

PRACTICE PEACE INITIATIVE
2014 COMMUNITY PEACE CONFERENCE
UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS
FEBRUARY 19, 2014

PROBLEM STATEMENT

By any standard, historic or comparative, the Virgin Islands experiences extremely high levels of violence. Reducing violence was cited as the territory's number one priority in a recent survey of citizens. The social and economic costs to the community are very high. And, it is generally agreed that they are understated in many ways. Violent crime, and the fear of it, has changed the way people live. And, in a tourist-based economy, violence poses a constant threat to deliver a major body blow to the territory's well-being.

THE CONFERENCE

The February 19 Community Peace Conference brought together more than 100 community leaders. Its purpose was to build a platform for planning and executing a strategy that will reduce violence in the territory by 75% over the next ten years, with dramatic reductions in homicide in the first three years. The goals of the conference included:

- Produce a set of priorities and an action agenda for the Strategic Planning conference to be held on February 22.
- Achieve buy-in and ownership of these priorities and a commitment on the part of participants to remain actively engaged in what will be a long-term undertaking.
- Learn and understand the challenges ahead through interaction with the conference's external resources and from one another.

There was also a basic assumption that the St. Thomas pilot initiative will be modified and refined for replication territory-wide.

The conference was structured in four parts. The first of these was a "status report," describing the scope of the problem and the extraordinary costs that it has imposed on the community. In part two, the outside resources, responded to status report and put the Virgin Islands' challenge into a broader geographic, criminal justice, services and human context. Their contributions focused on the following issues:

- The mobilization of the community to end violence and achieve community peace
- A policing strategy and community initiative which has dramatically reduced violence in other jurisdictions
- Approaches to resolving group conflicts and dealing with problems of revenge and retaliation
- Reintegrating the formerly incarcerated into the community and assisting them in reclaiming their lives

Part three consisted of a series of workshops designed to produce topical visions for a better future, strategies for achieving that future and a set of problems or impediments to securing it. In the final segment, these lists were converted into the "action agenda" that follows.

A VISION FOR A BETTER FUTURE

Visions are a powerful tool for mobilizing individuals and communities for action. They also help define the problems to be solved. The conference participants were clear and consistent in describing the community that they want to build (or reclaim).

There were broad vision statements, as well as those that were specific. The clearest:

"We will have a community where, crime and violence, including all forms of domestic violence, have been dramatically reduced, our children and adults are safe, secure, protected and respected at home, at work and in our neighborhoods. A vision that has been achieved through the efforts of all sectors working in close collaboration in an environment in which trust is the dominant quality."

Our vision is that overall crime will be reduced by 75%, and homicides by 70%. 1,000 guns will have been removed from the streets by the end of 2016. Through improved collaboration between federal and local officials, the number of guns coming into the territory will have been measurably reduced. We will

have implemented targeted strategies, gun buy backs, amnesties, etc., that will effectively reduce the number of guns in our community.

GOALS, STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

The following additional goals and approaches were suggested for building a healthy and peaceful community. It will be the responsibility of the strategic planning group to synthesize this list and, where achievable, to convert items into meaningful, time targeted, measurable and achievable objectives and action plans.

- The most effective interventions will be implemented for repeat offenders in the juvenile justice system.
- Neighborhood watches and effective self-policing tools and practices will be implemented. Communities will effectively become the first line of responsibility in providing neighborhood security.
- We will be a more inclusive community. We have broadened the “we” and shrunken the “them.” We are a true multi-cultural community in which mutual respect is a basic Virgin Islands value.
- Our children are safe and free to enjoy the community in which they live. A clear and visible measure of having achieved our vision will be that our playgrounds will (again) be full of children.
- Our service agencies are able to reach all groups and communities, regardless of language, place of origin or ability/disability.
- Our schools are peaceful and students are becoming the carriers and practitioners of the message of community peace, non-violence and respect. Children are taught (and utilize) the tools of peaceful conflict resolution at an early age.
- Family members practice peace, including ridding their homes of weapons.
- Through solid planning, trust building and communication enhancements, we will build multi-agency alliances (government, NGO, business) focused on implementing a coherent, targeted set of tactics for reducing violence and having the overall community speak with a single voice of moral outrage in rejecting violent behavior.
- Forums and platforms for youth planning and participation in building healthy communities will be designed and implemented at an early point in the initiative.
- Proven approaches for prevention for young people are in place, and opportunities for those who have been incarcerated and want to change their lives will provide opportunities for a better future.
- We will design and implement an integrated, multi-media, multi-lingual, multi-cultural communication strategy whose single purpose is violence reduction. We will “flood” the community with anti-violence, conflict resolution training, communications and recruitment activity.

