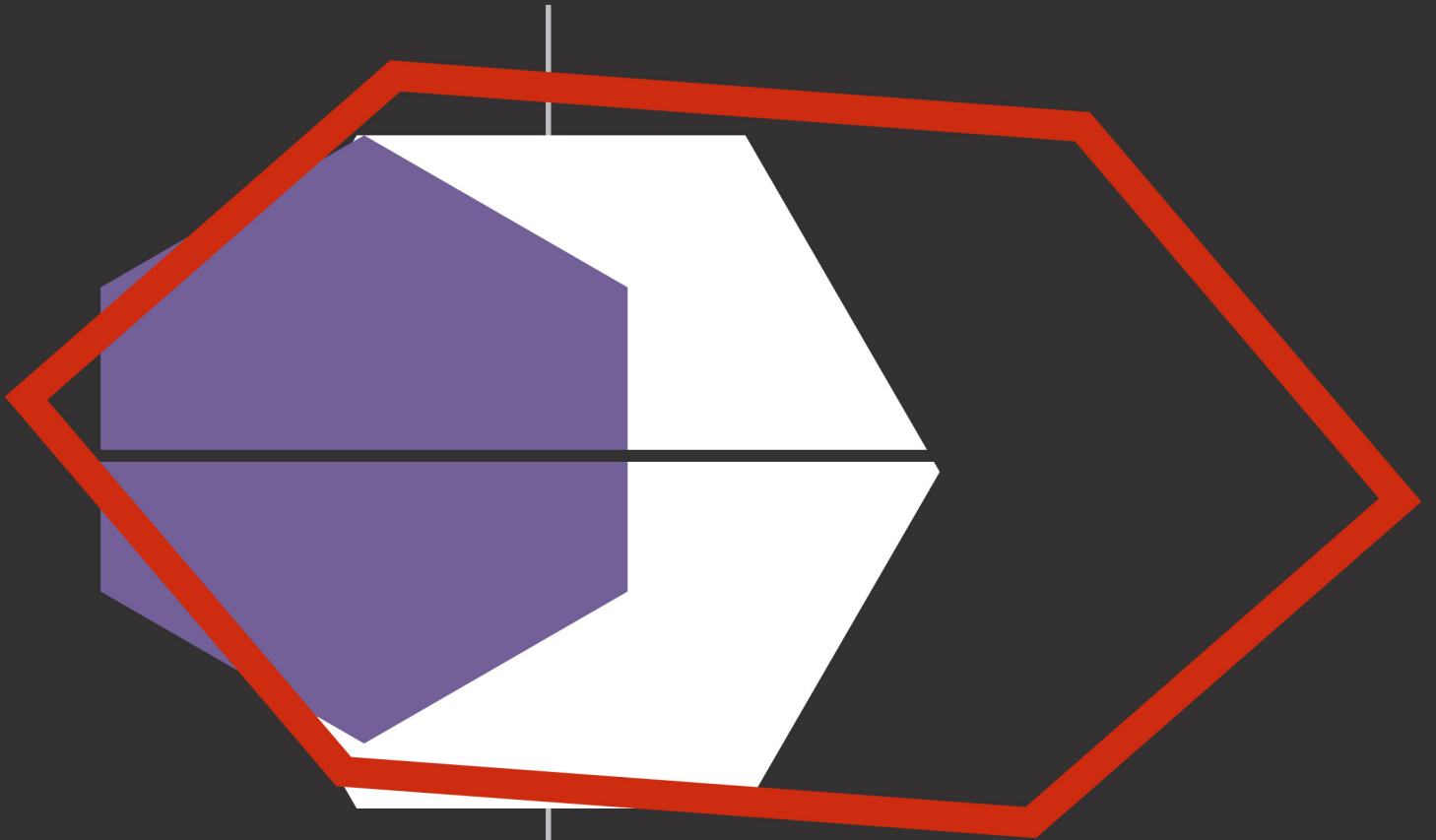


EYE ON THE PRIZE



**Pathways to
Equitable Safety Strategy in
Community Development**



**WANT A SHORTER VERSION
OF THIS RESOURCE TO
SAVE TIME OR FOR EASIER
SHARING WITH OTHERS?**

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“When the concept of safety is weaponized, it turns against the very individuals who bear the greatest risk and vulnerabilities from unsafe conditions ... And yet we can reclaim safety. Communities are fighting for policies and practices such as the reduction of police presence in instances of traffic violations or fare aversion on public transit. Communities are supporting a care response through meeting basic human needs of shelter, food, affordable healthcare and arts and culture. Communities are creating safety through rapid response networks, through organizing solidarity and base building in sanctuary cities.”

– THE PEOPLE’S PRACTICE, ISSUE 08

Community safety and community development are inextricably linked. In the United States, segregation and chronic disinvestment have concentrated poverty into very specific places – places that people of color disproportionately call home – and that has created conditions where safety is far weaker. Housing vulnerability impacts safety by leaving people in economic crisis and less able to address dangers that impact them. Hate crimes target neighborhood-level anchors. Public safety responses to violence against women of color, particularly violence against Native women, have been notoriously poor. Redlining continues to have widespread safety impacts ranging from pedestrian deaths to incarceration rates, and communities with high criminal legal exposure see consequences in everything from hypertension rates to preterm births.

When dangers are this geographically concentrated, and when neighborhood change is so closely linked to perceptions of public safety, it’s clear that community development has an important role to play in the solutions. Traditional neighborhood-level approaches to public safety may have had some successes, but they also carry their own difficult racialized legacies. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design might have helped our public spaces have better sight lines and lighting, but it’s also intentionally created “hostile architecture” that disproportionately harms marginalized groups. Neighborhood Watches may put more “eyes on the street” and move decision-making closer to the ground, but it’s also historically been used to monitor and harass residents of color, and some of those same dynamics have moved into online community forums. There has to be a different way. And in the months and years following George Floyd’s murder, we demonstrated that substantive safety reforms were possible, even when they had not previously been accepted as feasible.

