



POLICE  
— 2 —  
PEACE



POLICE COMMUNITY  
YOUTH DIALOGUES  
TOOLKIT

SPRING 2021



# INTRODUCTION

**The ‘Police Community Youth Dialogues’ are conversations which can serve to build trust, lower barriers, reduce bias and eliminate stereotypes. They do this by allowing young persons and officers to speak candidly about their experiences interacting with one another. These conversations allow each to glimpse the world from the other’s point of view, which can lead to young persons and officers finding common ground.**

**This ‘Police Community Youth Dialogues’ Toolkit will help facilitate the following outcomes for police services departments:**

- Improve police-youth relations
- Break down longstanding barriers between young persons and officers
- Establish relationships between young persons and officers
- Develop strong community relationships between citizens and police
- Improve outcomes for young persons by reducing the number who may become ensnared in the criminal justice system.



# QUESTIONS TO ASK UPFRONT

**When you desire to introduce a ‘new community policing program’ to your department, there are several questions to ask yourself beforehand which will shape the program and impact your ultimate results.**

**Here are questions to ask yourself as you begin this stage of the process:**

**1. Do you have an existing youth dialogue program?**

- a. If yes, what’s working and what isn’t working?
- b. If no, why not?

**2. And are you interested in a youth dialogue program?**

- a. If yes, why?
- b. If no, why not?

**3. What are your program objectives?**

- a. Greater community engagement
- b. Building public trust
- c. Creating new channels of communication
- d. Establishing new relationships between officers and young persons
- e. Improving outcomes for young persons so they don’t become ensnared in the criminal justice system

**4. What success metrics are essential to you?**

- a. Lower community violence
- b. Lower arrest rates among young persons
- c. Broad community support

**5. What stakeholders will your program be important to?**

- a. Public, youth-oriented departments
- b. Schools
- c. Elected officials
- d. Local businesses and associations
- e. Parent groups
- f. Other \_\_\_\_\_

**6. How long will your program run for?**

- a. 6 months
- b. 12 months
- c. Other \_\_\_\_\_

**7. What initiatives would you like to include in your program?**

Later on, you will have the opportunity to complete a worksheet where you list them





# ABOUT THE PROGRAM

**Improving the state of police-youth relationships is a complex problem for any community. Young persons are afraid they may be arrested for saying the ‘wrong’ thing to an officer. This is further complicated by peer pressure which may be exerted if they are seen talking to police officers. Conversely, officers whose role is keeping the public safe may have a need to question teens. Seen in their position of authority, officers may seem harsh to young persons which can lead to escalations of otherwise minor encounters.**

## **What can be done?**

These longstanding barriers can be lowered through a series of police community - youth dialogues. These can take the form of facilitated conversations between members of the community, their youth and police officers. Through direct dialogue and dynamic interactions, layers of prejudice, stereotypes, bias, fear and mistrust can be dismantled to help individuals find common ground.

## **What are the key drivers of successful dialogues?**

Among the successful components of dialogues is community buy-in. Identifying stakeholder groups in advance of any planning can help the program gain much-needed momentum and become a conduit for future youth to join in. Part of this buy-in is to be steadfast that the dialogues are not venues for snitching on others. Other successful drivers are awareness of the possibility of rival youth crews and sensitive issues that should be avoided.

## **How will young persons be attracted to the program?**

Including community stakeholders is key to attracting young persons to the dialogues. Through public agencies such as housing and transit, schools and local parent organizations, word about the program can be spread throughout youth in the community.

## **Where would these dialogues occur?**

Community stakeholders may be tapped to provide space to hold the dialogues in venues familiar to young persons. They may also be able to offer incentives for participation with in-kind donations including free passes to movies, sporting events and for food. These familiar venues help create a safe space for candid conversations to occur.