A METRIC THAT WILL DEFINE SUCCESS

This vision may contain the “metric” that will tell the community that it has succeeded in countering violence and achieving peace: **playgrounds that are full of children.**

CORE THEMES

The measures of this conference’s success will be the development and implementation of plans built on the themes that the participants developed during the course of the day. From a wide ranging discussion – and the planning efforts leading up to the conference, the following basic themes emerged.

Strategic clarity: An anti-violence plan

Participants in the February 19 conference confronted the reality of the scale and scope of the problems of violence, and the danger of succumbing to feelings of pessimism and fatalism. During the course of the day, they created a framework for a Strategic Plan that will have a single purpose: find the outer edge of positive community change in reducing all forms of violence. Do not over-reach or undershoot.

It is important to restate the importance of maintaining a focus on violence reduction as a goal. While the territory faces other critical challenges, many of them such as poverty reduction and improved education being of equal importance, the focus of this plan will be on reducing violence in the community.

There was broad acceptance of the strategic framework provided by Center for Crime Prevention and Control. That framework has three pillars:

- **Targeting:** Target the sources of violence, in every community, a small group, and bring all of the resources of the criminal justice system to bear to get them to stop their violent and criminal behavior.
- **Moral outrage:** Engage the moral voice of the community to make it clear that it is no longer willing to tolerate this behavior
- **Services:** Provide high quality services for those who want to change their lives and move in a positive direction.

Each of these goals and strategies will require focused, coordinated and, most important, committed action on the part of a group of leaders and the stakeholders who devoted their time to producing this plan.

Execution

The participants in the February 19 conference were all leaders who gave up a day of their time because they believed that this undertaking was the beginning of long-term improvement in community life. A significant event on the path to achieving community peace. The ideas shared at the conference will provide the guiding themes for the strategic planning conference.

The February 22 conference will produce a set of strategies and action plans that will spell out in detail the path to both short-term “wins” and the major goals of violence reduction. Then the hard part: execution/implementation of the plan.

Securing the vision that the group defined will require near flawless execution. In a fundamental sense, this is very simple: success equals execution. And there is an equation that defines successful execution. It can serve as a checklist for leaders engaged in the strategic/action-planning portion of this initiative.

SUCCESSFUL EXECUTION = A CLEAR AND EFFECTIVE STRATEGY + THE RIGHT PEOPLE IN THE RIGHT ROLES + EFFECTIVE BASIC SYSTEMS AND WORK PROCESSES + A CULTURE/NORMS OF PERFORMANCE, FOCUS ON RESULTS AND MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY + IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

This equation can serve as the objective for an action plan by the strategic planning group.

Change Management

Success will also depend on effective change management by an integrated team of leaders. Some of these pieces are already in place. The proven approach to this kind of change management includes the following steps:

- 1) Create a sense of urgency. The leadership and stakeholder groups have successfully achieved this goal.
- 2) Identify the guiding coalition or group. This step should be a key outcome of the February 22 strategic planning session.
- 3) Develop and communicate a vision for change. The February 19 session represented a major step in fulfilling this goal.

- 4) Communicate the vision and achieve buy-in and emotional commitment from important groups in the community. Again, the February 19 session represented a big step in this direction, and securing the ongoing involvement and commitment of the “group of 100” should be a defined objective.
- 5) Empower action and act to remove the barriers to change.
- 6) Get short-term wins to sustain and energize the effort.
- 7) Don’t take your foot off the gas pedal too soon. This initiative is seeking to change entrenched norms and behaviors. They are not going to be changed without a persistent effort.
- 8) Incorporate the new norms and behaviors – those identified in the vision – as a part of the community culture.