In this resource, we're profiling ways to build community safety that looks more like what residents want and what practitioners are trying to accomplish in racially equitable community development work. We consider five promising practices for moving community development in that direction and offer prompts for applying learnings to your own work. First, though, we thought it would be helpful to share a few of our working definitions.

SOME WORKING DEFINITIONS

Anti-Racist Community Development: The policies and practices that people pursue, implement and refine in an attempt to address structural racism within the context of community development. This typically involves formal and informal efforts to address residents' needs around things like housing, wealth and health at a hyperlocal level. Anti-racist community development is not just the absence of racist intent or impact in this kind of work; rather, it's affirmative efforts to challenge and undo structural racism, often by focusing attention and resources toward root causes.

Safety: The entire set of conditions that protect people from danger, prevent danger from happening and address danger in the cases where it *does* happen. That certainly includes *physical* safety, such as safety from violence from other people, from wildlife or from disasters. It also includes addressing a whole range of other forms of danger, like *environmental* safety, *financial* safety and *psychological* safety.

Public Safety: The entire set of interventions used, primarily by governments, to try to minimize dangers within the communities they serve. This can involve actions taken to protect people at an individual level, as well as actions to try to address conditions that might expose groups or geographies to elevated dangers. While public safety can involve addressing a variety of dangers (like housing vulnerability or workplace conditions or environmental hazards), it's often most closely associated with reducing physical danger, especially through police, fire and emergency medical personnel.

Community Safety: The entire set of interventions used by governments, nonprofits and informal community groups to try to address issues of danger at a community level, usually in relatively small geographies like particular neighborhoods or municipalities. It typically emphasizes extensive resident leadership in identifying safety challenges and solutions, as well as trying to get to the root causes of dangers within the community. Just like public safety, community safety tends to be most commonly associated with preventing and addressing physical danger, although it often does this by tackling a number of social and economic challenges.

