Mediation Center Roles in Stronger Police-Community Relations in Four Cities

The police departments in the cities of Baltimore, Maryland; Dayton, Ohio; New Orleans, Louisiana; and Warrenton, Virginia have partnered with their local community mediation center to develop innovative community-based responses designed to strengthen the connection between law enforcement personnel and the communities they serve. This effort will enhance and expand services that support policing which is carried out with dignity and respect toward the people served, is neutral and transparent in decision-making, and conveys trustworthy motives.

Law enforcement and community leaders are being brought together by their community mediation centers to listen to each other and find common ground and common values from which they will be able to address one of the three following pillars that are articulated in the President’s Interim Report on 21st Century Policing:

- **Pillar 1: Building Trust and Legitimacy** – People are more likely to obey the law when they believe that those who are enforcing it have the legitimate authority to tell them what to do. The public confers legitimacy only on those they believe are acting in procedurally just ways.
- **Pillar 4: Community Policing and Crime Reduction** – Community policing requires the active building of positive relationships with members of the community. Police interventions must be implemented with strong policies and training in place, rooted in an understanding of procedural justice.
- **Pillar 5: Training and Education** – Hiring officers who reflect the community they serve is important not only for external relations but also for enhanced understanding about the community they serve within the agency.

The work of the four cities’ law enforcement and community mediation institutions is being supported by the JAMS Foundation and the National Association for Community Mediation (NAFCM). To date, the partners have assessed the needs of the local community, created logic models and data logs, and hosted facilitated listening sessions with a focus on internal law enforcement and external community capacity. This foundational work is designed to create sustainable and culturally appropriate approaches that will address the challenges that have been revealed using this process. These three approaches, which span the three pillars listed above, are:

**Procedural Justice:** Law enforcement/resident mediation facilitated by community mediation centers creates a safe space for conversations between the community and law enforcement and that allows them to address historic tensions, grievances and misconceptions. This process facilitates an exchange of knowledge and held truths between them and is focused on transformation, restoration and engagement. *President’s Task Force Recommendations:* 1.1, 1.5, 1.51, 4.1, 4.4.2, 4.5, 4.5.1.

**Reconciliation:** Individual law enforcement/resident mediations facilitated by community mediation centers are focused on creating trust, transparency, and the enhanced understanding of each other’s perspectives. Mediators facilitate the participants’ appreciation of each other as individuals and provide them with the opportunity to develop some shared understanding and
acceptance of one another which could serve as a part of the civilian review process for non-life-threatening claims of improper action or inaction. President’s Task Force Recommendations: 1.2, 4.1.1.

**Implicit Bias:** By increasing the number of law enforcement personnel proficient in the use of mediation skills that are focused on enhancing individual policing, recognizing learned biases that may interfere with their ability to create positive community relations, and enhancing their ability to deescalate situations and demonstrate cultural awareness, these police departments enhance their reputation within the community as thoughtful, reliable, and legitimate representatives of authority. President’s Task Force Recommendations: 1.3, 1.6, 4.2, 4.4.1, 5.1.

The partners are now developing, in conversation with their community colleagues, constructive approaches to transform and reduce police/community conflict. The focus will be on promoting communication, transparency, and trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve. Implementation of these culturally appropriate and sustainable approaches will begin in March 2016, with evaluations of their impact occurring in July 2016 and March 2017. The evaluation and other reporting mechanisms will be used so that any of the four approaches developed in Baltimore, Dayton, New Orleans and Warrenton may be replicated nationwide, thus maximizing the reach and impact of their work to improve public safety and increase public trust.

About NAFCM ([www.nafcm.org](http://www.nafcm.org)): In communities around the globe, programs and volunteers share their expertise to help others constructively engage, transform, and resolve conflict. NAFCM supports community mediators by aggregating their wisdom, amplifying their voice, and advancing their critical work. An active advocate for constructive conflict-assistive services, NAFCM supports the over 400 community mediation programs across the U.S. and others internationally.

About the JAMS Foundation ([www.jamsfoundation.org](http://www.jamsfoundation.org)): The non-profit JAMS Foundation is the largest private provider of ADR-related grants in the world. The Foundation was established in 2002 by JAMS, the largest private provider of alternative dispute resolution services worldwide, and is funded by JAMS mediators, arbitrators and employee associates who contribute a percentage of their income. The JAMS Foundation has provided more than $5 million in grant funding since its inception. Founded in 1979, JAMS and its more than 300 fulltime mediators and arbitrators are responsible for resolving thousands of the world’s most important cases.

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