These steps can also be folded into the action planning process on February 22.

Trust

The question of trust, particularly the erosion of trust, played a powerful role in the Community Conference. Successful organizations and undertakings are ones in which everyone is pulling in the same direction. Trust is the foundation for that unity. The opposite is also true: mistrust is the driver for fragmentation disunity and failure.

The participants defined trust in a number of ways, each of which has validity. If we describe “trust” as a fundamental goal of this initiative, here are the most important dimensions identified by the community leaders:

- Trust is a relationship. At its heart is the ability of members of the group to be honest and vulnerable with one another with the full confidence that they will not be taken advantage of.
- Trust is confidence that others will follow-through, and that we hold one another accountable for results in a direct and positive way.
- Trust flows from a collaborative, rather than a negative and hostile, relationship between business and government.
- Trust is confidence that law enforcement will produce results and protect me as a person and a citizen of the territory.
- Trust flows from a rejection of media focus on division and negativity and a willingness on the part of groups to challenge these destructive practices, especially when they are inaccurate and untrue.
- Trust is an outcome of clarity. Ambiguity in all of its forms produces mistrust and unhealthy conflict.
- Trust is a rejection of the norms of gossip and rumor spreading and their replacement by the norm of taking a problem or issue directly to the person concerned.

Based on experience, we know that building (or rebuilding) trust is not easy. There is no “on/off” switch. But it is achievable if a group is willing to work at it. In this instance, an immediate starting point could be the establishment of the Rotary International “four way test” as a core principle for all of those involved in this initiative, whether they are Rotarians or not.

- Is it the truth?
- Is it fair to all concerned?
- Will it build goodwill and better friendships?
- Will it be helpful to all concerned?

There will most likely be a tendency to put the trust issue to the side because it is “soft,” (it is not), and because it will take people out of their comfort zones (it will). That would be a mistake. Trust is the foundation stone. It is worth investing time in building (or repairing) it.

Community mobilization

“Community” is a term that is used freely, often where no community actually exists. For our purposes, it is very important to define exactly what we have in mind, because time and resources are going to be allocated to reaching these groups and communities. Based on the discussion during the course of the Community Conference, the key or target “communities” include:

- The neighborhoods in which people live, and, specifically, those individuals and groups that can be mobilized behind an effort to eliminate violence in their own community. These are – or will be – the moral voice of the community, the voice that says that this violence must stop.
- The small groups that are responsible for much of the violence that is being perpetrated.
- The law enforcement and criminal justice community or system
- The community of services providers, both public and not-for profit, including, and especially, the educational community from teachers to top administrators
- The business community

In some instances, the term community may be an exaggeration at this point. A goal of this initiative will be to build community by giving groups a common and important purpose and mobilizing them behind it.

Communication audiences “hard” and “soft”

The design and implementation of an integrated and comprehensive communications strategy will be a key feature in the success of this undertaking. Participants in the Community Peace Conference identified six “target” audiences for the communications component:

- The members of the executive/leadership group that will be established at the February 22 strategic planning session
- Key members and staff of the organizations led by the members of the executive leadership group
- The stakeholders who participated in (or should have participated in) the Community Peace Conference
- The groups and individuals involved in perpetrating violence in the community
- Young Virgin Islanders
- The larger community

One of the great assets going forward in this initiative is having access to key media outlets and communications leaders, especially young people, who will make this work.

Culture, norms and behaviors

Like “community,” the term “culture” and the phrase “changing the culture” roll off of our tongues fairly easily. The reality is that we do not know how to change cultures. But we do know how to change behaviors, and, with difficulty, to change norms, in particular, habits that people have gotten used to that are negative.