These definitions may be imperfect, and some of these areas of work can certainly overlap. We still believe it can be helpful to distinguish some key characteristics of each in order to make clear why we're focusing explicitly on community safety – and why that matters in the effort to push anti-racist community development forward.

WHY COMMUNITY SAFETY MATTERS FOR ANTI-RACIST COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

If we don't understand the magnitude of health and economic consequences neighborhood crime can have, we're unlikely to address the emergency housing and employment supports that victims and their families need to thrive in our communities.

If we don't recognize how much safety and violence concerns negatively impact economic investment and property values at a neighborhood level, we will be less able to move our communities out of cycles of poverty.

If we don't recognize that mass incarceration disproportionately removes people of color, particularly Black men, from communities and from local labor markets, we risk severely underestimating underemployment and unemployment risk in communities of color.

If we aren't willing to grapple with the extreme housing barriers that criminal records present, we won't be able to directly address a primary driver of racial disparities in housing vulnerability.

If we aren't attuned to how "broken windows" or "precision policing" disproportionately impact communities of color down to a street-by-street level, we won't be as well-positioned to target our anti-displacement strategies.

WHY ANTI-RACIST COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT MATTERS FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY

If we don't understand how narratives in media and popular culture impact how we collectively think about safety in communities of color, then we'll be less equipped in our own messaging and organizing around community safety reform and innovation.

If we don't recognize the leadership role community development practitioners play in stewarding resources related to housing, small business development and workforce supports, then we may lose out on an important ally in advocating for community investment.

If we don't take advantage of the housing expertise available in the community development sector, then we'll have less knowledge and capacity to address issues like reentry supports, wraparound services for the unhoused or supports for victims of domestic violence.

If we fail to work with community development collaborators to engage residents around safety and violence concerns, we may reduce the overall size and strength of coalitions supporting community safety reforms and alternatives.

If we don't fully recognize how prison and jail development has been routinely positioned as an economic development strategy in rural communities, then we'll be less well-positioned to explore non-carceral development strategies for poorer rural communities.

five PROMISING PRACTICES

Our anti-racist community development research points to some pretty clear signals of what more racially equitable community safety could look like. Exploring new approaches that address a wider range of concerns. Moving beyond day-to-day triage and focusing more on long-term community investment. Targeting root causes of crime and violence. Paying attention to the ways that data and narratives are shaping our ideas of what “safe” and “unsafe” even mean. Recognizing the role of policy in either supporting or challenging community safety innovation. Making sure residents continue to shape community safety solutions and have the resources to do so.

Even with that kind of framework in mind, though, it can still be difficult to picture what those approaches might look like. Fortunately, there’s a whole range of promising practices out there, and our stakeholder interviews and literature review highlighted five that we think are worth considering. It’s certainly not an exhaustive list. Community safety can cover a lot of ground, from safety within the home, to pedestrian safety, to the availability of free and open public spaces. We’ve tried to identify practices we think could have wide applicability for lots of different kinds of community development practitioners. We believe they could also offer inspiration for how community development addresses resident experiences with a whole range of adjacent systems, including human services, immigration enforcement and school safety. Most importantly, they can help us think about why status quo practices remain the status quo ... and where we can push beyond the bounds of what currently seems possible.

PROMISING PRACTICE PRACTICE 1: UNDERSTAND AND RESPOND TO INEQUITIES IN COMMUNITY SAFETY HISTORY AND NARRATIVES.

Community safety tends to get framed in very rigid ways, but “common sense” notions of what community safety is and “straight-forward” approaches to protecting it have a deeply racialized history. They’ve been used to justify everything from genocide to lynching to internment. Even today, perceptions of crime don’t always match the data, and how we respond to safety concerns are tied to primarily (but not exclusively) white understandings of punitive solutions. None of that is to discount the real experience of violence that Americans face, especially if they live in low-income communities; it’s only to note that unchecked narratives have racialized how we think about making places safer. Collective understanding of crack cocaine, superpredators and broken windows carried forward the American tradition of framing Black men as inherently dangerous and helped underpin the case for mass incarceration. Those narratives are widely distributed by pop culture and media, wildly overrepresenting Black people as perpetrators and undercovering Black people as victims.

