

# COMMUNITY-DRIVEN MODELS FOR SAFETY AND JUSTICE

**Leah Sakala**

*Justice Policy Center, Urban Institute*

**Nancy La Vigne**

*Justice Policy Center, Urban Institute*

## **Abstract**

The U.S. criminal justice system is defined and fueled by foundations and principles that uphold harmful power dynamics such as white supremacy, further destabilizing communities that face intersecting structural barriers. This paternalistic system is characterized by the imposition of punishments—including fees, fines, penalties, and deprivation of freedom and even life—that are meted out disproportionately to people of color and people living in poverty. More often than not, policymakers and justice practitioners fail to solicit the views, experiences, and expertise of community members and justice system-involved individuals, leading to policies and practices crafted under the auspices of promoting safety that undermine community stability instead. Consistent with Square One’s charge to “reimagine how we create justice,” this paper describes approaches that communities around the country employ to craft, lead, and participate in their own public safety strategies. The paper will offer examples of crime prevention work, investment and divestment efforts, and policy reform initiatives developed and guided by people most likely to experience crime and the heavy hammer of the traditional justice system. This paper will explore the promises, strengths, and challenges associated with each approach, presenting a range of creative strategies for residents—in partnership with the broader community of advocates, activists, and researchers—to adapt, own, and implement.

**Keywords:** Community organizing, Grassroots Leadership, Justice Reform, Public Safety

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since its inception, the criminal justice system in the United States has been punitive, reactive, and grounded in racism (See, e.g., Scott Christianson, *With Liberty for Some: 500 Years of Imprisonments in America*. Boston: Northeastern University Press. 1998.). Our top-down approach to public safety has exacerbated racial inequalities, magnified other social and economic inequities, and yielded costly and destructive outcomes for individuals, families, communities, and the country overall. Indeed, the current justice system is entrenched in self-perpetuating race and class power structures that

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destabilize communities and undermine safety. The criminal justice system's negative outcomes have not gone unnoticed by policymakers. The majority of states have passed justice reform measures, and jurisdictions around the country are pursuing local jail reform and reentry efforts<sup>1</sup> (Harvell et al., 2016; NIC 2007). Yet for the most part, these reforms chip away at the margins, create unintended consequences, and fail to address racially disparate impacts. Too often, such reform processes do not center—or even include—members of communities most likely to experience both crime and the heavy hammer of the criminal justice system (Urban Institute 2018).

We can do better by advancing justice policy reform, envisioning and building new safety strategies under the leadership of those most impacted by public safety issues: survivors of crime, those who have direct experience in the justice system, and people residing in communities where safety is a daily concern and where police pose a distinct threat to their civil liberties and lives. This community-driven approach to public safety will more effectively identify and address the underlying causes of crime and racial injustice, resulting in solutions that respect humanity, restore dignity, and repair harms. Fortunately, we are not required to start at square one to imagine more equitable and just strategies to make communities safe and strong. Throughout the country, communities have already been doing the work of redefining the way they approach and advance public safety initiatives.

People central to public safety challenges are central to finding solutions, and this paper describes ways to facilitate that process. While this community-driven approach represents a dramatic shift from traditional institutional justice system efforts, promising models and innovations exist all over the country. This paper describes five key elements of community-driven public safety. We discuss considerations for identifying stakeholder groups, catalog the data and information that can inform priorities and solutions, discuss strategies for broader community engagement, and describe the ways in which efforts can be assessed, adapted, supported, and sustained. We conclude with a call to action, encouraging advocates, activists, philanthropists, public officials, and the research community to promote community-led decision making as an essential element of building a safer, more just, and more equitable society.

