NLC NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES

REAL RACE, EQUITY AND LEADERSHIP

Municipal Action Guide
Responding to Racial Tension in Your City

With support from: **WELLS FARGO**

About the National League of Cities

The National League of Cities (NLC) is the nation's leading advocacy organization devoted to strengthening and promoting cities as centers of opportunity, leadership and governance. Through its membership and partnerships with state municipal leagues, NLC serves as a resource and advocate for more than 19,000 cities, towns and villages and more than 218 million Americans. Learn more at www.nlc.org.

About Race, Equity And Leadership (REAL)

In the wake of the 2014 unrest in Ferguson, Missouri, NLC created REAL to strengthen local leaders' knowledge and capacity to eliminate racial disparities, heal racial divisions and build more equitable communities. REAL does this through several intervention channels and support systems and with the understanding that local government leaders may not know where or how to start, offering tools and resources designed to help local elected leaders build safe places where people from all racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds thrive socially, economically, academically and physically.

Vision:

A nation in which every local official is equipped to effectively lead and serve an inclusive, thriving and healthy community. Inclusive, Thriving and Healthy Communities are safe places where people from all racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds thrive socially, economically, academically and physically.

Mission:

To strengthen local elected officials' knowledge and capacity to eliminate racial disparities, heal racial divisions, and build more equitable communities.

About the Authors

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

If you are picking up this document in a moment of crisis, we recognize that you are moving and acting with a sense of urgency. The National League of Cities (NLC) created this document to support you in this very moment.

NLC interviewed several current and former municipal leaders who have been through similar moments of crisis with racial tension. This document provides important contextual and tactical information to support your municipality's efforts to respond effectively. It includes:

- **Definition of common values** — Five common values need to be embedded in all actions in response to racial tension.

- **Insight** — Lessons learned, tactics, and such additional considerations can provide direction and suggest actions municipalities can take in real time.

- **Context** — Historical context that will help leadership get a more robust understanding of the situation at hand, and how the event may uncover deep rooted issues that the municipality can address.

- **Checklists** — Practical checklists ensure that you have some of the more critical components in place to respond:

  1. Direction to leadership in the immediate response to the crisis.

  2. Guidance on crisis communications protocol.

  3. Guidance on stakeholder identification and engagement.

  4. Guidance on how to continue the work of advancing racial equity post-incident.

We urge you to take time to review this document in its entirety. An effective response is more than simply responding to the incident but responding to the trauma and tension that exists as part of this incident.

Prepare to Address Racial Tension

Account for Implicit and Explicit Bias

Humans cannot escape from bias. However, we can control how much we let bias influence our actions. We must explore both the implicit and explicit biases that inform our actions. The Kirwan Institute defines implicit bias as[1]:

The biases we harbor in our subconscious cause us to have feelings and attitudes about other people based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age, and appearance. Biases inform a segregated reality that limits relationship building and interactions across races. Explicit bias as defined by the Perception Institute refers to the attitudes and beliefs we have about a person, group, or thing on a conscious level.[2] Individuals and/or groups are aware of the particular bias. It is critical that leadership and those involved in the team responding to the incident be aware of their own biases which can inform how one talks about an issue, the language used, and how the municipality interacts with the community. Being aware of and actively working through biases will support the community in how it responds to an incident or crisis sparked by racial tension.

Embed Common Values in Local Response to Racial Tension

As you prepare to address racial tensions in your community it is critical to approach them head on. In NLC's conversations with several municipal leaders who experienced these situations firsthand, five common values stand out: empathy, transparency, authenticity, partnership and collaboration, and consistency. Municipal leaders are encouraged to embed these values in their municipality's response to crisis. Below we review the five values and provide examples of how these can reflect in your response. It is important to note that leadership sets the tone, but these values should be carried by everyone in the municipality who has any role in the response.

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Also known as implicit social cognition, implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual's awareness or intentional control. Residing deep in the subconscious, these biases are different from known biases that individuals may choose to conceal for the purposes of social and/or political correctness.

Empathy

"I was given direction not to answer questions during a community forum and that was the wrong advice. It is critical to respond to the community during this time with empathy and a shared priority."

— City Mayor

Municipal leadership and those responding to these crisis moments of racial tension navigate a very difficult and emotionally charged situation. In these moments the community is looking for answers and wants to be heard. Leading with empathy, the capacity to understand or feel what another person is experiencing within their frame of reference, the capacity to place yourself in another's position, is critical in a time like this. When communicating in public forums, to the family/victim(s), and specific communities, the ability to demonstrate empathy in how you lead and respond can directly impact the response of the community.

Things to consider:

- Recognize the pain that a family and/or community may be experiencing.

- Express the shared urgency by the city to resolve fairly and reassure the community that the current situation is a priority.

- Acknowledge the different lived experiences that create racial tension.