Of course, community development doesn’t bear responsibility for society-wide histories or narratives. Recognizing them, though, can help ensure that our own place-based strategies actually achieve what they’re trying to achieve and highlight the important role that community development narrative strategy can play in how we work. It can be helpful to start from a place of curiosity about what we might not know yet – and what might not be recognized or appreciated in the communities where we work and live. Do we fully understand historic and contemporary links between incarceration and the economy? Do we have a sense of what kinds of messaging might work when it comes to reforming approaches to community violence? That kind of collective curiosity work can be particularly powerful when examining local legacies and local futures – interrogating the origins of the New York Police Department, uncovering the links between local histories and national racialized violence, contextualizing community development visioning opposite the impact of the Tulsa Race Massacre, or prioritizing narrative shift in a broader strategy to address criminal legal impact in Detroit. Challenging harmful dominant safety narratives can be powerful, particularly when we sustain that work over years, prioritize leadership of those most impacted and focus on changing material conditions of residents, such as in the work of the People’s Paper Co-op.

PROMISING PRACTICE 2: INCREASE MESSAGING AROUND THE EXPLICIT LINKS BETWEEN COMMUNITY INVESTMENT AND COMMUNITY SAFETY.

Drawing that connection between material need and crime can lead us to very different safety solutions. Economic hardship can be a driver of criminal activity. Households with lower incomes are far less able to afford insurance to protect against property crime losses. Some evidence suggests that exposure to environmental contaminants like lead increase likelihood of criminal activity, and those contaminants are localized in low-income communities. Violent crime in low-income neighborhoods makes poverty even more likely, with offenders' records cutting off job and housing options and victims facing higher unemployment. When poverty and violence is concentrated, both the problems and the solutions become almost definitionally place-based. That message gets a little murkier following decades of promoting prisons as an economic development strategy in communities with low incomes, particularly (but not exclusively) white-majority rural communities. Evidence suggests prisons fail to generate much additional economic activity, tend to reduce housing values and have required massive public subsidy. Still, this approach challenges our ability to imagine other solutions for addressing poverty-crime links.

If we recognize entrenched poverty as a primary driver of crime, though, then what connects these communities is a critical need for community investment ... and community development is a natural partner in that work. A lot of work has been done to reveal what kinds of community investment show evidence of positive safety benefits, including substantively addressing inequities between different geographies and reducing both violence and recidivism. Once people get entangled in the criminal legal system, though, economic opportunity shrinks considerably, reinforcing why we need to make these investments "upstream" of crime. Fortunately, the call for upstream investment is showing up broadly across nonprofit and public sectors, suggesting that community development can find meaningful partners in sectors like health, human services and even from within public safety. Upstream community investment can be demonstrated through funding, policy reform and sustained organizing. Along the way, though, it can be helpful to demonstrate concrete alternatives to status quo approaches, such as in Designing Justice + Designing Space's work to help communities reimagine criminal legal facilities as places for addressing other pressing economic and social needs.

PROMISING PRACTICE 3: INTEGRATE COMMUNITY-BASED SAFETY APPROACHES INTO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS.

Alternatives to status quo safety approaches can expand our understanding of what's possible – keeping crime low, people out of the criminal legal system and residents engaged. Many have been led by, or built in collaboration with, community development organizations. One high-profile model is alternative response, which diverts certain safety responses typically handled by police officers to other trained professionals, such as in responding to people during mental health crises. Such programs have grown from being limited pilots to now being widely implemented across the United States. Similarly, youth diversion programs have gained traction, including through successful organizing efforts. Diversion helps encourage community accountability and reintegration for youth offenders, rather than purely punitive measures. Programs vary in how they work, but some have grown in sophistication around integrating racial equity practices, removing additional barriers like probation, providing participants with access to additional resources and expanding substantive community engagement.