## **ELEMENT ONE: THE COMMUNITY IS IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT**

Community-driven public safety efforts center around directly-impacted stakeholders, operating on the principle that the people who are most proximate to the challenges at hand must also be most proximate to the solutions. It is essential to define who these key stakeholders are, and doing so requires a careful consideration of context. For example, communities can be based on geography, residency, native language, shared identity, membership in an organization or faith community, or common experience. In many cases, the people who have the most direct experience with safety challenges are also the most historically disenfranchised, including Black, Latinx, and Native American communities and low-income communities. Often, people who commit crimes that harm others are also victims themselves, a critical nuance that does not align with the traditional victim/perpetrator dichotomies of the criminal justice system. These essential stakeholders have been largely excluded from mainstream public safety policy conversations while bearing the brunt of the negative consequences of over-policing and mass surveillance and incarceration. Community-driven public safety, or community justice, offers an alternative path that runs contrary to traditional power structures, focusing on generating creative

solutions by following the leadership of the people closest to public safety challenges (Karp and Clear, 2000).

In addition to the ideological and moral case to be made for centering communities in public safety decision making, there are important practical and strategic benefits. First, these communities hold a wealth of information about how to address pressing issues, and ignoring that expertise is a missed opportunity. Indeed, many communities have developed indigenous solutions that have largely gone unrecognized by the broader field. In addition, a growing body of research documents how community-driven problem-solving processes carry their own benefits that extend beyond the outcome of any given effort. For example, organizations that foster collective efficacy and social cohesion can contribute to decreased levels of crime (Wo 2014).

While some community-driven processes are developed and implemented exclusively by community members themselves, others offer opportunities for partnership with organizations, institutions, and governments at the state, local, and even federal levels. Centering community stakeholders in justice reform efforts requires these partnerships to be structured intentionally, respecting the leadership of community players rather than including them as an afterthought. Simply put, a community-driven approach to public safety requires public officials, policymakers, and other leaders to be open and receptive to finding new and creative ways to step back and follow the community's lead to implement bottom-up solutions.

## **ELEMENT TWO: RESIDENTS HAVE A STRUCTURE AND PROCESS TO IDENTIFY PRIORITIES**

As with any problem-solving process involving multiple stakeholders, community-driven safety and justice efforts require organizational structures and processes to solicit input, guide decision making, and help identify priorities and action steps. Actors who are indigenous or external to the community can facilitate such efforts. Examples of various models, processes, and facilitators illustrate the value of both grassroots and intermediary-led strategies.

### **Organizing and Coalition Structure**

Community-led justice approaches can be organized through a variety of mechanisms, from organic grassroots movements grounded in community-level advocacy to those facilitated by a third-party intermediary. They can vary considerably based on who is involved, what organizational and management structure is used, the decision-making process followed, and the scope and timeline. Community-led approaches may emerge from a specific advocacy goal, or from a broader focus on justice reform or larger public safety goals. Indeed, the impetus for launching such an effort may define the people involved and the timeline for decision making and action.

These characteristics of organizational and management structure and processes may either engender or inhibit inclusivity of diverse membership and a democratic process of input and engagement. Moreover, a tension can exist between structuring the organizing process to promote inclusive decision making and ensuring the decisions are made in a timely manner that is best able to influence the intended outcome. For example, an advocacy effort established to inform the selection of a new police chief is by definition time-bound and requires judicious solicitation of community input in order to influence decision making during the period of recruiting and vetting of prospective candidates.

Passionate and dedicated community members typically initiate these grassroots efforts, which can grow into a larger coalition of concerned residents aspiring for political

action or change. In Chicago, IL, the No Cop Academy<sup>2</sup> movement was established by Black youth and other youth of color to push back against the city's plan to build a \$95 million police academy, making the case that the money should instead be dedicated to community priorities like public schools and mental health services. These Chicago organizers used the capital investment project proposal to spark a broader discussion about resource allocation and community priorities, and successfully build a broad coalition that included dozens of local advocacy groups.

### **Intermediary Facilitation**

Third parties, or intermediaries, can also support communities in initiating and organizing community-led efforts. These actors can be local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), such as community foundations, local nonprofits, or established advocacy groups, or they could be researchers, or even public agencies. Participatory budgeting<sup>3</sup> is one example of an intermediary-guided model, established with the specific aim of facilitating a process in which community members drive decision making on spending priorities. Often supported through technical assistance from a trained consultant, local community groups can seek guidance and develop strategies to play a key role in determining priorities for some portion of a jurisdiction's budget. The process can be initiated by community members or by public officials interested in a higher level of community engagement. The priorities are identified through a democratic process driven by a steering committee of community members who brainstorm priorities, develop proposals, and oversee the process in which residents vote on solutions that the government has committed to fund. The City of Vallejo, CA, engaged in such a process that resulted in street repairs, park improvements, community gardens, and college scholarships.<sup>4</sup>

