

Community Engagement Chat: Addressing Public Safety through Engagement

Troubling trends in both urban and rural settings - including increases in car jackings, gun violence and street crime in general - were the main topics for the August Engagement chat. Such trends are affecting neighborhood revitalization and engagement efforts as residents fear congregating, especially in public spaces with safety challenges. As participants discussed the importance of relationship building and building a community culture, it became clear that it is more important than ever to pull people together from walks of life. Here are a few ideas for building a safe and viable community culture:

- Host 'good will' opportunities, like church or school events, on a regular basis. Face time with the community builds relationships and trust.
- Identify a wide variety of community service projects and build connections between all stakeholders connected to those projects.
- Ask local parent teacher organizations to help with community building.
- Facilitate a relationship between high school resource officers and the community.
- Build connections between the local police force and the rest of community, including schools.
- Ask the police department for crime statistics. Consider crime patterns (times of day and days of the week) and schedule meetings at times that pose the least threat. For example, host a coffee break or noon-time event and make sure they are in a well populated area.
- When police officers attend events, incorporate ice breakers and 'getting to know you' exercises so residents and officers meet. Create opportunities for conversation.
- Restart DARE and other crime prevention groups like neighborhood watch groups.
- Offer different event models (virtual, in person, hybrid) so residents of varied capacities and comfort levels can participate and get to know each other. Learn how to 'live stream.'
- Encourage police officers to offer a 'ride along' to community members.
- Support programs for re-entry into the community to help build relationships and opportunities for success.
- Consider place making when possible. This may include neighborhood clean ups and reconfiguring a space for social gatherings, small parks or community gardens. Survey the neighborhood to learn what residents want and be sure to invite the police to planning meetings and celebrations.