Other models are less widespread but growing. Restorative justice models, for instance, are exploring alternatives to incarceration through conflict resolution, offender-victim interaction and community healing. These models tend to emphasize moving justice out of the courtroom and into the community, including through investing in local restorative justice ecosystems and bringing residents directly into the process. Restorative justice practices can also have a physical footprint paired with other community services, such as the Lawndale Christian Legal Center's restorative justice hub, developed in collaboration with 30 community-based organizations. Community-based violence intervention is emerging as another promising model, employing trusted community members to try to actively disrupt violence and connect those most at risk of getting caught up in cycles of violence to economic and social supports like stable housing. These programs are being tested by both government offices collaborating with community organizations and community coalitions themselves. Violence intervention is showing signs of success and gaining visibility in community development. Despite this traction, these kinds of models cannot be sustained without resourcing. Folks doing violence intervention work, for instance, face potential physical risk and trauma, so ensuring that they have support and training is of the utmost importance.

PROMISING PRACTICE 4: INCREASE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ATTENTION TO THE NEEDS OF CURRENTLY AND FORMERLY INCARCERATED RESIDENTS.

Community development is well-positioned to support upstream investment and alternative safety models that can prevent people from entering cycles of violence. The sector also has expertise, resources and community knowledge that can support people who are already caught up in those cycles, including currently and formerly incarcerated residents. That includes a clear role for addressing housing barriers facing people reentering from the criminal legal system, an underrecognized driver of racial housing-related disparities and something that applies to many different forms of housing, including public housing. Fortunately, there are a wide variety of interventions being employed around the country to address these barriers. While housing might be a particularly clear place for community development to serve the needs of the formerly incarcerated, the sector can also lead or collaborate on efforts to offer supports like record expungement; training and income opportunities tied to community maintenance, community art-making or community health; and organizing leadership development and networking, including around community investment and criminal legal reform.

Despite the important role these kinds of supports play in reducing recidivism and strengthening communities that are home to large numbers of returning citizens, but local community development ecosystems sometimes fail to acknowledge or actively engage currently and formerly incarcerated residents. Across the country, a number of community development organizations have been started by people impacted by the criminal legal system to fill this gap – and many have subsequently expanded to serve residents with low incomes more broadly. Examples include Soteria Community Development Corporation in Greenville, A New Way of Life in Los Angeles, Operation Restoration in New Orleans and Starting Over in Riverside. As this kind of approach becomes more common in grassroots direct service and organizing, it's seeing a similar increase in national support infrastructure led by government, national networks and higher education institutions. That includes communities of practice, technical assistance and informational webinars; technical support around topics like supportive housing development and overcoming NIMBYism; efforts to directly engage people impacted by the criminal legal system in policy work; and research focused on deepening the reach of these community practices into jails and prisons themselves.

PROMISING PRACTICE 5: INVEST IN SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE FOR ONGOING COMMUNITY SAFETY ACCOUNTABILITY.

These are not short-term fixes. Many require important, ongoing triage work to keep communities safe and to look at a much bigger picture and a much longer timeframe. Such approaches can only reach full potential if there's infrastructure to support them ... and if that infrastructure remains accountable to the communities it serves, including residents directly impacted by the criminal legal system.

Fortunately, there are many ways to build community-accountable infrastructure. We can develop robust organizing apparatuses that actively engage residents in safety policymaking. We can support collective learning, especially bringing people with diverse perspectives together to have meaningful if difficult conversations; design and test new safety responses; and integrate safety focuses into community development policy agendas and housing agendas. We can prioritize research that considers the effectiveness of alternative community safety approaches, from housing and justice collaborations to upstream investment to reconsidering community safety evaluation in the first place. Research supports can offer even more accountability when they're participatory, directly engaging residents in reimagining what safety investment looks like, asking violence intervention workers what they need and integrating safety data capacity building into organizing.

