



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

The Divided Community Project Academy Initiative

Case Study #3

Winston-Salem, NC

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 third community [academy](#) held virtually June 13-15, 2021.

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 three communities:

- Canton and Stark Counties, Ohio
- Cheverly, Maryland
- Winston-Salem, North Carolina
- Approximately 20 leaders from across the state of Michigan

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. The participants engaged in various activities, such as the Amory Simulation and facilitated community conversations regarding 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, and
- 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. Below is a case study of Winston-Salem, North Carolina’s experience with the Academy Initiative.

INITIATE

In 2018, a citizen's group called the Creative Corridors Coalition installed the Twin Arches over U.S. Route 52 in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, intending to symbolize a city coming together.

Some saw beauty in the two arches "reaching over a road that has become a by-name for the city's racial divisions" while others considered it a waste of money and criticized the prioritization of funds for this project over substantive needs of the community [1]. While physical and racial divides between the east and west sides of Route 52 are a reality in Winston-Salem, the city has been relatively civil.

Despite heightened racial tensions and concerns around police brutality nationally, respect for law enforcement has not been readily questioned in Winston-Salem perhaps partly due to the statute and presence of Chief of Police Catrina A. Thompson (and Black female), and Sheriff Bobby F. Kimbrough, Jr. (a Black male).

Like many other communities, Winston-Salem has historical and generational issues that are rooted in race, inequity, and injustices, but the more immediate concerns have revolved around increases in gun violence and youth involvement with gangs.



"We all have different positions and a lot of stress on top of everything else that's going on, we need to respect each other and recognize that all the different organizations out there have to make tough decisions. I came away from the Academy Initiative with profound respect for others in the community, I came away with more understanding to respect the decisions of others and to be more patient, to not jump the gun and wait to hear from others before reacting to them with little information"

—Representative of the Hispanic League at Winston-Salem

[1] Young, Wes. "Opinions divided on new U.S. 52 arches." Winston-Salem Journal, February 2, 2019. <https://journalnow.com/news/local/opinions-divided-on-new-u-s-52-arches/article_4e88d9b2-010a-5c98-9500-c0da6a46c3f2.html>.

Dr. Pam Peoples-Joyner, a Community Relations Specialist at the Winston-Salem Police Department learned about the work of the Divided Community Project (DCP) through Wake Forest University's Chief of Police, Regina Lawson.

Recognizing the importance of community cohesion and seeing the need for action that was not just coming from law enforcement, she put together a team to participate in the Academy Initiative (hereinafter referred to as "the Academy"). She sought to proactively bring community leaders together to have a better understanding of the varied experiences within the community.

In the course of recruiting a diverse and representative core leadership group, several individuals were reluctant to participate in just another training, given their busy schedules. Dr. Peoples-Joiner assured them that something tangible would materialize from the Academy.

The Academy team included representatives from the City of Winston-Salem, the Winston-Salem Police Department, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, Winston-Salem City-SPIRIT [2], the Hispanic League, United Health Centers, a local rescue mission, and a local house of worship.



[2] City-SPIRIT (City-Site Problem Identification and Resolution of Issues Together) is a program of the United States Department of Justice that brings together diverse community stakeholders to develop collaborative solutions to reduce conflict: <https://www.justice.gov/crs/our-work/facilitation/city-spirit>

IMMERSE

Through the Academy, Winston-Salem's core leadership group hoped to gain a better understanding of what other segments of the community face during a community crisis.

The structure and activities of the Academy met this interest. In practicing perspective-taking through the simulations and role-playing, the participants gained a new sense of understanding and empathy for what others in the community might be experiencing.

When confronted with conflict, there is a tendency to focus on one's personal or organizational point of view and it is easy to get upset and point fingers at others. Academy activities asked participants to consider community conflict from alternative perspectives – from roles which they do not normally occupy.

These alternative perspectives shifted how participants view community division and tension, and illustrated how other community members face personal and institutional constraints in trying to make informed decisions. During the simulation debriefing conversation, participants recognized many community leaders have different (and perhaps incomplete) perspectives regarding law enforcement operations and protocol.

For example, the public often quickly demands transparency and accountability, but an incomplete understanding of law enforcement rules and regulations may lead to suspicion that the police are trying to hide something from the public. Some members of Winston-Salem's core leadership group made notes to inform the public about the city's standard operating procedures and decision-making processes to minimize distrust towards government employees going forward.

In the middle of the Academy, Assistant Police Chief William Penn abruptly departed due to an emerging active shooter incident. Shots were fired into a Winston-Salem Police Department office and officers pursued the suspect into a nearby park [3].

While no one in the leadership group anticipated something like this could happen in their community, this incident spoke to the ongoing issue in the community around gun violence, the youth, and gang activities. It further motivated the core leadership group to quickly execute a plan to address the underlying issues and to work towards community cohesion in Winston-Salem.