# PRE-CHECK LIST

## Dialogues Pre-check List

### Location

- Is the site a neutral space, outside of the police station
- Is it somewhere familiar, where youth already congregate in groups
- Have you considered a non-traditional venue such as a performance space, outdoors?
- Is the space quiet and without distractions

### Duration

- Are you prepared to hold at least three types of conversations:
  - Young persons and officers meeting separately with their peer groups
  - The dialogues themselves where officers and young persons come together
  - Follow up conversations or debriefs, with each group separately, or with the two groups together to learn how things have changed since the initial dialogues

### Size

- Are you able to bring together a minimum sized group of 15 to 20 participants at a time?
- For that group, can you create a mix of approximately three young persons for each officer?
- Is the intended group diverse in its makeup of race, ethnicity and gender?



# PROGRAM PLANNING MATERIALS

## Program Setup: 2-4 weeks before the program begins:

- Meet with key stakeholders to discuss the program
- Finalize program objectives
- Identify operations points of contact
- Determine timeline for program
- Consider the location where the dialogues could occur
- Consider the length of the dialogue sessions, such as 60 minutes
- Consider the size and make-up of the groups which would be ideal
- Consider whether food could or should be served to create a welcoming environment

## Notes:

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# PROGRAM PLANNING MATERIALS

## Dialogues Particulars

The setting for a dialogue venue sets the tone for a successful discussion. Consider these questions as you develop your program:

### Utilization of Space

#### How much space will be needed?

- If prep sessions are held with each group separately before a dialogue, where will they meet?
- Where will the larger dialogues be held?
- Will exit and entry from the larger dialogues venue be awkward in any way as a result of single points of entry or exit?

#### Where will people sit?

- Have you considered the comfort of seating arrangements, enabling sitting for an hour at a time?
- Are you able to prevent young persons from clustering in groups on opposite sides of the table or room?
- Would you like to assign seats in advance, or ask participants to fan out as they enter the room?
- Would you like to hold a session upfront to break the ice, such as comedy, shared experiences or a giveaway?

### Setting the Tone

- Have you considered the formality of the program, and made choices about how formal or informal it should be?

- If using tables, are you planning to offer pens and notepads?
- Have you chosen a space large enough for the group to move around without interacting with one another if needed?
- Are you considering serving food, which can be an icebreaker?
- When would you serve the food so that it is not a distraction?
- Are people able to comfortably eat where they are seated or do they need to move somewhere to pick up or consume food easily?

### Equipment

- Have you considered what supplies might bring about the best result?
- Do you have access to computers, projectors, smart boards, flip charts, paper and markers?
- Can there be a copy machine nearby, if needed?

### Program Documentation

- Do you wish for the dialogues to be memorialized?
- If you think that may help lead to further action, how do you plan to document the dialogues?
- Is there an adult observer who may be available to record the dialogues and then have them transcribed?



# PROGRAM PLANNING MATERIALS

## Program Cleanup

- Are you selecting a space which can be quickly and easily cleaned up after the dialogues?
- Does another group need to use the space immediately afterwards?
- Are you responsible for cleaning the restrooms afterwards?

## Facilitation

A strong facilitator is crucial to success. Identifying someone with experience interacting with young persons is a skill you will want to have.

- Have you identified someone with experience engaging youth?
- Is this person familiar with the specific needs of the community?
- Can you locate a multi-lingual facilitator in the event you have multiple languages spoken in your community?
- Is the person you are considering familiar with the prior or ongoing police youth tension, if any?
- Is the person you are considering adept at working with shy, withdrawn and acting out young persons?
- Have you considered a co-facilitator, where more than one speaker is involved?
- Consider not using a police officer, for the reasons of youth reluctance to share, power structure and prior experience with the young persons in the room.

If you need help identifying a facilitator, please reach out to us and we can assist you in

identifying the perfect facilitator for your dialogues program.

## Engaging Young Persons & Police Participants

**The following steps will help build engagement for your program:**

Before beginning to reach out to any youth for potential participation, first consider the idea of just who you want to bring together. By reviewing the goals in this toolkit and comparing them with the youth population you wish to reach, you can come up with a plan to engage those who are consistent with your program goals.