The planning group, both in the February 22 session and subsequent ones, will define these norms and behaviors, make them explicit and develop focused approaches to defeating them (if they are negative) and reinforcing them (if they are positive)

ISSUES AND PROBLEMS: THE ACTION AGENDA

The Action Agenda is a consolidation of the issues and problems lists compiled by the working groups at the February 19 conference. The strategic planning group will convert the issues into time targeted, measurable and achievable objectives during the February 22 session. These objectives will then be supported by detailed action plans. The Action Agenda:

- **Trust:** We have a trust deficit that impedes or prevents us from achieving our goals and working effectively together.
- **Pessimism and fatalism:** This is a prerequisite problem. Because we do not believe that real change is possible, failure to change becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy. Change is possible.
- **Change resistance:** We have high levels of change resistance and complacency. Much of this resistance takes the forms of bureaucratic inertia and indifference.
- **Family breakdown:** We increasingly deal with the consequences of family breakdown. We have significant numbers of families in which adults are working multiple jobs and have insufficient time with their children.
- **Criminal justice resources:** We have insufficient criminal justice resources.
- **Communication:** We do not do a good job of communicating change, particularly policy changes.
- **Multilingual society:** We are a multilingual society, but our systems, policies, approaches and attitudes lag in recognizing this reality.
- **Services coordination and delivery:** Services, particularly for young people and vulnerable populations, are not coordinated, lack visibility and are sometimes not supported until it is too late, and they have either withered or folded entirely.
- **Negative media impact:** The focus of the media on negative stories, personal attacks and politicizing everything has the effect of demoralizing the community at all levels.
- **Lack of youth inclusion:** Young people are not involved in the planning of strategies, services and programs for them. For example, young people must be engaged in defeating the norm of seeking revenge or retaliation. They are not so engaged at this time.
- **Information:** We have an information deficit that hampers our ability to make effective decisions.
- **Early intervention:** We lack “front-end” early intervention approaches and resources and pay a stiff price later on when behavioral change is much more difficult and expensive.

SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

Planning Approach: The immediate next step will be to convert this document into concrete goals and objectives and a set of detailed action plans. These action plans will contain time targeted, measurable and achievable objectives. They will produce clarity and eliminate ambiguity with respect to roles and responsibilities, resources needed to perform tasks and measures of success. They will pass a test of reasonableness as a “package.”

The key to success will be to find the outer edge of achievable change, in particular, to produce visible and measurable progress without over-reaching. A core assumption: 100% achievement of 5 goals is far better than 50% achievement of 10 goals.

Focus will be essential, and the focus of this initiative is the dramatic reduction of violence that destabilizes the community. The danger of seeing this goal as a Christmas tree on which a lot of other things can be hung will be resisted.

There has been a strong emphasis on execution in this plan document. There is a simple reason for that: in the absence of successful execution, what is the point in investing all of this time and effort? Ideas without action don't amount to much. And our process is to link the power of ideas to execution and community change that sticks.

Framework: The strategic planning group will assess and adopt or refine the framework that The National Center for Crime Prevention and Control's three part strategy provides as a framework:

- 1) Target the most disruptive groups in the community and concentrate law enforcement resources on them.
- 2) Mobilize community voices of moral outrage make clear that these destructive behaviors must stop
- 3) Design, implement and deliver a package of services that successfully meet the needs of three groups: those at risk of engaging in violence, those currently engaged in violence who want to change their lives, and individuals being released from incarceration and returning to the community.

Planning themes and topics: In each of the following areas, it is suggested that the strategic planning group produce a 3-year goal, a one-year objective that is time-targeted, measurable and achievable and an action plan for that objective.

These goals and objectives encompass "soft" issues (that are not really soft) and the keys to operational and implementation success.

- 1) Outreach and concerted action to stop the violent behavior of identified groups
- 2) Communication and an organizational strategy and plan to mobilize community voices to take a moral stand against violence
- 3) Design of a highly targeted services strategy for the three groups listed above (at risk, currently engaged in violence, post-incarceration/"re-entry") and identification of resources to serve them

- 4) An approach and a plan to systematically address the following negative norms:
 - a) High levels of mistrust
 - b) Fatalism and pessimism
 - c) Change resistance, the "get out of the way" stage of change management.
- 5) The structure and core processes and systems that will sustain this initiative going forward
- 6) Identification and action plans for a series of quick and visible "wins" that will mobilize support and sustain emotional commitment to this undertaking.

The (ambitious) goal of the February 22 session will be to produce action plans for each of these six priorities. It is necessary to respond in advance to "But what about...?" The temptation to overload is almost certain to result over the long-term in a reinforcement of the norms of pessimism and fatalism. Clear and focused action will be the key to success in changing communities.