



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

The Divided Community Project Academy Initiative

Case Study #2
Bloomington, IN

2021

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Acknowledgements

The Divided Community Project (DCP) housed at the Ohio State University Moritz College of Law – in partnership with the American Bar Association Section of Dispute Resolution – hosted DCP’s second [Academy Initiative](#) in Chicago March 1-3, 2020.

DCP sought to work with communities seeking to design processes which identify and address divisive issues tearing at the fabric of participant communities. The project convened “core leadership groups” composed of approximately eight stakeholders from four communities:

- Bloomington, Indiana
- Charlotte, North Carolina
- Indianapolis, Indiana
- Midwest City, Oklahoma

The Academy provided a program for participants to be in conversation with similarly situated colleagues from diverse communities, dispute systems design experts from DCP, and individuals experienced in responding to community unrest and hate incidents, including a police chief, city manager, and a senior advisor to a mayor from jurisdictions that confronted volatile conflict that made national headlines. In this iteration of the Academy, each community was assigned a dispute systems design expert to support their preparation and participation in the events. The participants engaged in various activities, such as the *Midland Simulation* and facilitated conversations regarding community efforts to address unrest and community tension, in order to:

- Strengthen skills for dealing with community unrest and its underlying causes.
- Strengthen collaboration among a community’s core leaders.
- Develop public engagement processes to identify and address community division.

Following the Academy program, DCP hosted two follow-up conversations intentionally designed for Academy participants and made available consultants to continue working with the participant communities. This report details a case study of Bloomington, Indiana’s experience with the Academy Initiative.

INITIATE

Bloomington is a town in the central region of Indiana, home to the flagship campus of Indiana University with over 40,000 students.

According to the 2019 census, among Bloomington's 86,000 inhabitants, 82 percent identified as white and 4 percent as Black or African American [1]. Bloomington does not have a long history of community unrest, but the community drew the national spotlight in the summer of 2019 when tensions escalated at a city-operated farmers' market.

Early in the summer, the city organizers of the market were notified that one of the vendors had ties to white nationalists. The accusations quickly gained traction after activists identified "federal court records and the leaked archives of a far-right message board to uncover a digital trail" connecting the husband-and-wife sellers of organic tomatoes and kale to an organization that promoted white nationalism [2].

Residents participated in public meetings to debate whether the vendors should be asked to leave or allowed to stay, and there were both protests against and counter protests in defense of this particular vendor. Protestors and community members expressed competing concerns regarding how market vendors would conduct business amid the conflict, and the safety of vendors, patrons, and community members because of one vendor's affiliations.

Bloomington Mayor John Hamilton's comments also echoed the dilemma as he condemned "white nationalism and white supremacists as a scourge" on the country and the community but also assured that "all are welcome in our inclusive Bloomington, and that [the] Farmers' Market will embody those values of inclusion and welcoming, as well as be a safe space for all to gather" [3].

As the situation grew increasingly volatile with individual demonstrators facing arrest and a group called "No Space for Hate" releasing plans for more protests at the market, Mayor Hamilton temporarily suspended the 45-year-old community tradition of holding the farmers' market citing public safety concerns. Taking the advice of legal counsel, the city ultimately declined to remove the controversial vendor from the market, as removing a vendor based on individual beliefs would be a violation of the First Amendment.

[1] United States Census Bureau. "Quick Facts: Bloomington, Indiana." Accessed September 29, 2019. <<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/bloomingtoncityindiana,US/PST045219>>.

[2] Healy, Jack. "Amid the Kale and Corn, Fears of White Supremacy at the Farmers' Market," The New York Times, August 18, 2019. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/18/us/indiana-farmers-market-white-supremacy.html>>.

[3] Harris, Shakkira. "Bloomington farmers market suspended 2 weeks amid vendor's alleged ties to white nationalist group," WRTV, July 30, 2019. <<https://www.wrtv.com/news/local-news/bloomington-farmers-market-suspended-2-weeks-amid-vendors-alleged-ties-to-white-nationalist-group>>.