- If you are unable to answer questions due to an ongoing investigation or because you do not know the answer, acknowledge the community's desire to get the information, and provide whatever information you can provide. For example, if there is an ongoing investigation, explain that you cannot provide any information that would jeopardize that investigation, but give a broad overview of the way in which the matter will proceed.

Transparency

"Our city decided immediately that any investigation to be conducted would be through an independent investigative body to preserve transparency and fairness of the process."

— City Mayor

It is important to understand the historical context of systemic racism in order to recognize the fractured relationships between communities of color and a government. The history provides context for the mistrust that exists between the two. Municipal leaders have an opportunity to rebuild the broken trust between communities and local government by being transparent with the family/victim(s) and community throughout the process. Providing regular and transparent updates to all stakeholders can demonstrate to all that the municipality is committed to a transparent process. An independent investigator is just one example of how to lead with transparency. Managing expectations goes hand-in-hand with the value of transparency. Municipal leadership can be forthright with information on processes to ensure that the community is fully aware of what to expect. It is critical that the community understand what type of information you will release to various stakeholders and when you will release it.

Things to consider:

- Utilize an independent investigation to preserve transparency and reduce any perception of municipal partiality.

- Provide frequent updates to all relevant stakeholders. If there is not any significant information to share, simply communicate that there is nothing new to share.

- Share information upon request as long as it does not interfere with any ongoing investigation.

- Consult with legal counsel on legal requirements and liability issues.

Authenticity

"From the beginning, the family and the community knew that I was invested in this. They knew that I was authentic in my words and actions as we went through this process. This helped with any racial tension in our municipality."

— City Attorney

In addition to one who is empathetic and transparent, the community is looking for authentic leadership. When the municipality expresses shared urgency demonstrated through transparent actions, the family/victim(s) and community will be looking for authenticity within leadership for reassurance. Words and actions must align. It is important to understand that these will be measured against your record and of those lived experiences of the community. Recognizing that these might not always align, authentic leadership demonstrates clear responsiveness to constituents. It will be important to have community leaders and other stakeholders by your side through this process. They will validate your authenticity within the community and during public forums.

Things to consider:

- Meet people where they are and lean on your community partners if you need to ask for something. It is essential to develop these relationships with community partners before a crisis occurs.

- Determine who the community partners are; identify individuals who can assure the community of your sincerity and authenticity in addressing the issues at hand. Be sure to identify local leaders in neighborhoods who may not hold high profile positions, but who have earned respect in their communities.

Partnership and Collaboration

"A city isn't going to be able to establish fruitful relationships on the spot in a moment of crisis. It's the relationships I established prior to any incident that were critical in helping me to respond to the situation at hand and ability to truly work with the community."

— City Mayor

Active partnerships and intentional collaboration must appear across all areas of a city's response. The community needs to see, know, and feel that the municipality is committed to working with the community to find the right resolution. These incidents are deeply rooted in history and lived experience that cannot be addressed in a short timeframe. Incidents of racial crisis require intentional and sustained efforts to find solutions and actions now while also keeping a long-term vision in mind. Municipalities, as conveners, should explore ways to make space for collaborative efforts to find solutions and actively listen to the various communities' feedback, insight, and suggestions. Municipalities must be willing to engage in active listening. This will allow information from all stakeholders to surface, and will inform needed changes in policies, practices, and procedures that may be contributing to the existing racial tension. Working in partnership and collaboration with the community will help to build a municipality's credibility in addressing the issues at hand.

Things to Consider:

- Municipality takes the lead in creating space for community input.

- Create authentic opportunities to stand in the decision making.

- Provide ways to facilitate the exchange of ideas and feedback.

