

WABASH COLLEGE

Wabash Democracy & Public Discourse Initiative

Post-Deliberation Report Public Safety & Justice Northwest Indiana Report Date: May 16, 2017

This report was authored by:

- Jaleel Grandberry, Walker Hedgepath, John Janak, Deonte Simpson
Wabash Democracy and Public Discourse Fellows

- Dr. Sara A. Mehlretter Drury,
Director, Wabash Democracy and Public Discourse

Contact: wdpd@wabash.edu

765-361-6393

Background

On April 17, 2017, community members of northwest Indiana arrived at the Anderson Library and Conference Center of Indiana University Northwest to participate in a community public deliberation on safety and reducing violence. The deliberation was held in partnership with a number of organizations, including the Kettering Foundation (Dayton, Ohio), the National Issues Forum, Wabash Democracy and Public Discourse, the Office of the Mayor of Gary, Lakeshore Public Media, the Urban League of Northwest Indiana, and the Legacy Foundation of Northwest Indiana.

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 public problems. Community members were encouraged to sit at a table of their choosing, resulting in 3 groups of 6-8 people.

The event began with WDPD facilitators Jaleel Grandberry and Walker Hedgepath opening the event with ground rules for the discussion and the purpose of deliberation. Then, Chancellor Lowe from IU-Northwest and Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson gave brief remarks welcoming everyone and emphasizing the importance of this topic, before handing it back over to the student facilitators to begin conversation.

Each participant had a “Safety and Justice” conversation guide created by the National Issues Forum (NIF). These guides looked at the issue from a national perspective, and are designed to create a structured conversation about reducing violence and promoting safety. The guide was broken down into three different approaches to address the broader question, “*How do we reduce violence in the community?*”: (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 participants consider options and weigh tradeoffs of the issue.

Once the deliberation event began, a trained facilitator and notetaker from Wabash Democracy and Public Discourse 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 15 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, Jaleel Grandberry invited tables to share the actions they prioritized with participants from other groups. Once each table had shared what actions their group prioritized, Walker Hedgepath closed the event by thanking all participants for coming.

The event schedule was therefore as follows:

- 6:00 Welcome & Introduction to Deliberation
- 6:15 Opening Stage
- 6:30 Approach 1: Enforce the Law Together
- 6:45 Approach 2: Apply the Law Fairly
- 7:00 Approach 3: De-Escalate and Prevent Violence
- 7:15 Prioritize and Discussion
- 7:30 Final Report
- 7:40 Closing Remarks

This report analyzes and draws from 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 northwest Indiana because the analysis is limited to only those who participated in the event. As such, this report summarizes the deliberative conversation on April 17, 2017, and describes the potential actions generated by those gathered to reduce violence and promote greater safety, both in northwest Indiana and more broadly across the United States.

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
- Reflection

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 officials. Each offered a different background in regards to the topic of discussion, all of which proved to offer insights to the three following approaches. The initial conversation started with driving out their previous experiences and thinking about what the issue might be.

Although tables had different conversations, there were a few common driving themes about the issue. It was understood that there is an overall atmosphere of fear relating to these issues. Initial reactions included several individuals advocating that there is a need to build better community relationships. Additionally, it is believed that knowledge of local systems is important, as it enables citizens to act more effectively.

Analysis of the Three Approaches

Approach 1: Enforce the Law Together

In the National Issues Forum guide, this option emphasized the importance of community-police partnerships in addressing violence in communities. In particular, the guide suggested actions such as having communities having a diverse police force, requiring police to be in the community where they serve, communities promoting neighborhood watch programs, citizen responsibilities in reporting crime, and citizens fulfilling obligations to serve on juries.

One of the most substantial themes for this approach was that several community members emphasized the importance on improving the relationship between law enforcement officers and the general public. A few individuals at different tables noted the issues associated with unfair generalizations: for example, if one officer commits a transgression in a distant community (away from northwest Indiana), the public at large tends to view the police with distrust—even when the incident did not occur in that community. In order to address these sorts of generalizations, one suggestion was that members of law enforcement should be visible and proactive in getting to know the people whom they are protecting. At the same time, community members should be more proactive in promoting safety and interacting positively with their neighborhood officers.

These drive toward a major theme assembled from this segment: **both** the community and law enforcement have to **trust and respect one another** to restore balance to local criminal justice.

