

Post-Deliberation Report  
Public Safety & Justice  
South Bend, Indiana  
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# Background

On March 21<sup>st</sup>, community members of South Bend, Indiana arrived at the Charles Martin Youth Center to participate in a community public deliberation on reducing violence in communities. The deliberation was facilitated by Wabash Democracy and Public Discourse, an initiative at Wabash College that encourages productive conversations in communities to discuss and address problems. Community members were encouraged to sit at a table of their choosing, resulting in 4 groups of 6-8 people. The event began with WDPD facilitators Anthony Douglas and Vincent Bowden opening the event with ground rules for the discussion and the purpose of deliberation. Ms. Karen White and Ms. Gladys Muhammed welcomed all to the event, particularly local law enforcement, and WDPD Director Dr. Sara Drury initiated the conversation.

Each participant had a “Safety and Justice” conversation guide created by the National Issues Forum (NIF) designed to create a structured conversation about reducing violence in our communities. The guide was broken down into three different approaches to address the broader question, “*How do we reduce violence in the community?*” The three approaches were: (1) Enforce the Law Together, (2) Apply the Law Fairly, and (3) De-escalate and Prevent Violence. It was stressed that the three different approaches provided in the participation guide were not the only possible perspectives, but rather potential perspectives designed to help people consider options and weigh tradeoffs of the issue.

Once the deliberation event began, a trained facilitator and note-taker from the Wabash Democracy and Public Discourse Initiative led the conversation at each table. The conversation started with participants at their tables introducing themselves, then they proceeded to discuss all three perspectives one at a time, weighing their benefits, drawbacks, and possible actions. Each approach was discussed for approximately 20 minutes. Afterwards, each group spent 15 minutes reviewing and discussing all the approaches, determining which actions the community should prioritize.

At the conclusion of the conversation, Dr. Sara Drury invited tables to share the actions they prioritized with participants from other groups. Once each table had shared what actions their group prioritized, Dr. Sara Drury closed the event by thanking all participants for coming.

**The event schedule was therefore as follows:**

- 6:00 Welcome & Introduction to Deliberation
- 6:20 Approach 1: Enforce the Law Together
- 6:40 Approach 2: Apply the Law Fairly
- 7:00 Approach 3: De-Escalate and Prevent Violence
- 7:20 Prioritize and Discussion
- 7:35 Final Report
- 7:45 Closing Remarks

This report analyzes the table notes, recordings from the conversation, and facilitator notes. This report is not meant to be a complete portrayal of the public opinion in South Bend, IN because the analysis is limited to only those who participated in the event. As such, this report summarizes the deliberative conversation on March 17, 2017, and describes the potential actions generated by those gathered to address violence in our community.

This report focuses on accurately analyzing and conveying the most frequent themes that came from the discussion, and proceeds as follows:

- Stakeholder Information
- Analysis of Three Approaches
- Prioritization
- Conclusion & Thanks

## Stakeholder Information

The stakeholders, or individuals who came to the event and had an interest in the issue, included concerned community members, law enforcement officers, teachers, and elected community officials. Each offered a different background in regards to the topic of discussion, all of which proved to offer substantially different answers to the three following approaches. The initial conversation started with driving out their previous experiences and thinking about what the issue might be.

While each table had their own conversation, several tables felt the violence started on the streets. Participants discussed that impoverished families, such as parent(s) having to work long hours, which leads to the youth being out late on the streets and committing acts of violence. Some felt it could be due to the lack of moral compass or lack of guidance that might lead to poor choices. Another contributing factor discussed was the role technology and social media were playing. Participants voiced that social media is flooded with violent content and news, which can overflow into schools and on the weekends. Some community members voiced there must first be a reformation of understanding gangs, as well as how and why individuals join them, in order to be able to address the problem.

# Analysis of the Three Approaches

## Approach 1: Enforce the Law Together

This approach asked participants to weigh-in on community involvement in policing. The guide offered a brief description of the approach along with providing benefits and trade-offs to potential actions. The description noted the perspectives of community policing and asked participants to think critically about what this might look like in the future.

Across all four tables, participants felt police are necessary in order to have safety and order within a community. However, many participants feel a sense of fear rather than a sense of comfort and safety when it regards law enforcement. Some felt the best response to this is to require officers to live in the communities that they police, but other participants voiced that police want to “go home” from work and living in the community makes that tough. Another thought was police making stronger efforts to get to know the community better when they are on duty. Participants expressed that law enforcement needs to be more visible in the community in a positive manner and not only when there’s been a situation.

Another part of the conversation was dedicated to increasing community involvement within policing. Participants across four of the tables felt this would be a great idea, but wondered how it could enacted. The issues differed as some participant’s felt there could be biases involved and that community involvement would increase these biases possibly. Other participants felt that it could lead to an issue of “nosey neighbors,” or community members acting as vigilantes, which could harm the community and trust between community members. However, some voiced that the more eyes that are watching, the less chance that someone will commit a crime out of fear of being caught.

## Approach 2: Apply the Law Fairly

This approach encouraged participants to consider addressing violence in the community by enforcing and applying the law fairly. The guide provided potential actions such as limiting traffic stops, eliminating “stop and frisk” programs, investing more resources in communities with higher poverty and crime rates, and reducing rates of arrest for minor drug and other non-violent crimes.

