

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/stronger-together-policing-program-bridge-divide-police-and-community>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

The Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) has a longstanding history of collaboratively working to improve policing practices, policies, and police-community relations.

Since pioneering several early innovations in American policing, including [one of the first community policing experiments](#), Vera has sought for over five decades to work with police and communities together.

In response to urgent calls for help from community advocates and police professionals in the wake of events from Ferguson to New York to Dallas, Vera enhanced its capacity to do more in the policing space. In 2016, Vera began to build on its history of policing work by developing a new approach for police and community members to engage each other, come to the table, and work hand-in-hand to take a thoughtful but critical look at police policies that could be strengthened with community input and the expertise of national policing experts. This initiative, known as [Police Enhancing Accountability through Community Engagement \(PEACE\)](#), was successfully piloted in Asheville, North Carolina after an officer-involved shooting.

Like too many other departments nationwide in recent years, the Asheville Police Department (APD) faced a grieving community that was demanding change. But the APD responded by doing something bold: they invited representatives from 16 community groups, such as Black Lives Matter and the Racial Justice Coalition, to work through the issues at hand, including revising the department's use-of-force policy. With the help of Vera as a facilitator over six months and several policy development sessions, the APD and the community groups were able to learn from each other and work towards a common goal of public safety and security. By the end of the facilitated process, the department [debuted a new use-of-force policy](#) that goes beyond state law to detail exactly how officers can and should use de-escalation tactics to slow down and stabilize potentially tragic interactions. The department subsequently trained their officers in accordance, and the revised, community-informed policy is being implemented today.

The revised policy aims to prevent police encounters that end in tragedy and violence. It will also help officers avoid being in the position of having to make a split-second decision about using deadly force. And by asking for and incorporating the voices of the community, the APD took a step toward building trust between the police department and the people it serves. Such a relationship is critical to achieving public safety: when people experience policing as adversarial rather than supportive, as is the case in many communities of color, they are less likely to report crime or participate in investigations.

Asheville's story is an unusual and important one; it shows both the problems confronting policing today and the potential of innovative strategies. And such innovation is needed, because American policing faces some of its greatest challenges in modern history.

It is in this context that Vera is launching its [new Policing Program](#). With this program, Vera has expanded its capacity to provide assistance to law enforcement agencies and communities to collaboratively measure, manage, and improve public safety; better respond to the needs of vulnerable populations; and advance a new model for participatory police-community policy development. The program is committed to ending American policing's overreliance on enforcement as the primary means of ensuring community safety, through implementing and testing alternative responses and facilitating police-community partnerships that give voice to residents' priorities and concerns.

The launch of Vera's Policing Program includes the release of a national expansion of the PEACE Initiative through a [request for proposals \(RFP\)](#). Through this RFP, Vera invites law enforcement agencies, with community partners, to apply to become a PEACE site and receive structured support and guidance from Vera. This assistance is centered on a process of collaborative policy development, allowing police departments to modernize their policies with community buy-in, strengthen police-community partnerships, and receive national recognition for demonstrating a commitment to pragmatic police reform.

America is at a precipice for police reform; there has been a clear call to improve the way police and communities interact to better meet their common goal of public safety. The PEACE Initiative shows that it is possible for police and communities to come together after a tragedy. With the right tools, we can help enable more of this kind of partnership and prevent future tragedies by shifting the culture of policing away from focusing on enforcement activities and towards crime prevention and community satisfaction, as well as officer wellbeing.

PUBLICATION

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