Approach 2: Apply the Law Fairly

This approach in the National Issues Forum guide suggested actions that would work to applying the law fairly, working against discriminations of race, class, and gender. The guide gave participants a number of statistics to demonstrate how minorities have been discriminated against in the judicial system, and suggested actions to address this.

In discussing this approach, a common theme across the tables again reflected the need to foster strong relationships between the police and the community. Some expressed that a reason the law may sometimes be applied unfairly is due to misconceptions and an overall distrust between minority members of the community and the police. A few participants expressed that they believed if a better relationship is formed between the two, these many injustices will not occur or be less likely to occur.

Additionally, some people at the various tables discussed that citizens needed to better understand the legal system as well as laws around community safety. One suggested action was that there needs to be educational programs for citizens about these issues, and

particularly laws. One example of a law that seemed confusing to some community members was the “stop and frisk” law mentioned in the National Issues Forum guide. There is believed to be misinformation about this law and technique, as well as how it works. Several community members suggested that a positive action would be education about this law and others, particularly so that they can know what may be an infraction and so that citizens can understand how to better comply with police.

After discussing this approach, other community members suggested an action of education and training for law enforcement officers and others in the broader judicial system, particularly in programs that pertain to implicit bias and racial sensitivity. This sort of action could help people to better understand diverse communities and be able to interact with them comfortably and rationally.

A few community members expressed that there should be punishment for people who do not apply the law fairly. These individuals suggested that individuals in the judicial or criminal justice system pushing racial agendas or actively promoting injustices should be removed from their job. Some suggested studying this over time, so that trends could be noted and action taken.

Approach 3: De-Escalate and Prevent Violence

In this approach, the National Issues Forum guide suggested actions around how communities could 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, and so the themes mentioned below may only have come up in one particular group. Topics discussed included increasing mental health training for officers, developing more educational and leadership programs, and creating healthier living conditions at home for the benefit of young children. Other secondary themes (not discussed as substantially as the others) included developing proper mental health facilities and finding the funding and manpower to institute change within the community.

Participants that discussed training for police officers felt it necessary for various reasons. One group stressed that currently, officers are very reactant to crime. They expect the worse when dealing with situations, and this may lead to a mishap occurring in the event of an officer interacting with a citizen. To add to this point, one group acknowledged the responsibility of being a police officer, and suggested that they too may need support and assistance. Another group felt training was necessary because they saw some police officers lacking understanding of the community perspective.

One group discussed the equipment for officers around de-escalation and prevention, and specifically whether officers should be equipped with military grade or standard equipment. After discussion, this group felt that with proper training, police departments would be able to perform their job with standard equipment, and that military grade equipment might encourage more violence.

As for educational and leadership programs, participants agreed again that they were necessary for a couple of reasons. Many participants felt that children need a better living situation within their community. Community members shared their feelings that the area lacks mentorship programs and schools that are active in fighting the issue. If these two concerns were addressed, then the community would have a better chance of combatting the big issue of violence prevention and de-escalation. Many of the participants felt that better living conditions in the household were necessary in order to instill healthy habits within children beginning at a young age.

Along with leadership in the community, one group discussed whether or not it was the community's duty to report crime activity or not. That same group offered the idea of citizen intervention as a way to de-escalate or prevent crime, but they acknowledged that the action could be seen as risky for citizens.

Reflection

During the prioritization stage, each group reported several actions that seemed most preferred. These actions were identified by the group, but do not necessarily represent a consensus among the individuals at the tables. Instead, they should be seen as prominent actions and ideas after the deliberation of the approaches. The actions below are listed in reported order, and do not represent a hierarchy. The preferred actions to reduce violence included:

- Encourage greater care and consideration from the community and police officers
- Take continued actions to create a climate of trust across law enforcement and the community, building on established programs and strengths
- Utilize funding to support positive community programs to reduce violence, especially connecting school aged youth with law enforcement to create positive relationships
- Increase the training within the police force and the community, especially around issues involving young people, mental health, and positive parenting
- Establish new/better mental health treatment and training facilities

Acknowledgements

The Wabash Democracy and Public Discourse initiative would like to thank Indiana University Northwest for hosting the event.

Additionally, the following individuals contributed greatly to the success of the event through their support:

- James Muhammad and Lakeshore Public Media
- Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson, Office of the Mayor of Gary
- Ms. LaLosa Burns, Office of the Mayor of Gary
- Dr. Vanessa Allen and the Urban League of Northwest Indiana
- The Legacy Foundation, Northwest Indiana's Community Foundation