Participants considered reforms to the justice system to lessen inequalities and how these might impact violence in the community. One major theme of this approach was that an foundational first step to applying the law fairly is encouraging open and honest

conversation. Community members in attendance felt that more dialogue between members of the law enforcement community and citizens is one of the first steps to addressing injustices in some of the systems practices. In addition to open dialogue, participants called for transparency in the justice system. In order for law enforcement to be perceived as a legitimate and fair authority, the tables felt that the processes in which the law is applied must be transparent.

Another major theme that was popular at the tables was the push for education of police officers and citizens. Many participants supported the use of implicit bias training for law enforcement officials. However, some participants suggested that citizens should undergo similar educational programs in order to change the way in which community members think about our law enforcement officials. In other words, education should involve many groups in the community.

In addition to the implicit bias training, some groups discussed strategies used by law enforcement to identify criminals such as “stop and frisk.” Participants acknowledged that these practices, as they function currently, are very biased. But they struggled with the tension that, if used properly, they can be effective at reducing crime. Retraining officers with implicit bias training might add to the legitimacy of “stop and frisk.”

Some tables discussed the redistribution of more funding—both for social programs and law enforcement—to communities with high crime and poverty rates as a way to reduce violence in our communities. Funding is important for education and training programs, and also might reduce conditions that prompt violence and crime.

Lastly, a few tables mentioned holding our government, law enforcement officials, and media accountable for their actions. Several actions were mentioned that participants felt could address this goal. One action suggested creating a board of citizens or an independent third party to review felony cases. Another table also advocated for a more thorough screening process for new police officers. Finally, one table’s action focused on how to help community members make educated decisions when it comes to voting for certain officials in our judicial system, since they have a huge impact on applying the law fairly.

## Approach 3: De-escalate and Prevent Violence

In this approach, the guide prompted the participants to engage with what steps could be taken in order to de-escalate and prevent violence. The guide’s sample actions included training officers in de-escalation techniques, starting local gun buy-back programs, and getting community members involved in violence prevention.

This approach had conversations that varied greatly by table, but tended towards a few themes. The themes included increasing training (mental health and implicit bias), developing more mental health treatment centers, increasing awareness of mental health care/diseases, applying for more funding for educational programs, and creating stronger relationships within the community.

As for possible actions, several focused around training and education. Some of the participants felt that mental health and implicit bias training was a necessity to improve safety and justice in communities. Those who advocated for the training believed that by implementing these forms of training, officers would be better equipped to handle citizens while they were out performing their job. Implicit bias training continued to be stressed by one group in particular because they felt that it would lead to a decrease in the unfair treatment of minorities from police officers. Another table discussed that young people needed educational programs to help decrease violence and crime, particularly addressing mental health and on how law enforcement works in the community. A few members of the community were familiar with the previous school program known as D.A.R.E, and they advocated for implementation of programs that shared goals similar to the program, especially the connection to law enforcement.

Beyond education, one group discussed the importance of developing appropriate facilities for officers to transport those fighting mental health illnesses to. Other groups believed that proper mental health care facilities were necessary simply because the community lacked those sites.

Finally, several tables stressed actions devoted to creating a tightly bonded community where everyone has a relationship with one another to address safety and justice. In doing so, the area would be able to work to eliminate the “no snitching” practices, produce law abiding citizens, and make the community safer. Lastly, a few participants in the conversation strongly emphasized resisting the images that media creates of certain groups, because these images might hurt relationships in the community. These participants noted that negative images are too often created of groups—both community members of color and police officers—and that these images have led to biases and ill-advised decision-making from officers and citizens.

# Prioritization

During the prioritization stage, each group reported 2-3 priorities for action. Among those areas most important to the community were as follows (the actions below are listed in reported order, and do not represent a hierarchy):

- **Develop relationships within the community including officer to citizen, citizen to citizen, youth to adults, etc.** By creating a tightly bonded community, participants felt that citizens would follow the law more often out of respect for their fellow citizens as well as officers. Participants also felt that this action would help create an environment where citizens look out for one another and resolve issues without the constant assistance of an officer.
- **Fight against misrepresentation and unjust arrests.** Participants felt that implicit bias training would be important in order to achieve this goal. Participants felt that these stereotypes have led to problems such as racial profiling, and unjust arrests, and they need to be addressed.
- **Train officers and citizens on how to handle mental health.** Outside of professionals who understand mental health, there has not been a strong effort in the community to educate officers nor citizens on how to handle people dealing with mental health issues. By doing so, the community would be better able to address those dealing with a form of mental health.
- **Educate the public on what mental health is in order to decrease the negative stigma the name holds.** No one wants to discuss mental health because of the negative connotation that the word carries. However, by addressing this concern and creating an environment where it is ok to acknowledge whenever a mental health crisis is occurring, the community could make strides in supporting one another through these issues.
- **Apply funding to the educational programs that community members need.** Participants understood that while other areas may lack funding as a result of this action, it was still very important. The educational programs discussed in the conversation were critical to participants and their aim to create a community where citizens and officers were well-equipped with knowledge, and could make the best decisions within law enforcement.
- **Communicate the summary of this forum conversation to the community so that everyone can understand the discussion that took place.** The participants want to publicize the effort to address law enforcement and decrease violence within their community. By doing so, they are hoping that more citizens will be on board with the movement.

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