

Birmingham

2017 INTERIM STATUS REPORT

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA IS ONE OF SIX PILOT SITES FOR THE NATIONAL INITIATIVE FOR BUILDING Community Trust and Justice (NI), a project designed to improve relationships and increase trust between communities and the criminal justice system, while also advancing public understanding of the issues contributing to those relationships. In collaboration with the U.S. Department of Justice, the National Initiative is coordinated by the **National Network for Safe Communities at John Jay College of Criminal Justice**, in partnership with the **Justice Collaboratory at Yale Law School**, the **Center for Policing Equity at John Jay College and UCLA**, and the **Urban Institute**.

The National Initiative's work involves trust-building interventions with police departments and communities based on three pillars:

- Enhancing **procedural justice**: the way police interact with the public, and how those interactions shape the public's views of the police, their willingness to obey the law, and their engagement in co-producing public safety in their neighborhoods.
- Reducing the impact of **implicit bias**: the automatic associations individuals make between groups of people and stereotypes about those groups, and the influence it has in policing.
- Fostering **reconciliation**: frank engagements between marginalized communities and law enforcement to address historical tensions, grievances, and misconceptions that contribute to mutual mistrust and misunderstanding and prevent police and communities from working together.

At a Glance: Key highlights for Birmingham, Alabama

Procedural Justice

- All 940 sworn officers of BPD have received procedural justice training ("PJ1" and "PJ2").

Implicit Bias

- All 940 BPD officers have also received implicit bias training ("PJ3").
- On September 9, 2017, BPD launched a community-facing implicit bias training, known as "PJ3—Community".

Reconciliation

- BPD kicked off a series of listening sessions with representatives from various groups, including the LGBTQ community, survivors of intimate partner violence, and the Woodlawn neighborhood.
- BPD's Council of Captains facilitate listening sessions with officers under their commands, helping to build in participation from members of BPD's rank-and-file.

Birmingham was selected as a pilot site for its demonstrated willingness and capacity to engage in the National Initiative's research, intervention, and evaluation process, as well as its jurisdiction size and demographic composition. The National Initiative partners with public safety officials to develop, implement, and assess each intervention, which is tailored to the needs of the Birmingham community. The successes and lessons learned in Birmingham and each pilot site will set the city on a trajectory beyond the project's formal end date and help to build a base of knowledge, policy, and practice to transform communities everywhere.

This status report comes as Birmingham moves into a fourth year of work with the National Initiative: moving forward, the Birmingham Police Department will take steps to institutionalize each component of the NI to ensure sustainability and longevity.

Enhancing Procedural Justice

The Justice Collaboratory at Yale Law School and the Chicago Police Department created a comprehensive curriculum on procedural justice (PJ) that was adapted by the National Initiative and the Birmingham Police Department (BPD) to address Birmingham's unique history and police practices. Research demonstrates that procedural justice can increase public willingness to obey and cooperate with the police ("police legitimacy") and ultimately lead to stronger police-community relationships, increased safety, and reduced crime.

The PJ curriculum includes several modules that do the following:

- Define the concept of legitimacy and highlight ways to increase police legitimacy;
- Explain procedural justice and how it is necessary for advancing public safety goals;
- Review the present-day relationship between the police and the community; and
- Help BPD officers understand the role that history has played—from the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 through the Civil Rights Movement—in hindering legitimacy in some communities.

It also features modules that thoroughly explore the real-life application of procedurally just policing principles, thus helping officers to recognize when, where, and how those principles should be applied.

All 940 of BPD's sworn officers have undergone both 8-hour trainings on the theory and framework of procedural justice ("PJ1") as well as operational techniques on how to apply this framework in practice ("PJ2").

The NI is working closely with PBP leadership to institutionalize the PJ curriculum and sustain it as a core part of PBP's future policies. These efforts

include working with Chief Roper to create a full-time PJ training unit and framework that will weave the NI pillars throughout the department, plus ongoing efforts to centralize PJ training as a core BPD Academy function moving forward.

Reducing Implicit Bias

As part of the National Initiative's work to address and reduce implicit bias, Birmingham police trainers worked with NI staff to adapt the implicit bias training developed by the Center for Policing Equity. This training works to ensure that law enforcement is aware of implicit biases Americans hold and how they form, and the circumstances under which implicit biases are most likely to manifest in ways that jeopardize good judgment and safety. With this information in hand, officers and departments are far better equipped to work through police training, policy, and practice to identify and mitigate the scenarios in which implicit bias has significant negative impacts.

Birmingham was the third NI site to deliver implicit bias training ("PJ3") to its officers. All 940 of BPD's sworn officers have undergone the 8-hour training on implicit bias, and all new recruits will be cycled through as well.

Recently, on September 9, 2017, BPD launched a community-facing implicit bias training ("PJ3—Community"). PJ3—Community is designed to be co-facilitated by police and members of the public; as such, it provides a crucial forum for police and members of communities with low levels of confidence in the police to discuss issues of legitimacy, trust, bias, and history with greater nuance and common ground. The PJ3—Community kickoff meeting included representatives from a wide range of community-based organizations and advocates who will be co-facilitating the training, including

Growing Kings, the Birmingham Community Foundation, Magic City Acceptance Center, and others.

