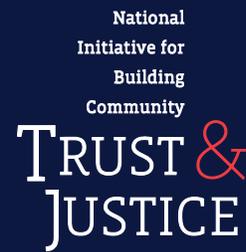


# Birmingham

## 2016 STATUS REPORT



### **BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA IS ONE OF SIX PILOT SITES FOR THE NATIONAL INITIATIVE**

for Building Community Trust and Justice, a project to improve relationships and increase trust between communities and the criminal justice system and advance the public and scholarly understandings 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**, with partnership from 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 minority 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.

The National Initiative also regularly evaluates its interventions to determine effectiveness, and is committed to building and sharing a knowledge and practice base for communities everywhere.

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, ethnic and religious composition, and population density. This status report describes the city's progress at the midpoint of the project's second year.

## **Enhancing Procedural Justice**

The National Initiative and the Birmingham Police Department have created a comprehensive, first-of-its-kind curriculum on procedural justice tailored specifically for Birmingham.

All 825 sworn officers in the Birmingham Police Department (BPD) have completed this curriculum—which was developed with the Justice Collaboratory at Yale Law School—and are now equipped with the principles, understanding, and best practices necessary for procedurally just policing that emphasizes giving community members a voice, employing neutral decision-making grounded in transparency, demonstrating respect for citizens' rights and dignity, and increasing the police department's trustworthiness. Research shows that procedural justice can increase police legitimacy in the eyes of a community—regardless of whether police encounters end positively or negatively—and ultimately lead to greater public cooperation and compliance, increased safety, and reduced crime.

The curriculum features several modules that clearly define the concept of legitimacy and highlight ways to increase police legitimacy; define procedural justice and discuss its benefits, and tie back procedural justice practices to policing goals; review the present-day relationship between the police and the community; and help BPD officers understand the role history—from the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 through the Civil Rights Movement—has played in hindering legitimacy in some communities.

It also features modules that thoroughly explore the real-life application of procedurally just policing principles and provides an in-depth package of discussion points, exercises, videos, and im-

ages that help officers recognize when, where, and how those principles should be applied.

The National Initiative team is working closely with departmental leadership to institutionalize the curriculum into BPD's Training Academy, and sustain it as a core part of BPD's future policies.

## **Reducing the Impact of Implicit Bias**

As part of the National Initiative's work to address and reduce the impact of implicit bias, a new curriculum is being developed specifically for multiple BPD audiences.

BPD leadership, including Chief A.C. Roper, and Birmingham's procedural justice trainers attended an extensive, three-day "train-the-trainer" program on the new curriculum, which will be delivered to all BPD officers in winter 2017.

The Center for Policing Equity is working with BPD on the rollout to ensure that law enforcement is aware of the many factors that go into rapid human decision making; understands how police officers can make better choices when conscious of the biases and stereotypes that exist in the world; and be mindful of the numerous challenges faced by police officers who actively try to reduce the effects of implicit bias.

The curriculum will be further customized in partnership with local advocacy groups and community leaders to incorporate understanding of how implicit bias might impact interactions with marginalized populations.

BPD also plans to offer a community procedural justice and implicit bias training that will highlight the National Initiative curricula its police officers are undertaking and provide the public with a greater understanding of how all people, including the community, contribute to societal implicit bias.

## **Fostering Reconciliation**

Over the past 18 months, the National Initiative has developed an exhaustive reconciliation process that draws out the many narratives underpinning mistrust on both sides of the police-community divide and builds a basis for informed, concrete policy and practice changes.

Birmingham began its on-the-ground reconciliation work in August 2016 through facilitated meetings between Chief A.C. Roper and influential leaders from a variety of communities with histories of tension with the police, including African American, youth, and LGBTQIA. The meetings described the reconciliation process to the assembled community members; allowed Chief Roper to publicly commit to a process of reconciliation and acknowledge the importance of overcoming the present state of mistrust; and offered community members an opportunity to respond to the process.

The next steps include meetings between officers from all levels of the department and residents of communities; a fact-finding report laying out the historical and experiential basis for tension; collecting and sharing narratives from police and community members on their perspectives and experiences relating to police-community trust; and the establishment of a collaborative body charged with reviewing police policies, practices, and norms to improve trust and legitimacy.

## **Ensuring Public Safety and Building Trust for All**

The National Initiative team is designing and implementing trust-building interventions that address the following populations in Birmingham: youth, victims of domestic violence and/or sexual assault, and LGBTQIA communities.

- The National Network for Safe Communities has been working with BPD to implement the Violence Reduction Intervention (VRI), which is 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, VRI aims to improve public safety, minimize arrest and incarceration, foster police-community collaboration, and change the narrative in neighborhoods that may have felt unprotected from violent crime but burdened by over-enforcement of low-level offenses.
- School Resource Officers (SROs) will attend a specialized, recurring, two-day training offered by Auburn University, which will feature curriculum addressing the adolescent brain, mental health issues, and substance abuse.
- SROs also now emphasize in-school diversion, reducing arrest in favor of using the school system—rather than the criminal justice system—to address violations of school policy.
- For victims of domestic violence and/or sexual assault, BPD has partnered with the District Attorney's office, Crisis Center, and YWCA, for monthly Coordinated Community Response (CCR) meetings and to provide victim services through the Family Justice Center.
- BPD has hosted the IACP's "Law Enforcement Response to Violence Against Women" training which highlights best practices with participating officers from Birmingham, Minneapolis, Fort Worth, and Gary.

- The District Attorney’s office in Birmingham recently received a U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) grant for a “Sexual Assault Justice Initiative,” which will roll out a tiered training protocol for beat cops, detectives, court personnel, advocates, prosecutors, and others in all 27 jurisdictions of Jefferson County.
- The National Initiative team will work with BPD to improve its understanding and practices related to the needs of the LGBTQIA community.

### Creating a Baseline for Evaluation

In fall 2015, the Urban Institute conducted a survey of residents in the Birmingham communities most likely to have high levels of police contact and mistrust. The results confirmed that these communities have distrust and suspicion of law enforcement—but the results also demonstrated a significant willingness by residents to work with police to improve public safety, despite that divide. They also provide a baseline from which the National Initiative will build new, or further tailor existing, interventions in Birmingham, and ultimately measure the impact of those interventions.

BPD is working with the National Initiative team to publicize the community survey results within the department and to the public in ways that highlight common ground and set the tone for further action and partnership.

And as part of the National Initiative’s evaluation efforts, the Justice Collaboratory at Yale Law School will publish reports and scholarly articles on the results of the interventions in Birmingham and

their effects on building community trust and justice.

### Looking to the Future

With new curricula developed specifically for Birmingham on enhancing procedural justice and reducing the impact of implicit bias; a police department with all of its sworn officers undergoing said curricula; a reconciliation process that has started frank engagements between communities and law enforcement to address historical tensions and mutual mistrust; development and implementation of further trust-building interventions that address a variety of special populations; and development of a baseline for evaluation, the fundamental aspects of the National Initiative’s three pillars are well underway in Birmingham, Alabama.

The National Initiative commends BPD’s strong leadership and commitment to the project, which has been essential to the significant progress detailed in this status report.

Over the remainder of the project, the National Initiative will continue the rollout and institutionalization of its new curricula; raise public awareness of its activities and increase public engagement; measure the impact of its interventions; and develop partnerships with local researchers to address any research gaps identified by its work.

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](mailto:info@trustandjustice.org) or contact the National Initiative’s Birmingham Site Liaison Jerry Wiley at [Jerry.Wiley@birminghamal.gov](mailto:Jerry.Wiley@birminghamal.gov). We look forward to hearing from you.