Participatory justice, as articulated in a concept paper developed under the auspices of the U.S. Partnership on Mobility from Poverty, has its foundation in participatory budgeting. It aims to support residents of neighborhoods most affected by concentrated poverty, crime and violence, and criminal justice system presence in defining how safety should be delivered in their communities, and to make government systems responsive to that vision. The model involves: engagement with an organization of residents of neighborhoods most affected by crime and heavy criminal justice system activity; a democratic process of identifying alternative strategies for delivering safety and justice; and the commitment of a government partner to implement the identified community priorities through spending and/or policy changes. Data analysis of both the status quo and proposed new policies, and ongoing evaluation of the process, its implementation, and its impact, are also components of the model.

### **Process Considerations**

Regardless of whether the community-driven process is led by residents on their own or in partnership with an intermediary, process considerations regarding who participates, how their input is solicited, and how decisions are made can present unique challenges and opportunities. Group membership will vary from entity to entity, but it almost always runs the risk of being dominated by a select few who likely do not represent all views held among community members. Older retired women, for example, may have a preference for different types of strategies than young men in their twenties. This dynamic underscores the importance of recruiting people who represent an array of community interests. Anticipating and addressing issues such as how the effort is advertised (e.g., online or hard copy fliers), where and during what hours of the day convenings will occur, whether buildings and spaces are accessible, whether food or

childcare will be provided, and how language barriers and fear of exposure to system actors (e.g., among undocumented populations) will be navigated, is critical to ensure that diverse aspects of community interest are represented.

Once an array of community members is recruited for participation, similar considerations are required to ensure that they have meaningful opportunities to weigh in on decision making. Far too often, decisions within democratic processes are overly influenced by self-appointed leaders who have had the most experience participating in community meetings, eclipsing other critical perspectives, including those from people with the least political capital or those most likely to have direct experience with the criminal justice system. Overcoming this barrier to participation requires creative strategies to engage all people involved, and may include breaking up into smaller groups, conducting and sharing results of stakeholder interviews, and taking straw polls or using live polling technology.

Relatedly, decisions about who facilitates group discussions and how decisions are ultimately made can influence group processes and results. Third party intermediaries may be helpful as trained facilitators, but they may also introduce new power dynamics, impacting who is driving the conversation and whether the community is ultimately truly guiding the process. Moreover, the demographics (such as age, race, or gender) and positional power of the person or people facilitating the conversations can also influence the process and outcomes. Similarly, the process of group decision making can introduce biases, depending on how conversations are facilitated and decisions are made, particularly when not all participants agree on the nature of the problem or the best possible solution. While pros and cons exist for any approach to group decision making, processes that are informed by information and evidence give community members a strong foundation from which to reach their own conclusions.

### **ELEMENT THREE: COMMUNITIES HAVE THE INFORMATION NEEDED TO GENERATE SOLUTIONS AND MEASURE IMPACTS**

Regardless of the organizing structure of the community-led approach, all successful efforts need information to identify priorities and inform solutions. Information for these efforts usually takes one of three forms: expertise based on direct experience with the justice system and public safety challenges; survey data representative of the views of residents; or administrative data and related measures collected by agencies including justice system actors. Critical information can also be generated and gathered through methods that are less traditional to research and policy strategy, such as cultural and spiritual practices or community arts projects designed to enhance public safety and community wellbeing (Treskon et al., 2018). Decisions surrounding which information to use, and how to gather and interpret that information, are necessary precursors for charting solutions. Employing mixed methods approaches that draw on multiple information sources can fuel particularly rich analyses to guide decision making.

#### **First-Person Expertise**

Personal narratives reflecting the perceptions and experiences of those exposed to safety and justice issues are an important component of any community-led initiative because they provide critical contextual insights and can be persuasive in advocacy efforts. Simply put, soliciting and sharing community knowledge is crucial for understanding the challenges at hand and beginning to build solutions. The Essie Justice Group report (Clayton et al., 2018) representing the experiences of women with incarcerated loved ones is an example of how first-hand expertise is essential to understand of the impact of punitive justice policies on families and intimate partners on the outside.