- Partner with community leaders to identify the community needs.
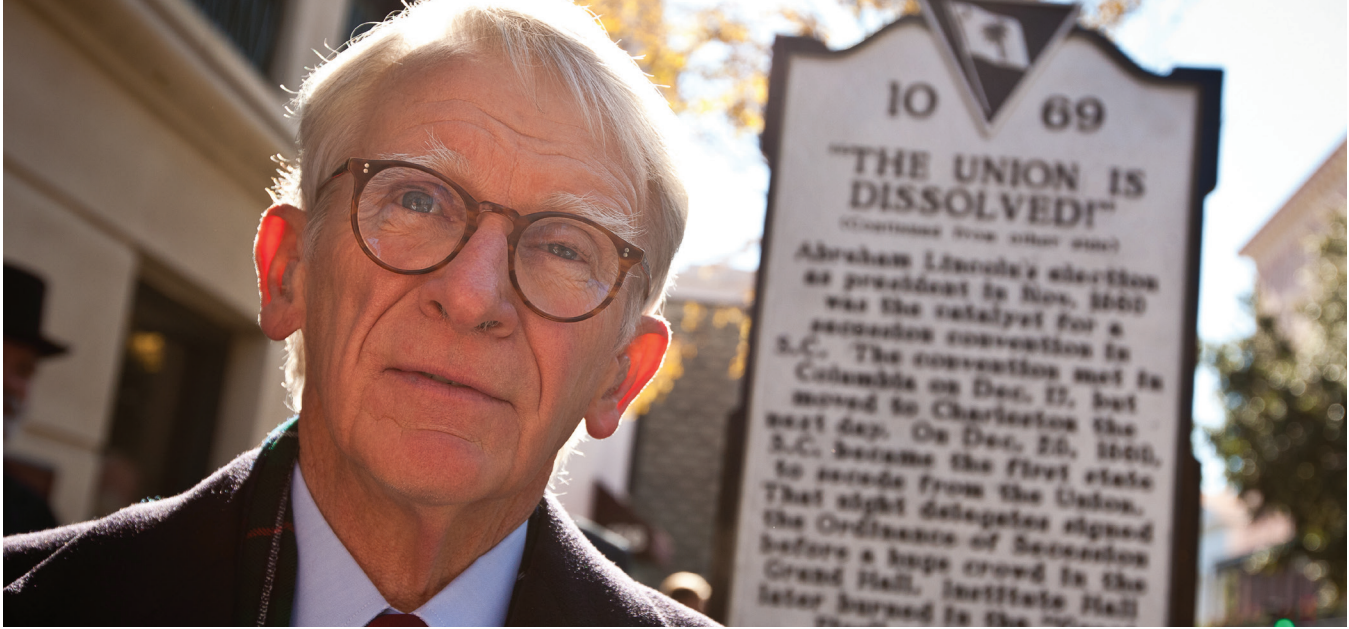
150th Anniversary Of South Carolina's Secession Marked In Charleston

- Identify ways to collaborate at the community level using trauma informed practices.

- At listening sessions, be prepared for anger and emotion; recognize that part of your role as a leader is to hear the community where they are in that moment and respond effectively.

Consistency

"City leaders have the opportunity to set the tone for how the community responds in times of racial tension. By being consistent, the community can find a way to trust leadership is doing everything they can to do the right thing."
— City Mayor

The final value, consistency, affirms the previous four. In embracing empathy, transparency, partnership and collaboration, and authenticity on a consistent basis before and during a crisis, a solid foundation is established for navigating these crisis moments of racial tension.

Consistency is measured by the community in the following ways:

- How municipal leadership shows up to public forums

- Frequency of communication

- Inclusive messages that reach all community residents

- Actions taken

When leadership consistently expresses empathy, shares information, partners and collaborates with the community, and is authentically engaged in the situation, it signals acknowledgement of the severity of the tension. Consistent response from city leaders affirms the government's commitment to logic, accuracy, and fairness. This will help operationalize a sensitive response to the situation and demonstrates government's commitment to being present and to working toward resolution and repair.

Things to consider:

- Establish clear roles for your municipality's staff response team.

- Ensure consistency and continuity in response.

- Articulate expectations and guidelines for clear messaging across the team.

- Establish consistent channels of communicating with various stakeholders.

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Understand Historical Impacts of Systemic Racism

A key component to dealing with racial tension in your municipality is acknowledging the trauma and pain those have experienced from long-standing issues including poor police-community relations, poverty, lack of educational opportunity, economic immobility, racial tension and inequity. As part of the work NLC is committed to, racial healing and transformation sets up the process of advancing racial equity. This moment requires the whole municipality—elected/appointed leadership, staff across all levels, and the community—to come together to determine a resolution.

Racial tension is not born solely from crisis-level events in Baltimore, Minneapolis, Ferguson and other areas. These events surface long-standing issues that created racial tension. Our country's historical interaction with communities of color through government policy and practice create a fractured and tense relationship. It is critical to understand this historical context in how and why communities of color respond to these incidents. Racial equity requires understanding of justice and fairness. Historically, it is a lack of justice and fairness for communities of color that serves as the foundation for understanding and responding to the racial tension in your city.

Our country operates in a racialized system that is fundamentally grounded in white supremacy, a descriptive term capturing an all-encompassing centrality and assumed superiority of people defined and perceived as white in the context of overarching political, economic, and social system of domination.[3] Our systems have intentionally been built to the advantage of white people over people of color through the development and implementation of policy, practices, and procedures. Racial tension has always been present in our country. It is incumbent on

leadership within municipalities to understand and embed this understanding within responses to moments of crisis and racial tension. This Lessons Learned document will provide historical context, knowledge acquired from examples across the country, and practical steps your municipality can take to address racial tension.

