

Community-Police Engagement

Everyday Democracy's Approach

July 2019



Ideas & Tools for Community Change



Community Policing Today

What should policing look like in our representative democracy? What is the duty of the police? Of community members? How should we work together? How can policing work for everyone?

Due to our country's complicated racial history, the issue of policing is fraught with apprehension, mistrust, and divisiveness - particularly in racially diverse communities. The ways police treat people of color is in the spotlight and calls for attention in many communities.

At the same time, police officers themselves have become targets for violence, and are even sometimes killed in retaliation for events that took place in other cities. Many police officers are recognizing the need for deeper training around bias and inequities, and for increased trust between community members and police.

Communities across America need to have more honest, productive conversations on policing.

Why is it important for residents and police to talk about structural racism and other inequities?

*"Well, you can't **not** talk about it. It's still an issue.... Open discussion and dialogue is important. If you can't have them in a contained environment, what's going to happen when you are out in the community and things get hot? The more proactive you can be, the better."*

- Sarah Mooney, West Palm Beach, FL Chief of Police

How We Can Help

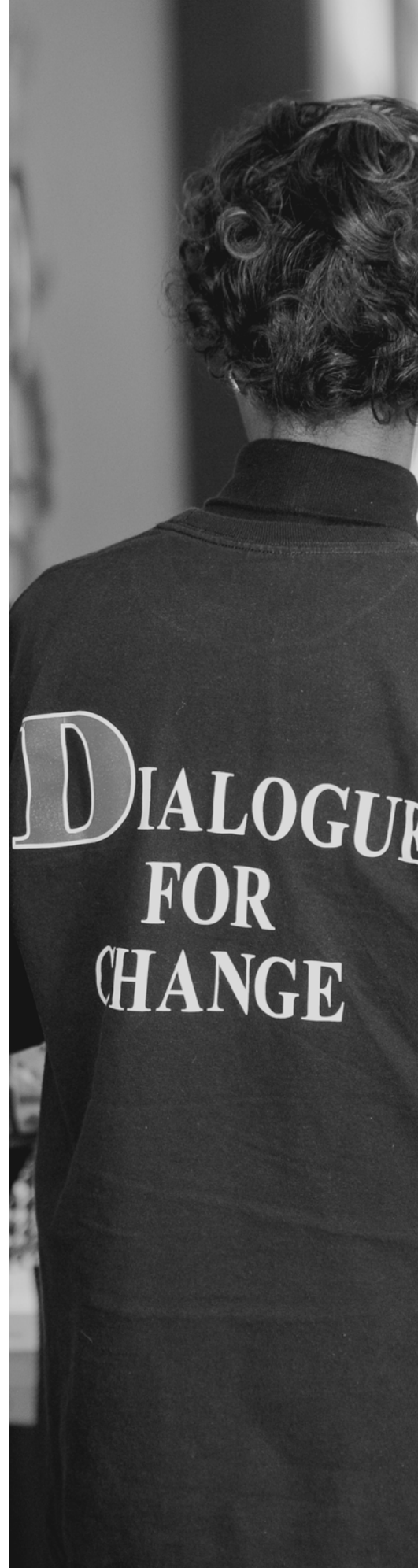
Everyday Democracy's "Dialogue to Change" is a proven and effective process that allows residents and police to hear one another, share their perspectives, carefully consider the issues at hand, and develop next steps that community members and police can implement together.

For more than 25 years, Everyday Democracy has worked with communities across the country to foster a healthy and vibrant democracy – one that is characterized by strong relationships across divides, racial equity, and widespread leadership and voice.

Our Approach

Our approach helps communities make meaningful, lasting improvements to policing and safety. We have seen communities become safer, more equitable places when community members and the police come together to talk honestly, listen to each other, and commit to working together.

For this to happen, leaders from police departments, advocacy groups, government, nonprofits, and the faith community need to take the first courageous steps to work together differently.





Here are snapshots of just three of the communities that have successfully used our Dialogue to Change approach to improve police-community engagement.

Better Together - Decatur, Georgia

Decatur County, Georgia, has used Dialogue to Change since the 1990's to engage community members in addressing its challenges – going beyond the traditional public comment or public hearing to true and ongoing dialogue.

The program, Better Together, has most recently worked to increase the number of active volunteers in the city and improve affordable housing. The initiative has also been fostering dialogue and building trusting relationships among members of the police department and the local Black Lives Matter group, Creating Community 4 Decatur.

Conversations for Change - South Bronx

In the winter of 2006-2007, divisions between law enforcement and community members in New York City seemed insurmountable following a series of police shootings of unarmed black men. Community leaders reached out to Everyday Democracy to help build a coalition of community members and police officers.

“Conversations for Change in the South Bronx” strengthened relationships, promoted greater representation of Latinos and African Americans on the South Bronx police force, and developed solutions to racial profiling and violence.

Community Partners - West Palm Beach

Community Partners first used Dialogue to Change in 2002 after a young black man was found hanging from a tree in Belle Glade, Florida. Residents were split along racial lines – white residents believed it was a suicide and black residents believed he was hanged. The court ultimately deemed it a suicide, but that didn't resolve the tension in the community.

Through ongoing Dialogue to Change efforts over the past 15 years, approaching difficult topics in the community has gotten easier. Community Partners is now conducting more than 10 ongoing dialogue projects throughout the West Palm Beach area.

Local police say they value community engagement and prevention initiatives as much as enforcement initiatives. Police officers regularly have the opportunity to take part in dialogues with youth and community residents, and often refer to our Dialogue to Change process and discussion guides.

Palm Beach County residents have put into practice values Everyday Democracy holds dear: commitment to relationships, incorporating an equity lens into the work, building local capacity for the community dialogue process, and creating sustainable change.





About Dialogue to Change

Dialogue to Change aims to engage local people in difficult community conversations. The process starts with organizing and coalition-building, where we work to make sure that everyone who needs to be at the table will be present at the upcoming dialogues.

We train people in your community to facilitate the dialogues so that capacity is built *locally* for this work. Dialogue to Change is focused on identifying clear actions of how to move the work forward.

We integrate evaluation and sustainability planning into the work so that we learn from the process and have a plan to continue the work long into the future.

Sample Questions for Dialogue

- What is an event or experience that has shaped the way you think about policing and race?
- How do we want people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds experience policing in our community?
- What should relationships between the police and community members look like?
- How do we want the police to work with other parts of government and different sectors (business, faith, etc.) of the community?

A black and white photograph of a community meeting. In the foreground, a man in a hoodie is looking down. To his right, a police officer in a uniform is looking at a dog. In the background, a police vehicle with "WEST PALM BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT" is visible. A red rectangular box is overlaid on the image, containing the text "Ready to Get Started?".

Ready to Get Started?

To learn more about Everyday Democracy's Community-Police Engagement work, contact **Gwen Whiting** at gwhiting@everyday-democracy.org.

To learn more about Everyday Democracy's Dialogue to Change process, discussion guides, and other resources, visit www.everyday-democracy.org.

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