This knowledge based on direct experience can be gathered from different stakeholders in a variety of ways, and collecting this often-sensitive information requires careful consideration of methods. To ensure broad representation, narratives can be solicited from a variety of community members representing an array of experiences, whether those are about interactions with law enforcement, fear of crime or other harm, personal victimization, or direct experiences with prison, jail, or community supervision. Interviews, focus groups, and community forums are all examples of strategies to solicit and gather perspectives from different stakeholder groups. Across all these approaches, it is important to recognize that people need to feel safe and respected in order to share this critical information, as these populations often face stigma and the experience of expressing their views can be extremely burdensome.

### **Survey Data**

Survey data, by contrast, can be designed to be representative of the entire community. However, selection bias whereby respondents represent just a subpopulation (for example, more affluent residents with higher levels of education) is a very real concern and is more likely to skew results when surveys are administered by mail, email, or online. Door-to-door surveys are the best means of soliciting input that represents all residents in a community of interest, and surveys conducted by people residing in the surveyed neighborhoods or in communities that are demographically similar are more likely to yield adequate response rates and candid responses.

In Tucson, AZ, staff from the Arizona office of the American Friends Services Committee, a nonprofit dedicated to reducing the footprint of the criminal justice system, worked with youth organizers in the city to document community members' views on safety. They fielded a survey in both English and Spanish to capture residents' perceptions of community safety and preferences for strategies to enhance safety in their neighborhoods. These youth led the survey effort at every stage, collecting and vetting the questions, distributing the survey, and determining how to use results.

While surveys can be a powerful means of ascertaining the views and experiences of people who are often not represented in other ways, using survey data alone, absent engagement among community members to interpret and provide context to this information, can result in misleading findings. Community Data Walks to discuss and interpret data can be a good strategy for residents to engage information and collectively develop key takeaways (Murray et al., 2015). In Austin, TX, a project called Community Voices, launched by the Austin Justice Coalition in partnership with the Urban Institute, employed a data walk to interpret the results of in-person interviews conducted by local residents via household canvassing. The survey focused on members of a heavily-policed, predominantly Latinx community, who were asked about their views of, and experiences with, police and public safety. During the data walk, community members were particularly struck by the fact that younger survey respondents had dramatically different views of the police than those over the age of forty. The data walk process also led to policy recommendations around police de-escalation methods and community engagement strategies.

### **Data on the Criminal Justice System**

Access to and use of data generated by criminal justice system and other agency players—including police, the courts, and corrections agencies—is critical to informing and empowering actors from communities most affected by the system's extensive reach. These data sources can provide useful context regarding current practice, for example,

where, when, and how often police engage in use of force or stop and frisk tactics. However, the availability of relevant data is highly varied. These data systems are often managed by the same institutions that community-led efforts seek to disrupt or reform. And even when accessed, data can be difficult and costly to clean, analyze, and visualize, particularly on an ongoing basis.

The National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP) is a network of local data intermediaries dedicated to democratizing information to give residents and community organizations a stronger voice in improving their neighborhoods. Local NNIP partners build and operate an information system with recurrently updated data on neighborhood conditions across topics. They also help community and government leaders use data in community building and local policymaking, and leverage this information to build the capacities of institutions and residents in low-income neighborhoods. Rise, the local NNIP partner in St. Louis, MO, teamed with CivTech St. Louis to enable easy access for residents to obtain ticket information in St. Louis County. The YourSTLCourts.com website and related text tool help residents navigate the court system with the goal of preventing jail time for non-violent traffic offenses. More recently, NNIP has partnered with the Microsoft Cities Team to launch a cross-site initiative on criminal justice data collection in the advocacy landscape (NNIP 2018). The project will focus on police practices and court systems, which are aspects of the criminal justice system that are typically under-developed in the use of local data to mobilize reform.