[3] Pierce, Daniel and Dolan Reynolds. "Man tracked to Hanes Park during officer-involved shooting in Winston-Salem, taken into custody; suspect's mother, grandmother found dead in their homes." Fox 8 News, June 14, 2021.

IMPLEMENT

The Academy served as a catalyst for developing a roadmap for the Winston-Salem community.

During the Academy and immediately following, the core leadership group conversations returned to the question: “What are our next steps?” One of the immediate decisions was to leverage their existing relationship with the Department of Justice to host a larger community conversation.

A lesson from the Academy was to include the excluded, and the group asked themselves who’s missing from the table. The core leadership group then used their respective networks to invite other community leaders and stakeholders to a two-day workshop of about 20-30 influencers from different areas of the community along with some police and city representatives. Dion Lyons, Conciliation Specialist at the Department of Justice Community Relations Service (CRS) facilitated the workshop.

Taking place on Sept. 8 and 9, 2021, the Winston-Salem Police Department hosted the workshop to meet three goals:

01

Identify Issues

Convene community and government leaders in dialogue to identify issues impacting their community and to develop solutions to address those issues.

02

Communication

Improve communication and collaboration between government and community leaders.

03

Implement Solutions

Create a working group composed of community and government leaders to implement solutions together.

One challenge during this two-day workshop arose when the representative of a major organization refused his participation because he was tired of meeting just for the sake of meeting. Members of the core leadership group recognized that they need buy-in from this organization for the work to be effective and credible in the community, and are strategizing to re-engage him or involve another member of the organization.

During the workshop, the main issue that the group identified and prioritized was the lack of parent accountability with the youth, which has since been reframed as the need for family support to avoid pointing fingers at parents.

Winston-Salem has experienced increases in juvenile delinquency and youth involvement with gangs, and as a potential solution, several participants at the September workshop mentioned that it takes a village, or a community, to raise a child. Various suggestions revolved around equipping parents with resources and information about opportunities that were available in the community.

Recognizing that there are already established programs in the community geared towards youth and equipping parents, one idea was to first take inventory of all the resources available and then to have a prominent community event where the list of resources would be distributed to the parents. Parents would come out with their kids and the community leaders would be prepared to connect resources and organizations with the parents, depending on their need. A virtual panel is tentatively planned for December 2021 to have representatives from community agencies share their resources and perspectives, and an in-person community resource event has been scheduled for January 2022.

During the two-day community conversation, the participants were asked if they would be interested in continuing with this work of building community cohesion and 15-16 community members expressed interest. Two members of the core leadership group, a Caucasian male pastor and an African-American female representative of the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County School District, are now co-chairing a new taskforce made up of these individuals to further the work of the Divided Community Project in Winston-Salem.

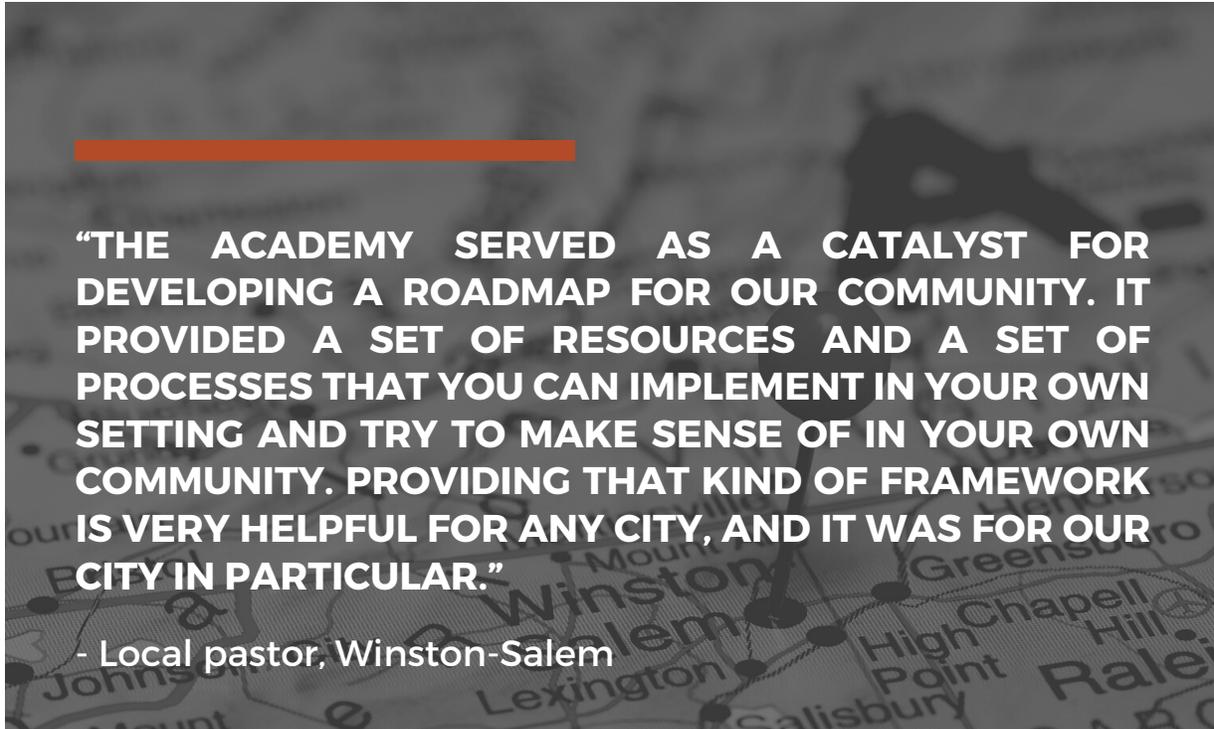
Designed to be a collaborative taskforce where the residents identify their needs and concerns, one of the co-leaders, Pastor Nathan Parrish of Peace Haven Baptist Church reaffirmed the intention of the new taskforce to empower and give agency to community members: “We’re not here to fix anything... We’re here to get a plan that invites other people into the cooperative and collaborative work of making this city the best it can be for all the people that are sharing life here together” [4].