Tension at the farmers market tore at the social fabric of the community. Coupled with concurrent national tragedies, including the mass shootings in Dayton (OH) [4] and El Paso (TX) [5] in the same month, these events prompted Mayor Hamilton to contact representatives of the Divided Community Project's [Bridge Initiative @ Moritz](#) to help community leaders address both longstanding and growing concerns around white supremacy, racism, and other forms of discrimination. Bloomington's community leaders wanted to calm the community and realized that if supporters of white nationalism were present in the farmers' market then they were likely elsewhere in the community. City leaders wanted to take a holistic approach which assessed the city's ability to work proactively to mitigate other possible sources of division and unrest.

The Bridge Initiative was a foray into the work of the Divided Community Project (DCP), and Bloomington's community leaders were invited to participate in the second iteration of the Academy Initiative (hereinafter referred to as "the Academy"). When the opportunity to participate in the Academy arose, Bloomington's city leaders saw it as an opening to make this a larger community effort and were excited to involve representatives of the university as well as influencers in the larger community.

After considering a wide range of potential participants, the core leadership group eventually included the City of Bloomington's Community and Family Resources Director, Bloomington's Director of Public Engagement, Bloomington's Chief of Police, Director of Indiana University's Political and Civic Engagement Program, Interim Assistant Dean of Indiana University School of Education, Assistant Director of the Kelley School of Business Diversity Initiatives, a local activist and artist, and a local businessman (who has since become the deputy mayor of Bloomington).



"The Academy Initiative helped to amplify the idea that there is a shared group of individuals who want to work together to create a safe space within our community – to know that there are others who want to make this community as safe as I do was reassuring."

- Assistant Director of Diversity Initiatives,
Indiana University

[4] Williams, Timothy, and Farah Stockman. "Gunman Kills 9 in Dayton Entertainment District," The New York Times, August 4, 2019. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/04/us/dayton-ohio-shooting.html>>.

[5] Romero, Simon, Manny Fernandez, and Mariel Padilla. "Massacre at a Crowded Walmart in Texas Leaves 20 Dead," The New York Times, August 3, 2019. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/03/us/el-paso-shooting.html>>.

IMMERSE

The Academy helped identify individuals who wanted to work together to create a stronger community in Bloomington and provided the time and space for community leaders to be present and build trust with one another.

According to the core leadership group, the Academy enabled participants to listen, connect, and learn from facilitators and members of other communities, and illustrated how principles underlying community division and unrest were not unique to any one community.

01

Listen

Listening to what happened behind the scenes in high profile cases, such as the killing of Trayvon Martin and the subsequent trial of the neighborhood watch volunteer, participants were reminded that building community cohesion was seldom easy but nevertheless worth the effort.

02

Connect

Sharing the lessons learned and best practices of creative ideas that had been tried to overcome various community challenges proved to be an insightful learning opportunity for several participants.

