Community Conversations: A Case Study

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Plan for the Session

- Introductions
- Background
- Participant Reflections
- Project Evaluation
- Discussion
A police dash cam video shows a Minnesota police officer firing seven shots into Philando Castile's car, killing him.
Time Line

- July 6, 2016: Philando Castille shot to death by Officer Yanez
- Summer 2016: Protests
- September 7, 2016: Work Session to discuss proposal to create Inclusion and Policing Task Force
- December 2016: Inclusion and Policing Task Force began meeting
- February 16, March 2, April 3, and May 1: Community Conversations
- May 24, 2017: Policing Recommendations adopted by the City Council
- June 14, 2017: Inclusion Recommendations and Statement of Community Values adopted by the City Council
- June 16, 2017: Yanez Acquitted
- June 19, 2017: Final Community Conversation
- July 2018: Falcon Heights received 2018 City of Excellence Award for its Policing and Inclusion Community Initiative
Community Conversations – 5 Sessions

- Personal and Community Values
- How can Falcon Heights Live Out the Community Values
  - In activities, policies, and policing policies and practices
- Review and Feedback on Draft Policing Recommendations
- What is Needed for Transformational Change and Personal Commitments
- Commemoration of Work Accomplished and Development of Next Steps
Community Conversations - Structure

- Community facilitators (training provided) – 2 per circle
- Participants could come to as many (or as few) conversations
- Group assignments made at check-in
- Structured questions answered in circles of approximately 8 people
- Joint sessions at the start and end of each conversation
- Childcare provided
- Snacks and Drinks
John Thompson
Transformation From Trauma to Action
TRAUMA
THERE IS A REASON WE ARE ANGRY
PHILANDO WOULD BE SO PROUD OF ME

THE VICTORY WILL BE WON
Elizabeth Dressel
Community Conversation Evaluation
University of Minnesota
Center for Integrative Leadership
Evaluation Methodology

- Survey emailed to 158 participants of the community conversations who provided emails
- 57 people completed the survey (39% completion rate)
- Conducted four focus groups
  - 23 people attended a focus group
  - 13 conversation participants
  - 10 conversation facilitators
Key Evaluation Findings

- **Divergent and Changing Concerns:** Participants arrived and left with divergent concerns and many changed their priorities over the course of the process.

- **Interface with City Council and Task Force:** Participants wanted more action, accountability, and interaction with these bodies.

- **Impacts of a Resource-Constrained Process:** Participants observed and bemoaned that limited resources had negative impacts on communication, childcare, and food.

- **Lack of Diversity:** Participants explored multiple concerns with turnout and diversity of perspectives.

- **Circle Format and General Process:** Participants articulated feedback on the benefits and limitations of the circle format and its implementation in this setting.

- **Facilitation Role:** Facilitators reflected on the distinctions between a circle process and other types of facilitation, and the ambiguity and tension they felt in this setting.
One of the most interesting findings is a positive change in the emotional state of the participants. Participants felt more optimistic and trusting and less cynical, sad and angry after participating in the conversations. In addition, participants expressed feeling both more energized and more fatigued after the community conversations.
Most dominant emotions (aggregated for all survey respondents)
Another noteworthy finding is changes to what participants hoped to accomplish through the community conversations. Following the conversations, participants prioritized higher:

- Understanding the role I play in injustices within my community.
- Making new connections with people in my community

The conversations did not make any difference in one prominent area of concern: both before and after, the number one priority was changing the way the city handles policing practices.
Top Priorities To Accomplish

- Change the way the city handles policing structure and practices.
- Make new connections with people in my community.
- Challenge myself to understand the role I play in injustice within my community.
- Become more active and involved.
- Make Falcon Heights a more inclusive community.
- Work on dismantling racism in my community.
- Educate myself and learn from others’ perspectives.
- Have courageous conversations about inclusion and exclusion.
- Get the City Council to end the contract with St. Anthony Police Department.
- Share my experiences and perspective with others.
- Ensure my experiences and perspectives are represented.

Before and After
Discussion