We highlight four examples of federal policies that have been implemented alongside local municipal government through policy, practice and procedure. Each of these examples shows how structural racism manifests into real lived experience. It is critical to note in explicitly calling out race within racial tensions, that these systems have been operated primarily by white people. This dynamic is critical to underscore and understand the deep-seeded roots of racial tension between government and communities of color. This is not to assign blame, but to call out how government programs contribute to existing fractured racialized relationships. Each example illustrates how a policy, practice or procedure did not create equitable, fair, and just conditions for communities of color. These examples are violent in nature and in practice. This violence inflicted upon communities of color has created deep seeded trauma and a level of tension between government and communities of color.

Housing: Redlining

Redlining was an overt practice of denying mortgages based upon race and ethnicity, a policy explicitly practiced by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) when determining neighborhoods for approved mortgages. Redlining limited financial services to neighborhoods based on racial or ethnic composition without regard to residents' qualifications or creditworthiness. The term

"redlining" refers to the practice of using a red line on a map to delineate the area where financial institutions would not invest. Complicit in redlining, local government used federal guidelines to complete "area descriptions" and rate neighborhoods as best (green), still desirable (blue), definitely declining (yellow), or hazardous (red).

The FHA allowed personal and agency bias favoring all white suburban subdivisions to affect the kinds of loans it guaranteed, as applicants in these subdivisions were generally considered "better" credit risks. According to James Loewen in his 2006 book Sundown Towns, FHA publications implied that different races should not share neighborhoods, and repeatedly listed neighborhood characteristics like "inharmonious racial or nationality groups" alongside such noxious disseminates as "smoke, odors, and fog." One example of the harm done by the FHA is as follows:

"In the late 1930s as Detroit grew outward, white families began to settle near a black enclave adjacent to Eight Mile Road. By 1940, the blacks were surrounded and neither they nor the whites could get FHA insurance due to the proximity of an "inharmonious" racial group. So in 1941, an enterprising white developer built a concrete wall between the white and black areas. The FHA appraisers then took another look and approved mortgages on the white properties."[4]

Between 1934 and 1962, the federal government underwrote $120 billion in new housing. Less than 2% went to non-whites.

The legacy of redlining laid foundation for the racial wealth gap since most Americans build wealth through homeownership. People of color were systematically denied loans and forced into devalued properties. The government essentially subsidized intergenerational wealth building opportunities for white families, denying black families and people of color the opportunity. Homes in predominantly white communities grew in value faster allowing future generations in predominantly white communities to accumulate wealth more quickly. This left people of color living in neighborhoods with fewer resources, less investment, and fewer opportunities to build wealth. The cumulative impact of the legacy of redlining means that today "the median white family has 41 times more wealth than the median African-American family and 22 times more wealth than the median Latino family." Similarly, "the proportion of black families with zero or negative wealth rose by 8.5 percent to 37 percent between 1983 and 2016. Native-American median household income is similar to that of black households. Nearly 34 percent of Native-American children live in poverty in contrast to 10 percent of white children."[5]

Transportation: National Interstate and Defense Act of 1956

The National Interstate and Defense Highways Act of 1956 authorized the construction of a 41,000-mile network of interstate highways that would span the country. It allocated $26 billion of federal dollars to fund this bill. The new interstate highways were controlled-access expressways with no at-grade crossings–that is,

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they had overpasses and underpasses instead of intersections. This national system ultimately included over 46,000 miles of limited access highway and was the largest and most expensive public works project ever undertaken. The construction process was greatly expedited by using standardized designs and accelerating condemnation of properties along the interstate right of way as these interstate highways connected the largest cities. This resulted in bypassing instead of encompassing access to smaller towns.[6]

Highway promoters and builders envisioned the new interstate expressways as a means of clearing slum housing and blighted urban areas. These plans date back to the late 1930s, but they were not fully implemented until the late 1950s and 1960s. Massive amounts of urban housing were destroyed in the process of building the urban sections of the interstate system. By the 1960s, federal highway construction was demolishing 37,000 urban housing units each year; urban renewal and redevelopment programs were destroying an equal number of mostly low-income housing units annually.

A 1965 report by the U.S. House Committee on Public Works asserted that the amount of disruption was significant. Planning scholar Alan A. Altshuler noted that by the mid-1960s, when interstate construction was well underway, it was generally believed that the new highway system would "displace a million people from their homes before it [was] completed." A large proportion of those dislocated were blacks, and in most cities the expressways were routinely routed through their neighborhoods. Urban expressways tore through long-established inner-city residential communities in their drive toward the core of cities, destroying low-income housing on a vast and unprecedented scale. Huge expressway interchanges, cloverleafs, and access ramps created enormous areas of dead and useless space in the central cities. **A general pattern emerged, promoted by highway officials and private agencies, of using highway construction to eliminate blighted neighborhoods and redevelop valuable inner-city land. The victims of highway building tended to be overwhelmingly poor and black.**[7]