03

Learn

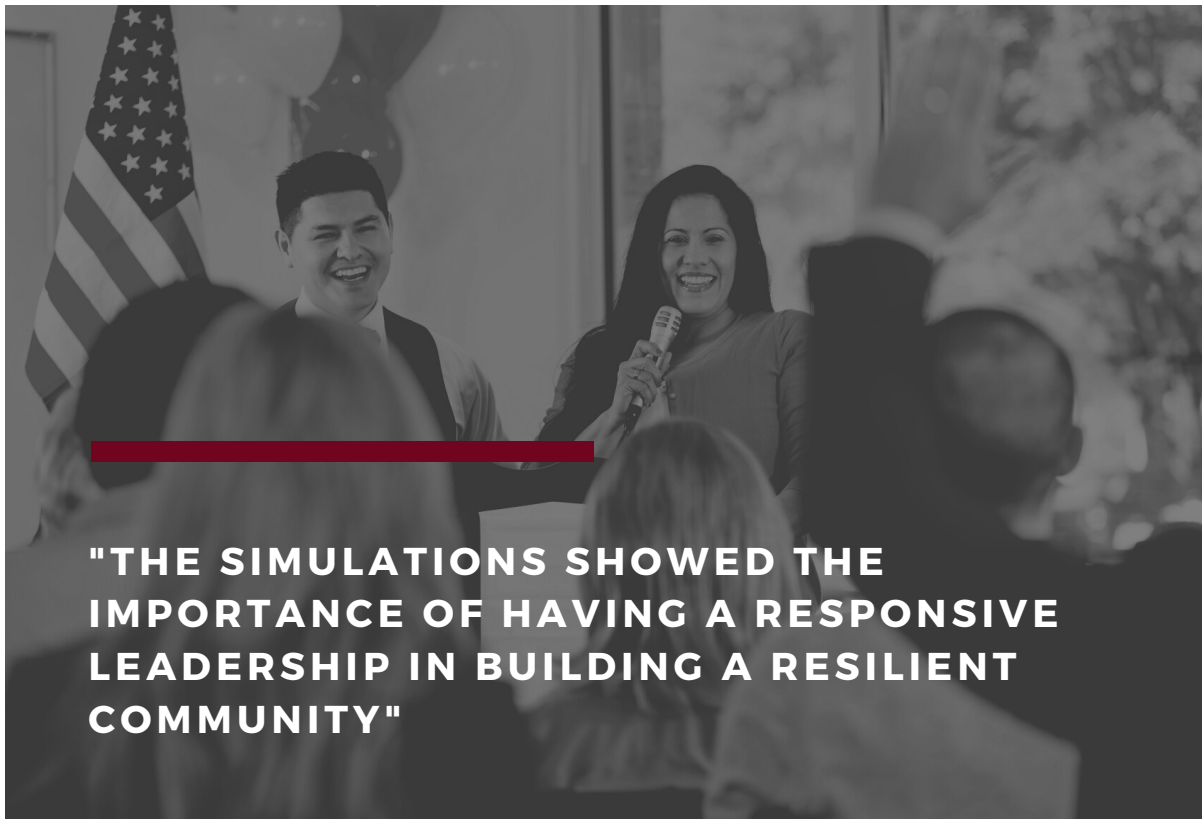
The level of disruption and fear that accompanies community unrest can be overwhelming, but the Academy validated participants' concerns and supported their efforts through material resources as well as through access to mediation and dispute systems design experts from around the country.

The exercises about responding to the media and lessons on how to involve key stakeholders were notably insightful and the simulations demonstrated the value of responsive leadership when building a resilient community. Creating a blueprint of ideas and options that members could take and adapt for their individual communities felt empowering for the participants.

The core leadership group from Bloomington found DCP's *Midland Simulation* to assist their teambuilding efforts while also illustrating diverse challenges which may arise during community unrest.

The Academy also offered to connect communities with a network of consultants for post-workshop needs, and the Bloomington team capitalized on this and remained engaged with a seasoned mediator of racial and ethnic disputes.

Several of Bloomington's core team members echoed their appreciation for this resource and noted that the individual they were paired with was phenomenal in helping, supporting, and guiding the Bloomington team.



IMPLEMENT

Empowered and enthusiastic, Bloomington's core leadership team returned to Indiana after the workshop and within a week, everything shut down because of COVID-19.

The pandemic inevitably slowed the work of the core team by shifting the city's resources and priorities away from this work, but the team nevertheless held bi-weekly or monthly meetings.

These virtual meetings were coupled with informal one-on-one and small group conversations to build trust and strengthen relationships. The team used tools such as GroupMe and Microsoft Teams to communicate regularly and collectively.

Conversations included celebrating each other's successes as well as discussing national issues together and over time they built an infrastructure of care, and not just productivity. The path to building teamwork was not always smooth, as one core member stopped showing up for meetings without explanation. As a group of seven, the team continued to forge ahead.



"I would recommend this training to all communities – whether they are experiencing unrest or not, because they likely will at some point... it can happen to any community at any time."