Criminal justice system data is not always available, either because agencies are not collecting it routinely or because they are unwilling to share it. Given these challenges, resources such as Mapping Police Violence and emerging efforts such as Data for Black Lives are dedicated to increasing transparency and data accessibility to advance racial justice and social change.<sup>5</sup> Another innovative approach is the Courtwatch model, which recruits volunteers from the community to sit in on court proceedings, collect data on decisions, narratives, and context, and share observations to promote oversight, accountability and reform. Courtwatch models may be specific to certain types of cases, such as supporting survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault; documenting proceedings of child custody, abuse, and neglect cases; or may be more comprehensive in nature.<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of the source of data on the criminal justice system and public safety concerns, making this information available to community-led partnerships for further use ensures that the effort is not entirely dependent on the accessibility and cooperation of system actors, who often are the gatekeepers for this information. It can also be valuable to engage in partnership with researchers who can help community-led reform efforts analyze and employ data in support of their advocacy work.

### **Community-Researcher Partnerships**

One model for data generation and interpretation in support of community priorities is community based participatory research (CBPR) (Minkler et al., 2012). CBPR is a community-led and researcher-guided data collection, analysis, decision making, and evaluation process that uses research tools and strategies to better understand community problems, priorities, and potential solutions. For example, a collaboration among academic researchers and community members to develop a youth violence prevention after-school program used focus groups to solicit input, involved pilot testing of the after-school program, and included organizational assessments of candidate after-school program sites (Leff et al., 2010). The systematic data collection and analysis approach supported by the research partners led to a revised program to extend its reach, expand its capacity, and promote sustainability.

Another example of CBPR is a project in Miami Gardens and Opa-locka, FL, in which researchers from the local university collaborated with city schools, police, and community-based service providers to develop and use standardized methods of data collection and analysis for problem identification and assessment of interventions. Researchers were able to document that youth who participated in the out-of-school suspension program had improved attitudes about violence and risky behaviors, and that community engagement activities increased adult residents' civic engagement in violence prevention efforts.

First-hand expertise, diverse community perceptions and opinions, and administrative data can all play key roles in informing solutions. The next step is to ensure that stakeholders have access to the partners and resources they need to advance them.

#### **ELEMENT FOUR: STAKEHOLDERS HAVE A PLATFORM FOR ENGAGEMENT**

People at the heart of community-driven public safety work require access to the partners necessary to advance solutions. In some cases, this engagement occurs primarily among neighbors or other community members. In other cases, engagement involves bringing a community-driven framework to ongoing interaction or collaboration between community members and more traditional justice system institutions and actors. We examine both dynamics here.

##### **Change Initiatives Within a Community**

In some communities, this work is done on the level of a neighborhood or even a single city block among stakeholders who are all proximate to the challenge at hand. For example, Mothers Against Senseless Killing members in Chicago, IL have long watched over their own neighborhoods, developing strategic youth engagement tactics to proactively address persistent violence (Manasseh 2017). Community bail funds like the one in Brooklyn, NY, are another such example in which organizers draw from a broader support network to pool resources to free people who are awaiting trial in jail because they cannot afford bail.<sup>7</sup>

Even within communities facing pressing public safety concerns, engagement across different stakeholder groups can be an important step in advancing solutions. The Boston TenPoint Coalition was formed when local clergy began mobilizing their communities to directly respond to pressing youth violence concerns. While the TenPoint Coalition used a variety of strategies, members' night walks through high-crime neighborhoods to engage residents who were out late, including gang members and people at risk of violent victimization, were perhaps the most well-known. In a TED talk with well over one million views, TenPoint Coalition leader Rev. Jeffrey Brown described how the night walks were designed to build trust with community members who had expertise that was essential for developing solutions:

“We said to them, ‘We don’t know our own communities... between 9 p.m. and 5 a.m., but you do. You are the subject matter experts, if you will, of that period of time. So talk to us. Teach us. Help us to see what we’re not seeing. Help us to understand what were not understanding’” (Brown 2015).

In all these approaches that take place within communities, leaders rely on their social capital and close proximity the challenge at hand to build and advance collaborative solutions.

