

SHRINKING THE FOOTPRINT OF POLICE: 6 IDEAS FOR ENHANCING SAFETY



Overview

Spurred by the brutal and senseless murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other Black Americans, people are demanding that we redirect money away from police budgets into sustainable community-driven solutions. Policymakers, communities, residents, and organizations are committing themselves to finding solutions that build safety, limit the use of police, and are rooted in anti-racist practice.

The **Center for Court Innovation** has worked with communities to build public safety for decades. Based on lessons learned, we believe that this is not the work of a moment, but rather a long-term shift in both thought and action. And it will take many different strategies to achieve change. Jurisdictions should rethink public safety—what it is and how to achieve it. Solutions should be locally-driven. Communities must no longer be subject to systemic racism and oppression, and their residents, especially Black and brown people, must have the ability to live without the undue harm of arrest, prosecution, and incarceration. And, Black- and brown-led organizations that engage in justice work should be supported.

This document is intended to provide several possible ways to approach these issues but is by no means an attempt to include all of the changes that would be needed, such as increased accountability and other structural changes. We are including programmatic ideas that localities could consider in crafting these solutions with which we have firsthand experience and research to support their impact and success. These programs rely on strong community investments, collaboration, and anti-racist policy. If implemented, they could bring communities a significant step closer to a world where the role of police is limited and public safety is enhanced.

1. Community Organizing around Justice Investment

When given a chance, communities can create their own conditions for safety by unlocking their existing potential. Community programming should begin with the underlying premise that communities are already strong and powerful, and that investments will build upon their fundamental strengths. Indeed, there are incredible entrepreneurs, producers, architects, and artists in every community. **Programming** should be crafted so that these individuals can enrich their own neighborhoods. This could look like a community-led technology center for aspiring coders, a music lab for artists in training, or entrepreneurship support for fledgling start-ups.

2. Addressing Trauma and Preventing Violence at Home

Violence begins with structural racism, including neighborhood segregation and a historic failure to make equitable investments in communities. Underinvestment in predominantly Black and Hispanic/Latinx communities combines with violence at the hands of law enforcement to contribute to collective trauma, cynicism, and more violence. **Domestic violence** and traditional mental health providers often reflect these same patterns of disinvestment and harmful intervention. Rethinking these interventions demands community leadership and partnering with those directly affected. These culturally-competent programs could include **engaging men of color** who have experienced violence and trauma, **building public awareness** of intimate partner violence within communities, and promoting holistic community healing.

3. Violence Interruption

Research has shown that community-led efforts can create community safety without involving the police. Community violence is seen as an illness, and much like illness is cured through prevention, community violence is cured through prevention programs. These programs “interrupt violence” without the use of police, and are staffed by what

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are known as credible messengers—people from the community who reflect the demographic of the community, and reflect the lived experiences of residents. The resulting trust and respect are especially crucial to the success of these programs. It also results in empowerment for residents.

4. Restorative Justice

Restorative justice offers an entirely different approach to addressing harm by focusing on healing relationships across families, communities, and neighborhoods. Restorative justice programs focus on the needs of those who have been harmed, without rejecting the humanity of the person who has caused harm. To build robust restorative justice programs, localities should look outside of traditional systems and to paid community members and volunteers for support. **In schools**, restorative programs can help end the school-to-prison pipeline; this approach can also reduce the deployment of school safety agents as a way to support safer schools. And, while shifting school safety agents out of policing in the near term is a path to shrinking the NYPD, merely creating a new means of oversight for these agents is insufficient. In the short term, school safety agents would be retrained in restorative practices, and over the long term, schools would divest from security personnel in order to onboard a counseling staff that reflects the school's needs and demographic makeup. (Denver's school district, for example, cut ties with police after investing in restorative justice practices.)

5. Youth Development

Young people need positive programming to help them build skills and develop their leadership ability. This programming is particularly important in the summer months when young people have unstructured time. Such programs should rely on people from the community—including artists, computer programmers, and business owners. These mentors teach concrete skills, from photography to entrepreneurship to youth organizing, and offer young people, particularly people of color, an opportunity to realize their full potential. Credible messenger models can be especially effective with youth, bringing services and positive role models to them where they are, instead of expecting vulnerable youth to show up at programs operating out of fixed locations.

6. Parent Support

The family is both where an individual's notions of safety begin and where they can seek security. Structural racism and oppression have created obstacles to this for many in Black and brown communities. Parent support programs can be seen as opportunities to build familial supports and create security in the home. Localities should look beyond entities like child protective services. Instead, they should consider **programs** that are informed by an understanding of underlying systemic and individual trauma, and that are trauma-responsive. This programming can reduce child maltreatment with the result of less system-involvement for the children involved. These programs are opportunities to avoid police involvement in the first instance. Parent support programs can also support families through **increasing employment** and parent-child connections, and create opportunities for parents to make meaningful contributions to their child's development.

For More Information

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