If you're interested in attending a training or becoming a facilitator, please reach out to NI Site Liaison Jerry Wiley at jerry.wiley@birminghamal.gov.

Fostering Reconciliation and Building Trust

In an effort to encourage open communication between community members and the police, acknowledge historical harms, and build trust in neighborhoods where it has been sorely lacking for decades, the BPD has worked with the NI to design and begin implementing a robust reconciliation framework that prioritizes active listening and collaborative public safety.

Birmingham began its on-the-ground reconciliation work in August 2016 through facilitated meetings (“listening sessions”) between Chief A.C. Roper and influential leaders from a variety of communities with histories of tension with the police, including the African American, youth, and LGBTQIA communities.

These sessions began with BPD representatives acknowledging historical harm on behalf of the department—a legacy that is very rarely considered by police seeking to build trust. This acknowledgment and rejection of the police role in America’s legacy of government-sponsored racial oppression is a powerful statement intended to form common ground with community members who are asked to contribute their experiences, time, and effort to the process.

In an effort to try a more intensive process of police-community listening, the National Initiative partnered with [Sustainable Equity, LLC](#)—a consulting firm with significant expertise in racial reconciliation and community building work—to support the development of public safety circles premised on their “Welcome Table” model. The model, which provides a small group of community members and police officers with a safe space for honest, open, and compassionate narrative sharing, included 18 participants who either reside or police on Birmingham’s East and West sides. The resultant group, Birmingham Equally United, has met weekly for the last year.

In parallel, the National Initiative has worked with BPD to expand listening sessions with marginalized communities. This effort began with separate sessions with members of the LGBTQ community, survivors of intimate partner violence, and the Woodlawn community. Chief Roper has worked to build infrastructure and buy-in to sustain the reconciliation process by tasking BPD’s Council of Captains facilitate listening sessions under their commands, and to build in participation from members of BPD’s rank-and-file.

Reconciliation Guiding Policy Change

Over time, the lessons learned from community narratives shared throughout these sessions will be converted to changes in policy and practice that build community trust. As a result of these initial listening sessions, some policy changes are already underway—from departmental policy directing officers to use community members’ preferred pronouns to changes designed to avoid triggering the trauma of domestic violence survivors during investigations.

These efforts also contribute to a larger process of collaborative police-community policy review. Using an analysis by the Center for Policing Equity and Yale Law School’s “Model Policies for Procedurally Just Policing,” BPD command staff have been carefully considering dozens of departmental policies for revision—some of which get to the very heart of the most pressing issues in policing, including a recent commitment to “de-prioritize the number of investigatory stops and low-level arrests made by officers and prioritize community policing by including measures of community policing performance in assessment.” These efforts will continue to be shepherded by Lt. Lynda Woods in partnership with the NNSC technical assistance team.

Lessons learned from the reconciliation process as it’s been implemented in Birmingham were shared nationally at the National Network for Safe Communities’ 2017 practitioner’s conference, where Chief Roper [participated in a panel discussion](#) titled “Police-Community Reconciliation: Framework and Practice.” For more information and to see the panel, please visit www.nnscommunities.org.

Improving Public Safety

The National Network for Safe Communities (NNSC) has been working with BPD to implement the Birmingham Violence Reduction Intervention (BVRI), a strategy designed to reduce gun violence by focusing on the people at highest risk for violent victimization and offending. A three-pronged approach involving law enforcement, community partners, and social service providers, BVRI aims to improve public safety, minimize arrest and incarceration, foster police-community collaboration, and change the narrative in neighborhoods that may have felt over-policed and under-protected.

To learn more about how BVRI works, [please visit NNSC's website](#) or contact Birmingham's GVI Project Manager Jarralynne Agee at Jarralynne.agee@birminghamal.gov.

Evaluating Progress

In order to assess whether the National Initiative is affecting community member perceptions of and attitudes towards crime and police, the Urban Institute has been surveying residents in Birmingham neighborhoods that have a high incidence of crime.

Their latest round of community surveys will be a follow-up from the baseline survey they conducted in Fall 2015, during which residents expressed support for obeying the law and willingness to partner with police to solve crime, but only 29% said that they trust the police.

The Urban Institute completed its second round of surveys in September 2017. Data from those surveys will feed into Urban's final report, which will be a comprehensive assessment of the implementation and impact of the NI and broader trust-building work.

Looking to the Future

The National Initiative commends BPD's leadership and commitment to a new way of doing business, which has been essential to the significant progress detailed in this status report. Additionally, we would like to extend our thanks to Chief A.C. Roper, who has ensured the sustainability of the NI in Birmingham through our continued partnership and beyond.

Over the remainder of the project, the National Initiative will continue the rollout and institutionalization of its new curricula; facilitate trust-building efforts through listening sessions; raise public awareness of its activities and increase public engagement; measure the impact of its interventions; and continue to develop local partnerships to sustain and institutionalize this collaborative effort.

If you are interested in getting involved, or have suggestions, questions, or comments about the National Initiative, please reach out to us at info@trustandjustice.org or the National Initiative's Birmingham Site Liaison Jerry Wiley at Jerry.Wiley@birminghamal.gov. We look forward to hearing from you.