Some considerations include the following:

- What age are you wishing to reach? Research into dialogues which include young people as young as 12 and as old as 21 has been shown to have an impact.
- Generally speaking, police departments have goals of reaching high-school aged persons. These young persons have had enough experience with police to have formed views and stereotypes, while at the same time may be mature enough to be thoughtful about how those experiences impacted their lives.
- Diversity is key. Except for rare occasions in which a certain issue is being addressed, such as gender-related incidents, the dialogues should mirror the racial and ethnic makeup of the community. Engaging young persons who are a healthy mix of ethnicity, race, sexual orientation and experience with the criminal justice system is a good recipe for success.



# THE DIALOGUES PROGRAM

## Creating Buy-in

We crafted a set of emails and graphics you can use with your community in order to promote engagement for your Police Community Youth Dialogues Program.

- **The Program Awareness Email:**  
Make your organization and community members aware of the upcoming dialogues. It is just for awareness, and therefore, shouldn't contain a URL to your program's sign up page.
- **The Community Participation Email:**  
Entice and excite engagement. This email should be sent to community leaders, stakeholders you identify as potential influencers.
- **The Department Participation Email:**  
Create excitement among department staff and entice them to support the program
- **The Program Participation Reminder Email 1 and Email 2:**  
Urge last minute participation to sign up for the dialogues. When you are crafting your message, focus on what is most meaningful for each of the stakeholder groups to take away from the dialogues.

## How to inspire community members:

- **Inspire!** Explain benefits of dialogue
- **Why?** Explain department and program objectives
- **Who?** Key stakeholders and community influencers
- **Goals?** Transparent & clear objectives

## How to inspire department staff:

- **Inspire!** Explain advantages of dialogue
- **Why?** Explain organization objectives
- **How?** Confirm the program doesn't diminish any of the work already being done to control crime
- **Goals?** Transparent & clear objectives

## The Toolkit

Across the country, departments are bringing officers and young persons together for productive conversations. This toolkit is a resource for those communities interested in bringing police community youth dialogues into their neighborhoods. The positive conversation strategies contained in this toolkit provide an overview of innovations and other promising best practices.

This toolkit is a valuable first step in breaking down longstanding barriers between young persons and police officers. While convening successful police community youth dialogues can require a time, energy and considerable commitment from a department, the effort is worthwhile. Officers and young persons alike report that these important conversations were valuable in establishing lasting relationships and changing the courses of young lives.

Note that the recommendations contained herein are intended as guidelines, and should be adapted as needed to suit the department and community.



# CONCLUSION

**The ‘Police Community Youth Dialogues Program’ does not end at the last session. To maintain a healthy community policing framework, you will need to continue to use tools at your disposal to stimulate participation and continuing buy-in. In addition, think of ways you can stimulate department and community-wide excitement about the program and its benefits. Emails, newsletters, videos and testimonials are all good ways to maintain excitement.**

You can even follow on the Police Community Youth Dialogues Program with these other programs to continually generate engagement, such as:

- Peace Officer Identity
- Officer Cognitive Resilience Training

And community programs including:

- Community Feedback Loop
- 7 Simple Steps for Positive Policing
- Walk With Us

These programs may come in handy when creating a Police Community Youth Dialogue Program for your department.

**Begin developing yours today!**

You now have the tools, tips and worksheets to consider developing your own Police Community Youth Dialogues Program.

If you have any questions about starting your own Police Community Youth Dialogues Program using Police2Peace, or enriching your existing program, feel free to visit [police2peace.org](https://police2peace.org) or give us a call at 928.852.4240.

**Engage your community today with Police2Peace.**



# POLICE —2— PEACE

Police2Peace is a national, nonpartisan nonprofit organization that is operationalizing a framework of community policing rooted in the idea of police officers becoming peace officers. Police2Peace's mission is to be a trusted source of ideas, strategies, programs and policies for positive change in policing for departments, municipalities, the federal government and civil society. As a solutions-driven organization, Police2Peace brings expertise to departments that are redefining, reimagining and advancing policing in America for the purposes of cultural, procedural and operational change and departmental alignment. Police2Peace is a U.S. domestic nonprofit corporation having a 501 (c)(3) status with the IRS.

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