Sustaining safety reforms and alternatives also requires reliable funding streams at different geographic levels. That funding could be explicit to safety, like supporting city-level police reform or removing state and local barriers to housing for the formerly incarcerated. It could also be about integrating safety attention into other revenue streams available to community development, such as infrastructure funding. Funding transparency can be increased through participatory grantmaking and participatory budgeting, like in the Communities Transforming Policing Fund and the Community Safety and Healing Fund. Participatory funding does not, however, definitionally result in more racially just investment. Funders can work to ensure diverse participation, especially from groups traditionally underrepresented in decision-making; provide learning supports around racially equitable development; and ultimately, defer to participant wisdom about what safety approaches are the best fit for their communities.

That's a lot of content – congratulations on making it this far!

Promising community safety practices can help us consider the strength of our current work and stretch what feels possible in the future. To get from here to there, though, it can help to do some deliberate reflection. In the following pages, we'll consider a number of different forms of reflection work that you can do independently, within an organization or in broader coalitions and communities. You can also use the prompts to get your thoughts together either on your own or in a small group, and then use that to launch dialogue in a bigger group.

an INITIAL TAKE

Before we turn to some more specific prompts, it can be helpful to start by just gathering your highest-level reflections to the content you've just reviewed.

How are you *feeling* after reviewing the content (e.g. excited, angry, sad, overwhelmed, etc.)? Does the way you're feeling about the content suggest anything about how you might want to approach this work moving forward?

Based on what you've read, where do you think your work has been strongest in terms of contributing to equitable community safety approaches?

Based on what you've read, where do you think you could stretch your work to be even more impactful?

getting GRANULAR

In this section, we want to take a look at each of the promising practices we outlined above to consider how they might fit in our work, the degree to which we're investing in them today and what that might mean for our work in the future. To start, rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the statements. If you're working in a group, you may want to start by taking a little time completing ratings individually and then comparing your takes. After you've finished rating the statements, consider each of the follow-up questions.

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NOT SURE OR DOESN'T APPLY	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Responding to community safety history and narratives is relevant and important to the community I serve.					
Within my work, responding to community safety history and narratives is receiving the time, attention and resources that it needs.					
Clearly linking community investment and community safety is relevant and important to the community I serve.					
Within my work, clearly linking community investment and community safety is receiving the time, attention and resources that it needs.					
Integrating community-based safety approaches into development is relevant and important to the community I serve.					
Within my work, integrating community-based safety approaches into development is receiving the time, attention and resources that it needs.					

STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NOT SURE OR DOESN'T APPLY	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
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Increasing attention to the **needs of currently and formerly incarcerated residents** is **relevant and important** to the community I serve.

Within my work, increasing attention to the **needs of currently and formerly incarcerated residents** is receiving the **time, attention and resources** that it needs.

Investing in infrastructure for **ongoing community safety accountability** is **relevant and important** to the community I serve.

Within my work, investing in infrastructure for **ongoing community safety accountability** is receiving the **time, attention and resources** that it needs.

Note the practices above that you generally felt were more relevant, important *and* resourced. These are places where your work might already be leaning into the intersection of community safety and racially equitable community development. What are some next steps you could take to deepen the impact of those practices and/or build from them to address other community priorities?

Note the practices that you generally felt were more relevant and important but *not* receiving sufficient attention or resources. Are there specific barriers that are preventing that work from being taken up? Are there ways that you could begin to address them? If you're not in a position to address them, are there ways that you could influence the decision-making of people who could?

Now let's consider any practices you generally felt were getting more attention and resources but *were not* necessarily relevant and important to the communities you serve. Are there ways to change approaches to make them more relevant and important? If not, what are the reasons that keep you (or potentially those you work with most frequently) from letting go of that work?

making HISTORY and NARRATIVES visible

There aren't silver bullets in anti-racist community development. Combating structural racism requires lots of different people employing lots of different approaches, and the research suggests that when it comes to equitable community safety, all five of the practices above show a lot of promise. At the same time, it can be helpful to pay specific attention to practices that might feel a little more abstract or a little less visible in day-to-day community development – like the less acknowledged role of history and narrative in how we approach community safety.