## Engaging with Traditional Justice System Actors

Often, leaders of community-driven strategies engage traditional justice system players to different degrees to advance solutions. In some cases, this engagement primarily consists of an initial referral from law enforcement to divert people from traditional justice system tracks into more community-centered strategies. A new proposal within this category is the Neighborhood Opportunity and Accountability Board (NOAB) model, currently in development with pilot sites in California (Muhammad 2018). Under this model, law enforcement or community members refer youth who have engaged in harmful or destructive behavior to a NOAB composed of a wide range of local residents including youth, community leaders, clergy, business owners, and people who have experienced victimization and prior justice system involvement alike. The NOAB will be responsible for understanding the incident and crafting and overseeing a community-based action plan designed to foster accountability and repair harm. For programs such as NOABs to succeed, community leaders and law enforcement must build and foster reciprocal trust, establishing a shared understanding that the community can be in a stronger position to address and repair harm than traditional justice system institutions and processes.

Other community-driven efforts require more ongoing collaboration between local community members, grassroots organizations, and traditional justice system actors. For example, the Participatory Defense model helps community members actively participate in defense efforts for people facing charges (Jayadev 2019). While participatory defense processes begin with families and friends organizing in community meetings, participants can also work with public defenders as key allies for collaboratively devising a holistic defense strategy. Another example is the Work and Gain Employment and Education Skills (WAGEES) program, which the Colorado legislature created in 2014 to improve reentry for people coming home from prison. This program is a partnership between the Colorado Department of Correction (CDOC) and a network of community-based service providers, many of which are led by people with firsthand experience navigating the criminal justice system and reentry process. CDOC provides the grant funding for the community providers, and an intermediary organization, the Latino Coalition for Community Leadership (LCCL) administers the program by selecting grantees, handling resource allocation, overseeing reporting requirements, and providing technical assistance and support to grant recipients. Many referrals come from parole officers, who often work closely with the community providers to engage in case management and troubleshoot challenges that arise. It took time to build the trust between parole officers and community providers that is required for close collaboration, and LCCL played a key role in facilitating communication and providing oversight and support as these working relationships were forged and solidified. The success of the WAGEES program has paved the way for several subsequent community-centered public safety programs in Colorado, including Transforming Safety and the newest Community Crime Victims Grant Program.

Some community-driven public safety efforts that require close collaboration with traditional public safety players have been slower to come to fruition, a testament to the challenges of this work. With broad support from community organizers and activists, the Council of the District of Columbia passed the Neighborhood Engagement Achieves Results (NEAR) Act of 2016<sup>8</sup> to respond to heightened violence in D.C. with a community public health-based approach. The wide-ranging NEAR Act provisions include creating new government offices to staff violence interruption efforts, funding new community partnerships, increased police transparency and data collection requirements, and an investigation by a new Community Policing Working Group.

While the NEAR Act was fully funded in fiscal year 2018, several of the provisions have not yet been fully implemented, particularly the requirements regarding collecting and reporting police stop and frisk data. This lack of implementation progress sparked a lawsuit filed in D.C. Superior Court by the American Civil Liberties Union of the District of Columbia, Black Lives Matter D.C., and the Stop Police Terror Project D.C. (ACLU 2018). The ongoing story of the NEAR Act illustrates the difficulty of adapting entrenched public safety systems to be more transparent and responsive to the communities in which they operate. When the NEAR Act is fully implemented, D.C. residents and community organizers will have better information about public safety and law enforcement practices in their neighborhoods, further equipping them to mobilize on behalf of their communities.

## **ELEMENT FIVE: COMMUNITIES HAVE SUPPORT FOR SUSTAINING AND ADAPTING STRATEGIES**

Communities across the United States have been defining their own public safety priorities and working to advance them for decades, and stakeholders in every sector have a critical role to play in supporting these efforts. Paving the ground for community initiatives, supporting complex, multi-stakeholder processes, undertaking implementation, and sustaining change are all resource- and time-intensive activities. By following the community's lead and lending support when asked, external and institutional stakeholders—including governments, funders, researchers, and national advocacy organizations—can be instrumental to fueling community-driven change. While there are innumerable ways to support community-driven public safety efforts, many discussions in the field have centered on the following three needs: 1) Providing and channeling resources, including investment in grassroots leadership; 2) Lending support with developing strategic messaging; and 3) Offering research and evaluation assistance.