– Director of Community & Family Resources Department,
City of Bloomington

Informally, the core team became a sounding board for city leaders on community issues. There are several features of the core team that made them effective. The team is a group of well-connected individuals representing the university, the city, and community voices, who are committed to improving community cohesion.

Additionally, team members have made themselves available for consultation with community leaders, often on short notice. Many in the core leadership team hold prominent roles in the community, and as issues arise and are discussed among the team, those members of influence then relay the concerns and considerations to other decision makers in the community or incorporate identified concerns directly into their work.

Formally, the core group has worked to institutionalize change through the creation of two taskforces led and directed by residents [7].



Racial Equity Taskforce

Assess city policy and procedures through an anti-racist lens and implement anti-racism training for the city's decision makers.

First, the core group developed a racial equity plan during the Academy and finalized it in subsequent team meetings back in Bloomington. The racial equity taskforce is intended to assess city policy and procedures through an anti-racist lens, and as of August 2021, the core leadership group was still recruiting community members to participate.

A related component of this taskforce is to implement an anti-racism training for the city's decision makers (e.g., heads of departments, city council members, and related staff). Members of the core leadership group vetted several trainers, and one has been selected to guide the one-year process that is scheduled to start in September 2021. .



Policing Taskforce

City leaders and community members engaging in conversation about the type of policing that should be implemented to best support the city and its residents.

Second, the City's future of policing taskforce emerged from conversations regarding what kind of policing should occur in Bloomington, a topic that has been affected by ongoing national concerns around police accountability. Prior to the farmers' market incident, the city had replaced its armored vehicle with a Bearcat (short for Ballistic Engineered Armored Response Counter Attack).

Law enforcement typically use armored vehicles to protect officers in active-shooter environments, or to move civilians or officers from harm's way during a dangerous encounter. But the shooting of Michael Brown Jr. in Ferguson, Missouri, and the protests that ensued raised the question of militarized police and the use of Bearcat vehicles in response to peaceful demonstrations [8].

[7] Calender-Anderson, Beverly. "City Releases Plan to Advance Racial Equity and Announces Two Resident-led Task Forces." City of Bloomington, Indiana – News Release, October 21, 2020.

[8] Rosenfeld, Everett. "Where Ferguson's 'military' police get their gear." CNBC News, August 15, 2014. <<https://www.cnbc.com/2014/08/14/ferguson-missouri-protests-where-fergusons-military-cops-get-their-gear.html>>.

Although the Bloomington police have not used the Bearcat, national concerns around police brutality heightened awareness of police behavior. Local residents were intentionally focused on police practices, including the department's ownership of the Bearcat.

Several issues have since become intertwined. For example, a segment of the community seems to believe that the farmers' market is friendlier to white supremacists than to people of color and seems to criticize the city because it "bought a military vehicle but won't invest in underserved communities" [9].

Community members on the future of policing taskforce have committed to two-years of involvement, and they are now meeting to come up with a 90-day report. This report is intended to inform Bloomington's budget planning process for 2022, if necessary.

The core leadership group strategically invited community members, especially those representing underserved populations, to serve on the taskforce. The taskforce includes young black males, women who represent the domestic violence shelter, and clergy.

The initial plan was to involve representatives of each of the jurisdictions covered by three law enforcement agencies – the Bloomington Police Department, the Monroe County Sheriff's Department, and the Indiana University Police Department – but the University Police Department and the Monroe County Sheriff ultimately chose not to participate in the task force because of resource constraints and competing priorities.

The diverse composition has not only made the taskforce more representative of the Bloomington community but has also facilitated connections between people of different sub-communities. The taskforce's diversity provides some notable benefits as well as challenges.

For the positive, one of the young black men participating in the taskforce voiced early on that he has not had a good experience with the police. Bloomington's police chief was in the room to hear that concern and the police department has since allowed community members to tour the police department and do "ride-alongs" with the police to inform citizens of the police's work and perspective.