Economic Development: Urban Renewal

Urban Renewal was a comprehensive scheme to redress a complex series of urban problems, including unsanitary, deficient, or obsolete housing; inadequate transportation, sanitation, and other services and facilities; haphazard land use; traffic congestion; and the sociological correlates of urban decay, such as crime. Early efforts usually focused on housing reform and sanitary and public-health measures, followed by growing emphasis on slum clearance and the relocation of population and industry from congested areas to less-crowded sites. The Committee on Blighted Areas and Slums, a group formed out of President Hoovers Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership in 1932, held the approach of wholesale demolition of existing structures was legal since "the elimination of slums is a public purpose," and expressed its confidence "that a large portion of the group displaced by slum clearance will be able to find suitable accommodations elsewhere."[8] The majority of those displaced were disproportionately communities of color, primarily black.

Those displaced from Urban Renewal received constitutionally mandated "just-compensation." This measure of compensation covered only the fair market value of the taken property and omitted compensation for a variety of incidental losses such as moving expenses, loss of favorable financing, and notably, business losses such as loss of business goodwill. The majority (approximately 90%) of homes destroyed during urban renewal were never rebuilt.

Between 1956 and 1972, urban renewal and urban freeway construction displaced about 3.8 million residents from their homes and was increasingly referred to by critics as "Negro removal" due to its focus on black neighborhoods.[9]

Crime: Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, also known as the crime bill, provided resources through the COPS program for 100,000 new police officers, $9.7 billion in funding for prisons, and $6.1 billion in funding for prevention programs designed with significant input from experienced police officers. Mass incarceration of people of color and low-income people began in the 1970s. It then accelerated with the passage of the 1984 Sentencing Reform Act to lengthen prison terms and abolish the federal parole system, and the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act to establish mandatory minimum sentences for specific amounts of cocaine and set a lower sentencing threshold for smaller quantities of crack cocaine than the pure powder itself. However, the 1994 crime bill embraced implicit biases embedded in the public conversation about crime to create new policy levers that significantly increased the disproportionate policing, arrest, and incarceration of people of color. The nation's combined federal and state prison population rose to its peak of 1.6 million in 2009.[10] In 1994, black men were roughly 6.8 times more likely than white men to be incarcerated in federal and state prisons.[11]

These three federal laws contributed to disproportionate incarceration through several components including the development of federal mandatory minimum sentences that institutionalized existing racial bias and the development of a federal "three strikes and you're out" provision. Among the most pernicious aspects of the 1994 crime bill was its influence on states to increase their prison rolls by setting a precedent for state level "three strikes" laws.

The 1994 law also increased prison funding tied to state laws requiring people to serve 85% of their sentences regardless of behavior. The impact on the development of state tough-on-crime laws included a proliferation of state laws in the 1990s that eliminated parole, removed judicial discretion in sentencing, and enacted mandatory minimums as measures to attract bonus dollars from the federal government. While these measures did little to decrease crime, they played a major role in the upward spiral of disproportionate incarceration of people of color and of low-income. Today, more than 60% of the people in prison are people of color. Black men are still six times more likely to be incarcerated than white men and Latino men are 2.7 times more likely.[12]

Municipal Voices from the Field: Tactics for Responding to Racial Tension

Local municipal leaders who have experienced moments of racial tension shared several lessons learned that other municipalities can benefit from. These lessons provide guidance for local municipalities that are either currently experiencing racial tension or that want to prepare their municipality in the event of an incident that surfaces racial tension. These moments of crisis in a municipality will require that the municipality have some of the most difficult conversations. The result can be a focus on policy, practice, and procedure in relation to race and how communities of color are served. NLC found that the lessons learned from local municipal leaders fit into three areas:

1. **Stakeholder and Community Engagement**
2. **Communication**
3. **Responsiveness**

In each area, the five common values (empathy, transparency, authenticity, partnership and collaboration, and consistency) are essential elements of the municipality's learning process.

Following this section, a checklist is provided to ensure that your municipality is considering some of the most crucial components of an effective local response to racial tension. These points are lessons critical to strategies and tactics that municipalities can consider taking to establish and maintain critical relationships to navigate the existing racial tension.

1. Stakeholder and Community Engagement

At the outset, it will be important to identify and define the various communities within your municipality, beyond just race and ethnicity, i.e. military, religious, etc. Determine who should be at the table to ensure that a broad range of knowledge and skills are available to comprehensively address all aspects of the incident. Developing and investing in the critical relationships with community residents and leaders is key. Ideally these relationships are established prior to any incident. These individuals will serve as trusted lines of communication and information.

Tactics:

- Municipal leaders and anyone involved in response efforts should identify several trusted community stakeholders they can engage to help coordinate the engagement between the local government and the community.

- Engage key individuals within communities who can organize and coordinate townhalls and community conversations; this may include leaders in neighborhoods as well as leaders from established organizations or advocacy groups.