When we talk about community safety history, we might be referencing events from 100 years ago or something that happened just a few months ago. It might be something with a lot of national visibility, like the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, or it could be something with more hyperlocal impact, like a particular crime in a park that changed how residents talked about safety. How does community safety history show up in your own work? What one or two specific events has had the biggest impact on how your organization and/or community thinks about community safety?

In Anti-Racist Narratives for Community Development, we outlined several dominant community development narratives. There are also narratives that impact how we approach community safety specifically. What are one or two narratives you see in your work that might get in the way of moving racially equitable community safety work forward in your organization and/or community? What are one or two narratives you see that might support moving this work forward?

Overall, are there ways that you (and collaborators in the community in which you work) could test the accuracy of these kinds of histories and narratives? Are there specific steps you could take to uncover additional histories and narratives that could inform and advance your community safety work?

what's POSSIBLE

There are promising practices for advancing more equitable community safety efforts and outcomes, but they're often working against a lot of headwinds, including histories and narratives that are hardwired into our collective understanding of what safety is, who it's for and how to achieve it. For those reasons, equitable safety strategy is not something that we can implement overnight – but now that we've pushed our understanding forward a little bit, we're at least ready to put an initial plan into action.

Based on everything you've captured above, what are your biggest aspirations for what equitable community safety work could look like in the community you serve? How do you see your long-term contribution to that vision?

On the way to that bigger vision, what shifts could you make in your work within the next year to create some positive momentum? Are there specific ways that you can collaborate with others to keep that momentum going?

Based on what you've captured above, what do you think are the biggest challenges or threats those efforts could face over the next year? Are there ways that you could minimize or disrupt those obstacles? Are there people or organizations you can collaborate with to address those challenges or threats?

TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY and LEARNING

Traditional public safety approaches have had troubling consequences for many communities, and many residents – particularly residents of color, residents with low incomes and residents who've been directly impacted by the criminal legal system – have disproportionately been excluded from identifying safety priorities and solutions. For those reasons, any effort to build equitable community safety strategy needs to pay a lot of attention to accountability, transparency and collective learning – including for practitioners who don't regularly have direct interaction with affected residents. By engaging residents more actively in feedback and decision-making, we'll be better positioned to identify challenges and solutions *before* crises emerge and to shift our work when it's no longer serving community safety interests.

How will you know if your community safety work is successful, and specifically, whether it's achieving more equitable outcomes? How will you engage the community you serve to get their perspectives on the work and its outcomes?

What are the one or two biggest outstanding questions you need to address around your community safety strategy? Are there specific actions you can take, especially on an ongoing basis, to help prioritize exploring those questions, including with members of the community you serve?

Are there particular times in the upcoming year when you can dedicate time and space to assessing your progress in both your practices and your learning? Are there any forums or events where you could engage in that learning work with members of the community you serve?

Are there any concrete actions you can take to increase transparency around community safety decision-making and outcomes with the community you serve? Are there any steps you can take to formalize a role for community members in decision-making? If you're not in a position to formalize transparency mechanisms or specific community member roles, are there ways that you could influence the decision-making of people who could?

When you look back on your work a month from now, a year from now or five years down the road, what's one thing you want to remind yourself about where you are right now? What's the final thought that you don't want to lose as you think about equitable community safety practice and/or policy?

The People's Practice

We hope you've found something promising in these practices!

Feeling inspired to keep going deep on anti-racist community development?

Visit us at www.thepeoplespractice.org for additional op-eds, Q+As, research, resources and more!

The Anti-Racist Community Development Research Project was produced with support from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to increase understanding of structural racism in community development and pathways to racially equitable outcomes that promote health equity. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of RWJF.

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