### **Resources and Investment in Grassroots Leadership**

Communities need resources to support their change efforts and invest in their grassroots leadership. Many of the communities with pressing public safety concerns have experienced systemic, historical divestment, including housing discrimination, underfunded public education, insufficient transportation systems and other infrastructure challenges, limited access to the social safety net and other public services, and a constrained local economy. Some community-driven public safety projects are entirely volunteer-run or collectively funded by members of the community pooling their assets. Even in these cases, community engagement and mobilization require resources, and lack of access to sustained and reliable investment in local solutions can stymie and even starve change initiatives. For communities of color, and particularly Black communities, investment in community-driven public safety initiatives can be part of a broader reparations strategy to begin to undo a long historical legacy of divestment and structural oppression.

Funding sources for community-driven work vary, ranging from small community foundations, to public/private partnerships, to government grants and other public revenue streams (Harvell et al., 2019). In the private philanthropy world, foundations such as the North Star Fund have been supporting this work for decades alongside community funds and other smaller-scale funders that support local grassroots leadership. Collaboratives such as Funders for Justice are making significant, more recent contributions to develop and align funding strategies. Public/private partnerships such

as Social Impact Bonds, or Pay for Success,<sup>9</sup> constitute another path to community investment, and the Massachusetts Juvenile Justice Pay for Success Initiative is well-known as a pioneering strategy to fund a local youth program and employment service provider. Increasingly, stakeholders are finding ways to braid public funding in with resources from the private funders and philanthropies that have traditionally been the primary supporters of this kind of work. A 2018 Urban Institute report found that these public investments typically take one of three forms: upfront investment (a new stream of resources), reinvestment (channeling savings gleaned from reform efforts), and invest/divest (shifting resources away from traditional public safety institutions and towards other local community-identified needs) (Sakala et al., 2018). While such resource strategies require careful planning, a growing number of state and local jurisdictions around the country are developing creative funding models, and their local communities are reaping the rewards.

### Support with Developing Strategic Messaging

While communities have been engaging in their own safety strategies for decades, the concept of community-driven justice is much newer in the broader political discourse. The time is ripe to test and refine ways to message such efforts to broader audiences. Generally, the public is receptive to the idea of investing in community-based public safety solutions. Initial polling found that voters identified the lack of programs focused on crime prevention, reentry support, and employment as a top public safety issue, and more than three quarters of respondents supported shifting some resources from incarceration to community-based options (Gotoff et al., 2017). The same poll revealed much less openness, however, to shifting some law enforcement funding to community alternatives, an area that is ripe for further public opinion investigation. While the public generally supports investing in locally-driven solutions, different elements have the potential to resonate with different audiences. Some might find the community empowerment and reparations aspects compelling, while others may be moved by the devolution of decision making to the most local level, the more limited role of government actors in solving community problems, and the potential for increased efficiency in public safety spending. Gaining a better understanding of how to message and explain the concept of community-driven public safety could help recruit a broader base of support and cement this approach as a unique and valuable policy strategy for communities that seek creative public safety solutions.

### Research and Evaluation

Knowledge-gathering, research, and evaluation can provide critical information to inform community-driven public safety efforts and document successes and lessons learned. While many initiatives have not undergone formal evaluations to assess direct impact on specific public safety outcomes, several have been evaluated and found to produce positive results.<sup>10</sup> Formal documentation of the strategies, progress toward goals, and relevant outcomes of community-driven public safety initiatives can help potential supporters and partners gain confidence in these approaches. However, documentation or assessment must align with communities' self-identified goals and use measurement strategies that are tailored to the context and specifics of a given effort. For example, a given metric for recidivism in one community may not be appropriate for a different one that is demographically and geographically distinct, even within the same state. Finally, efforts to build the broader community public safety knowledge base need not be external to the communities in which the work happens; community leaders

around the country carry significant experiential wisdom about initiating and sustaining these projects that can be shared with others interested in taking on similar efforts. This sharing is critical, particularly in situations when more formal documentation or evaluation is not possible or feasible.