- Keep all stakeholders informed of ongoing information gathering efforts.

- Appoint stakeholders to serve as ambassadors for the municipality within different communities.

- Provide resources and make appropriate accommodations to maximize community engagement (i.e. childcare, evening meetings, public transportation, locations accessible for people with disabilities, parking accessible locations, provision of sign interpreters for people with hearing impairments, etc.).

2. Communication

Municipal governments are uniquely positioned to build bridges of trust in communities of color in the face of tragic events that are the result of racial tension. How local governments communicate and engage communities during this time is vital to set the foundation for advancing racial equity. It is critical to have dedicated lines of communication specific to each stakeholder and to provide a medium for individuals to express themselves. Open and direct lines of communication between the family/victim(s) and municipal leadership is critical.

Overcommunicating during a crisis is a positive strategy. Providing information to the community on a consistent basis signals that the municipality is dedicated to transparency. The level of consistency with information dissemination is a sign that the municipality made the situation a shared priority with the community.

Tactics:

- Consult with legal counsel early to determine how the municipality will handle any legal proceedings and dissemination of information.
- Establish protocol for city handling of any internal, external, or independent investigations.
- Create a dedicated line of communication with the various stakeholders of the community.
- Provide guidelines to the press on its role in how the municipality disseminates information:
  - name and contact information of primary spokesperson for the municipality.
  - information on when, where, and how often information will be shared publicly.
- Identify the type(s) of dedicated lines that the municipality will create. (i.e. a website or direct call line for the community).
- Determine who will manage these dedicated lines of communication.

- Engage community stakeholders so they can promote use of dedicated lines of communication.
- Establish additional communication outlets to communicate with broader community and stakeholders. (i.e. city website, city e-news tool, press conference, print and broadcast news media, community meeting(s), social media, etc.).
- Communicate to county, state, and federal officials with updates and/or requests for support as appropriate.
- Family/victim(s) become(s) the public "face" of the racial tension and they are seeking answers, so they have accurate, regular, and up-to-date information from municipal leaders:
  - Create open and direct lines of communication between municipal leadership and the family/victim(s).
  - Plan how and who will provide family/victim(s) with regular updates; assign a designated point of contact between the municipality and the family/victim(s).
  - Exercise the five values mentioned earlier (empathy, transparency, authenticity, partnership and collaboration, and consistency) to help navigate the charged atmosphere; family members can help address the tension if municipal leadership establishes the right relationship.
  - Offer to establish a direct line of communication between the municipality's response team and the family/victim(s).
  - Assign a designated point of contact between the municipality and the family/victim(s).
  - Provide the family/victim(s) with direct access to municipal leadership (i.e. mayor).
  - Make counseling services available to family/victim(s).

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3. Responsiveness

Moments of racial tension are difficult to navigate while sustaining some of the most fundamental responsibilities government has to the community at large: public safety and protection of municipal property. Incidents that lead to crisis moments of racial tension create unique governance challenges for municipal leadership. Governments have the burden of keeping communities safe, protecting public property, and serving the community at all times. Municipalities must be careful and intentional in their decisions about how to respond to the community at different stages of this process.

Police response to crowds can escalate or diffuse a situation. Ideally, municipal leadership should work closely with law enforcement agencies in advance of any incident to discuss, decide, and prepare for different scenarios. It is critical for the municipality to establish its policies on how it will respond and provide the respective training for those executing these policies, practices, and procedures effectively.

Tactics:

• Create a dedicated team with defined roles among city leadership and staff can help ensure a coordinated response.

• Identify and assign roles to a dedicated response team.

• Establish a clear and direct line of communication with police chief.

• Follow established policies, practices, and procedures for crowd management, handling demonstrations, and responding to protests.

• Engage professionals who are trained to facilitate conversations about racial healing.

• Engage community stakeholders in the response process when applicable to listen to community concerns and to help de-escalate situations

• Provide space for community members to engage with others in the healing process.

• Understand the optics of the municipality's response to help prevent missteps (i.e., a large presence of law enforcement in riot gear can incite confrontation rather than prevent it).

- Understand that there is an underlying historical context to racial tension. The municipality has opportunities to create space for healing.

- Leverage community conversations, public spaces, and community stakeholders as touchpoints for community healing and to address any longstanding issues.

- Ensure the constitutional right of people to gather peacefully, a core principal in crowd management.

- Strive to ensure that de-escalation is top of mind.

- Embrace racial healing as a cornerstone to the city's response.

Additional considerations for advance planning:

- Develop a proactive plan on how the municipality will respond in the event an incident occurs to can help ensure that the response is coordinated.

- Strategically identify and select city staff to participate on a crisis response team.

- Develop scenarios on how best to respond to potential demonstrations.

- Establish clear expectations for how law enforcement will respond to various types of escalation during demonstrations.