One of the lessons from the Academy was to meet people where they are. In that spirit, the task force has planned a series of community engagement opportunities where they will go out in the community to meet people in neutral public spaces (e.g., on the streets or in community recreation centers) instead of meeting at the police station, to ask citizens how the taskforce can be of service to them.

Meanwhile, the community has continued to experience gun and youth-related incidences. Practical next steps also involve meeting with the school district’s superintendent to understand what the school system is already doing and how the community can come alongside their efforts to push for positive change.

[4] Clemons, Tracy. “What is the Divided Community Project? Winston-Salem police working with local leaders bring community together.” Fox 8 News, September 23, 2021. <<https://myfox8.com/community/in-black-and-white/what-is-the-divided-community-project-winston-salem-police-working-with-local-leaders-bring-community-together/>>.

CONCLUSION



Despite initial reluctance to participate in the Academy and concerns about meeting without action, Winston-Salem’s core leadership group has met weekly to build and maintain momentum for their work. Unfortunately, it took another shooting, this time at a school [5], and a wave of reported guns in schools to draw the attention of some of local and state elected officials.

With the backing of both official and unofficial city leaders, the core leadership group has forged ahead and partnerships across community organizations have become stronger as a result of the regular meetings. However, the group still faces constraints, particularly given most members of the core group have separate full-time jobs.

Finding the time to meet as a group as well as to meet with the community without feeling overstretched has been another clear challenge. Finances, resources, and community comfort are other challenges for the work.

[5] Hardin, Tyler. “Mount Tabor High School shooting suspect identified; 15-year-old will likely be tried for murder as an adult.” Fox 8 News, September 16, 2021. <<https://myfox8.com/news/north-carolina/piedmont-triad/mount-tabor-high-school-shooting-suspect-identified-15-year-old-will-likely-be-tried-for-murder-as-an-adult/>>

For example, when working to engage gang members, police headquarters are not conducive meeting locations. Renting space has proved challenging: landlords are cautious about leasing property knowing gang members might frequent their space; it is not clear who will finance a lease supporting the taskforce's work.

Because grant opportunities for this work has been limited, some members of the core leadership group have offered to contribute out of their pockets for this work, but to date a suitable space has not been found. It appears there is momentum for digging into this work, yet financial and logistical concerns continue to impede progress.

There are many organizations engaged in unique approaches to positively transform the Winston-Salem community. Many often work in their own silos. The Academy clarified the value of breaking down silos to enhance community cohesion and collaboration.

The core leadership group from Winston-Salem has tried to leverage the strengths of individuals and individual organizations to foster participation from different segments of the larger community and to broaden engagement in addressing community-wide concerns.

Another aspect of institutionalizing change has been engaging more with elected officials and law enforcement officials and asking them to be more visible in different events to build trust.

Winston-Salem's core leadership group has maintained a strong collective motivation for action. They are an exemplary model for how quickly a group can lay the groundwork for substantive change.

Despite challenges connected to momentum, logistics, and COVID-19, in six months, Winston Salem's core leadership team has met regularly while engaging in the Academy, hosting a two-day workshop in collaboration with the Department of Justice, and launching a taskforce designed to empower community members.

Winston-Salem's core leadership group is optimistic that they can begin to address some of the disempowering fault lines dividing the community.

This case study was produced through semi-structured interviews with members of Winston-Salem'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.