for it. We know that hundreds of years of policing a racist status quo has left a legacy.”

When Harteau was forced out as chief in 2018, following an officer-involved shooting, her successor, Medaria Arradondo, continued to hold listening sessions. Since the end of the DOJ initiative, however, those sessions have ceased and been replaced by other forms of community-led discussions, according to the civilian police representative who coordinated them.

Still, like Stockton, both Birmingham and Minneapolis saw improvements in community trust, and changes in official practice, during the DOJ initiative, according to the Urban Institute study. In Birmingham, residents’ views on the law and willingness to work with the police improved significantly, while their perceptions of the frequency of neighborhood violence decreased. The department also made fewer arrests. In Minneapolis, residents reported significantly improved views of the law, higher perceptions of police legitimacy, and a perceived increase in neighborhood safety. The department’s number of use-of-force incidents also dropped.

With the initiative concluded and little likelihood of the current federal administration underwriting further work on reconciliation, Kennedy is now seeking other cities willing to test his model in full.

Georgia may be the first place in the country to initiate reconciliation statewide. Louis Dekmar, police chief of the city of LaGrange, made news in early 2017 when he publicly apologized to a gathering of black community members for the department's role in a lynching from 77 years prior. Recently, he recruited a group of police chiefs in Georgia—a state second only to Mississippi in its number of historical lynchings—to meet with Kennedy and outline a statewide process of acknowledgement and trust-building.

What would it take for American police and communities to really reconcile? T. Marie King put it simply: "The people who have been harmed have to feel reconciled." The international experience suggests that this process may have no clear end point. On this matter, Priscilla Hayner points to a report from the South Africa commission, which suggests that indeterminacy is an unavoidable feature. "Reconciliation is not an event," that report reads. "People cannot simply one day decide that they want to forgive and forget. Most of the victims in this community … demand to hear the truth and to be given time to consider it. They are often not willing to forgive unless the perpetrators show remorse and some form of reparation is offered."

But what form of reparation are police prepared to offer? Can the most progressive departments harmonize their stated intentions with their everyday use of coercive force? And is such harmony even possible for police, as representatives of the state?

In 2015, Stockton Police Chief Eric Jones (left) announced the results of training programs on implicit bias and use of force with then-California Attorney General Kamala Harris. (Damian Dovarganes/AP)

Most U.S. police agencies are not exactly tripping over themselves to find out. Even under the reformist Obama-era DOJ, law enforcement has been reluctant to assume responsibility for the damage they've done. Today, President Donald Trump's DOJ has rebuked calls for police accountability and reversed oversight measures for troubled departments. The symbolic question of whether to bring civil rights charges against the officer involved in the death of Eric Garner ended in July, when Attorney General William Barr ordered that the DOJ drop it. The Trump era has seen a return of the "law-and-order" rhetoric of past generations, calls for a revival of the "stop-and-frisk" policing tactics that were ruled unconstitutional, and an escalating role for police in everything from immigration enforcement to addressing homelessness—all measures likely to do further damage to perceptions of police among African American and Latino communities.

But in Stockton, the Urban Institute outcomes have given Jones a renewed commitment to the future of reconciliation, and to making the policy changes his community wants. "It was very encouraging," the chief said. "There cannot be a sunset on these listening sessions and other work we're doing, because we just have so far to go. But we made improvements in every single category."

He emphasized that the department has much more progress to make. "Regardless of the presidential administration now, we will continue to do this work. This is an issue that we are grappling with here in Stockton," Jones said. "It's a moral imperative."

Skeptical residents continue to show up for listening sessions, trust-building workshops, and community advisory board meetings—even though they may never see eye-to-eye with police on certain matters. While I was in the city in July, the DOJ had just made its decision in the Garner case, and the topic was fresh on people's minds. Toward the end of the workshop I attended, Skip Roberts, the retired coach, issued a provocation about the widely viewed video of Garner's death at the hands of a New York City police officer.

"All the officers in the room," Roberts said. "Do you think that was murder that took place?"

Meadors responded quickly. "For us, we can't make a decision based off of that, because we were not in that situation. And there are all kinds of different opinions that go around. What we do know is there was an impact to Eric Garner's family, to their community, to the officers in that agency."

For a few tense minutes, it went back and forth like that: Roberts pressing Meadors on finer points like the legality of chokeholds in New York City and whether a citizen could get away with such violence; Meadors gently refusing to render a judgment while acknowledging the pain Garner's death caused. Another participant said the conversation made her feel uncomfortable, and she thought Meadors was "talking around" the issue.

As the exchange wound down, Meadors made clear that he relishes this open dialogue. "These situations have to be talked about," he told the room.

Later, Roberts told me that he thought this was a "political answer" from Meadors. "Come from behind the badge and give me an honest answer," he said.

But despite those frustrations, he still found the conversation helpful. Like other local critics I spoke to—even those who believe that police are unalterably a force of oppression—Roberts ultimately valued having access to a setting in which he could challenge the police and make his voice heard. And he intended to keep doing so. "I can't wait for the next one," he said.