- Develop training for law enforcement and municipal staff to prepare them for response to moments of racial tension; adequate training for law enforcement and other dedicated responders engaged in managing these tense situations can improve outcomes (i.e., de-escalation tactics).

- Establish the policies, practices, procedures and training for de-escalation (i.e., identify and review de-escalation protocols).

- Work with organizations that can train religious leaders and other community members to help keep demonstrations safe.

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Racial Tension: Looking Forward

No city wants to be confronted with a disaster—natural or human. Human disasters that spark racial tension are even more difficult to navigate. As your municipality works through the current incident, record feedback from family/victim(s), community leaders, and the community at-large. Local leaders must recognize that this work requires being comfortable being uncomfortable. This moment of racial tension is an opportunity for cities to use all the community engagement work to create stronger, more equitable outcomes for all who live in your municipality.

Governing for racial equity is continuing the uncomfortable conversations internally and with the community to identify where adjustments can be made within policies, practices, and procedures to prevent future incidents from occurring. Municipalities must recognize that the work continues once you have "moved past" an individual incident.

As long as racial inequities persist, the possibility of incidents sparked by racial tension may surface in any municipality. Be intentional about exploring the root causes of racial inequity and tension. Municipal leaders should continue the momentum and engage in constructive dialogue with the community to navigate the incident. Identifying and partnering with the community around long-term solutions will help to prevent further incidents. Governing for racial equity is the work within policies, practices, and procedures to eliminate racial disparities, heal racial divisions, and build more equitable communities for all. This is the work going forward.

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Racial Tension: Checklists

Crisis Response

This list provides some of the most critical steps your municipality will want to take to respond in moments of racial tension.

☐ **Convene all cabinet/executive level staff to ensure city leadership is briefed from outset.**

- Elected officials, managers, department heads, and key staff must operate from the same basis of knowledge and information.

☐ **Consult with municipal legal counsel to ascertain any issues of municipal liability.**

☐ **Identify options for independent investigation in consultation with legal counsel.**

☐ **Establish a clear and direct line of communication with police chief.**

- Ensure that all facts about the incident are accurately and collectively known in real time.

- Agree on timing of fact sharing with stakeholders and/or public.

☐ **Identify elected leadership/staff and clearly state roles for internal response team; (i.e. spokesperson, family/victim liaison, media liaison, etc.). Set the tone:**

- Publicly affirm commitment to the five values (*empathy, transparency, authenticity, partnership and collaboration, and consistency*).

- Update the family/victim(s) and the public with new information as developments occur.

☐ **Articulate a balanced message to law enforcement leadership and personnel.**

- Provide acknowledgement and appreciation of their work but also stress the need for thorough investigation into incident.

☐ **Prioritize outreach to family/victim(s).**

- Designate family/victim(s) liaison.

- Connect family/victim(s) to appropriate services.

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☐ **Engage community stakeholders.**

- Identify and engage a broad and diverse array of stakeholders who can bring knowledge, skills, abilities and assets to the crisis response management and post-crisis response efforts. (see Stakeholder Checklist, p. 22)

- Set up community conversations in partnership with community stakeholders to engage them in understanding and learning from the incident and to prevent future incidents.

☐ **Develop an asset map of community stakeholders. Establish direct lines of communication to:**

- Family/victim(s) – Discuss appointing a liaison so family has a direct line of communication to municipal leadership. Inquire if family would like to appoint a liaison as well for channeling all communications.

- Community stakeholders – Establish a direct line of communication to the identified community stakeholders and engage them in sharing accurate updates throughout the crisis.

- Public – Establish communication platform(s) (i.e. – website, hotline) that community can access to receive information/updates.

☐ **Establish/review crowd management response policies with police chief and response team.**

- Identify and review demonstration/protest polices, practices, procedures (Keep de-escalation at top of mind).

- Identify and review de-escalation protocols.

☐ **Continue to communicate updates to and any need for support from county, state, and federal officials.**

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Communications[13]

This checklist provides guidance on effective communication in the event of a critical incident in your municipality. It reinforces some of the suggestions in the Crisis Response Checklist provided on page 18 and should be used in tandem with it.

☐ Designate a primary spokesperson and a backup spokesperson.

☐ Understand your audience and who you are communicating with (Note: your key audience is always your constituents, even if you are on the national news).

☐ Gather information and be thoroughly briefed by relevant agency and community stakeholders before you make any written or verbal statements.

☐ Based on your audience, identify the appropriate communication methods and channels for disseminating information to this audience. Ensure that all audiences' language needs and access needs are considered and addressed (i.e. non-English speakers; hearing impaired; digital divide; elderly; etc.).

☐ Establish a regular schedule of updates to manage expectations around information-sharing; communicate the schedule transparently.