However, given that the taskforce is made up of citizens who do not know much about the work of policing and how police departments function, it has been a challenge for the taskforce to put together a report that is supposed to be both timely and informative.

[9] "Peaceful Protesters Outraged at Racist Attacks and Anti-Black Violence," Limestone Post, July 9, 2020. <<https://limestonepostmagazine.com/peaceful-protesters-outraged-at-racist-attacks-anti-black-violence/>>.

CONCLUSION

"The Academy was very helpful, validating, and supportive. The lesson was that we have each other, and we can get through this"

– Director of Political and Civic Engagement, Indiana University

When the farmers' market incident occurred, the city's immediate response was to turn to the legal department and action was limited to what was legally feasible. When legal counsel stated the city had few options due to vendor contracts, the city felt forced to permit the vendor to maintain its presence at the market.

This was insufficient to address the community's concerns and the result was lost trust and increased fear among many citizens. In hindsight, several city leaders indicated that they would have talked to people differently, as opposed to defending why they could not throw the vendors out of the marketplace to protect the city from a lawsuit.

As a result of the Academy, city officials have been more intentional about listening to the concerns of the community, as evidenced by their handling of an incident with the unhoused population. Bloomington has a fairly large homeless community but also lots of places to shelter people.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic when vaccines were not yet readily available, a group of unhoused people did not want to be in shelters because they felt safer outside. They started to put up tents in the downtown parks, but the city shut them down and tried to relocate them, which caused a bit of tension.

Soon thereafter, the city officials listened to the concerns of the homeless and put up an isolation shelter in a hotel for people experiencing homelessness if they were COVID positive or needed to isolate because they had been exposed. The grant for the shelter was awarded to a collaborative group of shelter providers, with the City serving as the fiscal agent for the grant and a communications conduit.

Traditionally, a couple of the agencies did not work well together, so open communication was key to this effort. The city officials coordinated meetings about three times a week with shelter providers, health department officials, the major hospital in the area, and the police department.

This meeting allowed everyone to have access to the same information about available beds or any challenges that occurred with the Safe Recovery Site (the isolation shelter). This also provided an opportunity to share resources and brainstorm creative ways of making sure unhoused individuals received vaccines when they were available. The Safe Recovery Site existed from March 2020 to June 2021.

However, the group of shelter providers has since continued to meet once a week and the agencies that previously did not work well together are now working much more cooperatively.

One of the unexpected outcomes of these meetings is that city officials became aware of the number of unhoused women on the streets of Bloomington. As a result, the City has worked to secure funding from multiple sources to provide support for a women's shelter through August 2022.

Following George Floyd's murder, Bloomington saw several rallies in support of Black Lives Matter, some of which were the largest since the Vietnam War. Demonstrations were coordinated by students who worked with the county, city, and the police department and remained civil.

Bloomington's core leadership group has recognized that part of doing what's best for the city entails a responsibility to listen to the people's concerns and find ways to address them proactively. The team has since identified generational challenges: most decision makers are older, while activists who feel they have not been heard are often younger.

Since the Academy, several of the core group members have leveraged their personal relationships to bridge this divide to improve intergenerational communication.

In addition to the community leaders using their positions of privilege to strategically promote positive change for Bloomington, two community-led taskforces were created to institutionalize some of the lessons and to empower others in the community to take ownership of change.

Bloomington offers a useful guide on how core leadership groups can both informally and formally incorporate lessons from the Academy to build community resiliency.

This case study was produced through semi-structured interviews with members of Bloomington's core leadership group. The authors triangulated information between the interviewees and publicly available primary source documents, when possible, to make general observations and statements. However, specific parts of the case study highlight individual thoughts and insights and indicate them accordingly, where appropriate. We thank our interviewees for their time and contributions to this work.

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Additional resources developed by the Divided Community Project are available at <https://go.osu.edu/dcptoolkit>. For more information about DCP, the resources listed above, or for a copy of Academy curriculum, please email Bill Froehlich at Froehlich.28@osu.edu.