## CONCLUSION

Over the last decade, a growing chorus of voices has been calling for changes to the United States criminal legal system. Recognizing the social and fiscal cost of mass incarceration, over-policing, and the overuse of community supervision, public safety policy has been touted as one of the few areas where nearly everyone agrees that we can do better. Solutions are complex and contextual, though, and there is no one-size-fits-all fix for the system currently in place, much less for repairing the innumerable harms it has caused. But stakeholders seeking to build a better future can learn valuable lessons from the work of the innovators, activists, neighbors, and community leaders who have been developing and advancing their own solutions for decades. Their local-level approaches come from a radical reframing of what public safety is and where it comes from; an approach in which police, jails, and prisons are either last resorts or off the table altogether.

As the examples in this paper demonstrate, public safety is inextricably linked to community wellbeing in the broadest sense of the term. Strategies that take this expansive lens consider wide-ranging concerns, including access to healthcare, functional transportation, good jobs, stable and affordable housing, safe outdoor spaces, and adequately-resourced community groups and institutions that help forge connections, bring people together, and shape solutions. Community-driven approaches start with the opportunities and challenges present in each neighborhood and build out from there, engaging with traditional justice system institutions and players only if and when it is necessary to do so, and challenging them when they get in the way. Truly changing how we do justice in the United States will require listening to and supporting the communities that are already forging new paths, and learning from them to seed and nurture emerging efforts around the country.

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**Corresponding author:** Leah Sakala, Justice Policy Center, Urban Institute, 500 L'Enfant Plaza SW, Washington DC, 20024.

## NOTES

1. See The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Safety and Justice Challenge (<http://www.safetyandjusticechallenge.org/>) (Accessed April 5, 2019).
2. See No Cop Academy (<https://nocopacademy.com/about/>) (Accessed April 5, 2019).
3. See The Participatory Budgeting Project (<https://www.participatorybudgeting.org/>) (Accessed April 5, 2019).
4. The city's website states that "in 2012, the Vallejo City Council established the first city-wide Participatory Budgeting (PB) process in the United States, where ordinary residents directly decided how to spend a portion of the city budget. Through PB, Vallejo residents and stakeholders share ideas, develop project proposals, residents vote on projects, and the approved list of projects that receive the most votes are submitted to City Council for consideration." See City of Vallejo California ([http://www.ci.vallejo.ca.us/city\\_hall/departments\\_\\_divisions/city\\_manager/participatory\\_budgeting/vallejo\\_s\\_pb\\_program](http://www.ci.vallejo.ca.us/city_hall/departments__divisions/city_manager/participatory_budgeting/vallejo_s_pb_program)) (Accessed April 5, 2019).
5. See Mapping Police Violence (<https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/>) and Data for Black Lives (<http://d4bl.org/>) (Accessed April 5, 2019).

6. See, for example, Courtwatch NYC (<https://www.courtwatchnyc.org/about/>), King County Sexual Assault Resource Center (<https://www.kcsarc.org/courtwatch>) and Courtwatch of North Carolina (<http://courtwatchnc.org/>) (Accessed April 4, 2019).
7. See Brooklyn Community Bail Fund (<https://brooklynbailfund.org/>) (Accessed April 4, 2019).
8. See “Neighborhood Engagement Achieves results Amendment Act of 2016” (<http://lims.dccouncil.us/Download/34496/B21-0360-Amendment1.pdf/>) (Accessed April 5, 2019).
9. See the Urban Institute Pay For Success program (<https://pfs.urban.org/>) (Accessed April 5, 2019).
10. Examples include: South Bronx Community Connections for Youth, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, November 2013 ([https://cc-fy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/SBCC\\_Technical\\_Report.pdf](https://cc-fy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/SBCC_Technical_Report.pdf)), Evaluation of San José’s Mayor’s Gang Prevention Task Force, Resource Development Associates, February 2017 (<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/grants/250620.pdf>), and Evaluation of Oakland Unite: Year 1 Strategy Report, Mathematica Policy Research, November 2017 ([http://oaklandunite.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Oakland-Unite-Strategy-Evaluation\\_Final-11172017.pdf](http://oaklandunite.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Oakland-Unite-Strategy-Evaluation_Final-11172017.pdf)).

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