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☐ **Stick to the facts and acknowledge context:**

- Consider details that may be relevant beyond the single incident.
- Consider differing lived experience of impacted residents/communities. (See pp. 8-11 on Historical Impacts of Systemic Racism).
- Do not editorialize or express your personal opinion.

☐ **Do not simply say "no comment." Provide factual responses about why you may not have an answer in the moment and be transparent to the extent legally appropriate.**

☐ **Track and respond to media and community requests.**

☐ **Maintain a crisis communications inventory, a running document of statements, speakers, and coverage.**

☐ **Stay calm and composed even when asked tough questions.**

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Stakeholder

This list provides a framework for identifying and engaging a broad and diverse array of stakeholders who can bring knowledge, skills, abilities and assets to the crisis response management and post-crisis response efforts.

Every municipality is unique, and the range of stakeholders will vary. For each category below, consider:

1 Who is essential to the crisis response and the subsequent coordinated action and support?

2 Who in your community can contribute to a better response to and outcome from the crisis?

☐ Local government

- Municipal leadership: elected officials; appointed officials; department heads; line staff

☐ Law enforcement

- Police chief; deputies; community liaison officers

☐ County, state, and federal government

- County health and social services
- State legislators
- Federal law enforcement (in the event of an independent investigation)

☐ Non-profit, community-based organizations

- Local, private organizations providing social services; youth-serving organizations; cultural organizations

☐ Neighborhood groups

- Advisory neighborhood groups; neighborhood watch groups

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☐ **Religious community**

- Religious leaders; ensure multidenominational representation of all religious groups in your community

☐ **Health services/mental health services/ hospitals**

- Private health and mental health service providers; hospital representatives (i.e. ER, crisis response personnel)

☐ **Education community**

- Primary and secondary education officials
- College, university, community college representatives

☐ **Business community**

- Chamber of Commerce; major employers; business owners

☐ **National organizations**

- National organizations providing support to municipalities addressing issues of racial equity

☐ **Philanthropic organizations**

- Regional representatives of national philanthropic groups engaged in supporting racial equity work

The Future

The following list includes things to consider as your municipality continues the work of advancing racial equity. Challenges to the municipality create opportunities for constructive community engagement, identifying and sharing priorities, and focusing on root causes and solutions. This list will help your municipality think through how to use the momentum to govern for racial equity and push for changes within policies, practices, and procedures. This short list introduces many of the guidelines articulated in more detail in the **REAL Municipal Action Guide**.

- Develop formalized community engagement structure to continue the discussion on racial equity in policy, practice, and procedure (i.e. – task force/s, working group/s, commission/s).

- Develop, create, and implement infrastructure (in conjunction with community) to develop shared decision-making power between government and community, relative to policies, practices, and procedures.

- Document the challenges and lessons learned following this experience to codify it for reference in the future and share with peers.

- Secure additional resources to fund initiatives and/or policy, practice, procedural changes; consider partnerships with non-governmental organizations to sustain the work.

- Crisis intervention training for both municipal and community stakeholders.

- Implicit bias training for city leadership, city staff, and community stakeholders.

- Modify police officer trainings to emphasize de-escalation and alternative options to use of force.

- Explore areas of change within police department policy, practice, and procedure (i.e. – body cameras).

- Sustain ongoing community conversations on race relations, justice, and equity.

- Consider formalizing dedicated lines of community conversations (i.e. – counseling lines, website).

- Explore integration of racial healing into policy, practice, and procedure.

- Assess mental health and trauma-informed practice within law enforcement to ensure appropriate level and manner of response.

- Develop a racial equity plan.

Endnotes

1   http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/understanding-implicit-bias/

2   https://perception.org/research/explicit-bias/

3   DiAngelo, R. J., & Tatusian, A. (2016). White fragility. NY, NY: Public Science.

4   1934–1968: FHA Mortgage Insurance Requirements Utilize Redlining. (n.d.). Retrieved September, 2018, from
    http://www.bostonfairhousing.org/timeline/1934-1968-FHA-Redlining.html

5   https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/23/opinion/closing-the-racial-wealth-gap.html

6   Hilke, J., & University of Vermont. (n.d.). Landscape Change Program. Retrieved from
    http://www.uvm.edu/landscape/learn/impact_of_interstate_system.html

7   https://www.prrac.org/pdf/mohl.pdf

8   http://www.columbia.edu/cu/c2arl/pdf_files/USURRP_Phase_I_Final_Report.pdf

9   http://www.columbia.edu/cu/c2arl/pdf_files/USURRP_Phase_I_Final_Report.pdf

10 https://www.brennancenter.org/blog/complex-history-controversial-1994-crime-bill

11 https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cpus9701.pdf

12 https://sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Trends-in-US-Corrections.pdf

13 List adaptation resources:

    • Center for Public Issues Education; University of Florida; Crisis Communication Checklist 2014
    • International City/County Management Association; Crisis Communications Checklist 2016

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