



MAPPING

**Community Ecosystems
of Collective Care**

TOOLKIT



Contents

<u>Introduction: Weaving Collective Ecosystems of Community Care</u>	3
<u>Creating Community Ecosystems of Collective Care Cohort</u>	7
<u>Building on Black Feminist Abolitionist Histories</u>	10
<u>Mapping Your Ecosystem</u>	11
<u>Assessing Capacity and Creating Accountability</u>	20
<u>Accountability</u>	28
<u>Moving in Capacity-Informed Ways</u>	32
<u>Building Shared Definitions of Safety</u>	36
<u>Setting the Container</u>	37
<u>Assessing and Building Alignment around Shared Practices of Safety</u>	40
<u>Engaging Government Task Forces and Agencies</u>	43
<u>Lessons</u>	45
<u>Case Study: Dream Defenders</u>	52
<u>Case Study: Poder in Action</u>	56
<u>Case Study: Taller Salud</u>	61
<u>Case Study: African American Roundtable</u>	66
<u>Resources</u>	67

This toolkit was written by Shannon Perez-Darby and Andrea J. Ritchie, and designed by [Danbee Kim](#), with creative direction by Erin Glasco and proofreading by Ashton Yount. We are deeply grateful to the members of the Creating Collective Ecosystems of Community Care Cohort for generously sharing their work, dreams, lessons, and practices.

Introduction

Weaving Collective Ecosystems of Community Care



Since the 2020 Uprisings, there has been an explosion of interest, activity, and organizing around community-based approaches to building safer communities free from the violence of policing. Throughout this period, Interrupting Criminalization has been supporting these efforts by sharing expertise built over decades of organizing for and practicing transformative justice-based approaches to building liberatory communities with resources, toolkits, webinars, podcasts, skill-shares, trainings, cohorts, and learning and practice spaces, **including the following resources:**

- [What's Next: Safer and More Just Communities Without Policing](#)
- [Defund the Police - Invest in Community Care](#)
- [Navigating Public Safety Task Forces](#)
- [TJ Skill-Up Institute](#)
- [Building Your Abolitionist Toolbox](#)
- [One Million Experiments](#)
- [Building Coordinated Crisis Response Learning Space](#)

In many of these spaces, and within broader campaigns and movements to divest from policing and invest in the building blocks for safer communities, critical questions and conundrums began to surface from organizers.



“We are pivoting from a budget campaign to building up the things we want the city to invest in instead of cops – and need to better understand what exists and what we want to build.”

“We need to decide whether we are going to call or push for the creation of a department of community safety – and if we will participate in, resist, or ignore city initiatives to bring community safety programs under one department.”

“We need to develop a shared set of values across organizations doing this work in our city.”

“We need support to walk through a process of defining safety in our community.”

“We won a non-police mental health crisis response, but there are no prevention or aftercare services. So we can bring people to the hospital, but then they are just removed by hospital security because there aren’t resources to support them beyond a moment of crisis.”



AT THE CORE OF THESE CONCERNS ARE THE QUESTIONS OF:



How do we build shared definitions, values, and practices of safety across neighborhoods and organizations working within a city?



How do we weave our small, often relatively new community safety projects — ranging from mutual aid formations, to transformative justice practitioners, to neighborhood defense organizations, to community fridges, to violence interruption and crisis response teams operating at hyper-local levels — into robust, palpable neighborhood and city-wide ecosystems of care that people can feel, trust, and rely on more fully to collectively build greater safety and wellbeing?



How do we relate to state institutions and resources as we are doing so?



This toolkit offers some resources, responses, and additional questions to consider based on our work and practice spaces.

HOW DO WE GET THERE?

What's Next: Safer and More Just Communities Without Policing, published by IC in September 2020 as an initial offering to organizers advocating for divestment from policing in the context of the 2020 Uprisings, laid out ten key steps communities should consider when engaging these questions.

#1. Establish shared values and expectations

#2. Recruit implementation allies from among people working in life-affirming fields such as health care, education, youth development, and labor

#3. Establish city-wide planning processes identifying how communities will prevent, interrupt, and heal from harm, transform conditions that create harm, and ensure that residents are able to access the resources they need to thrive

#4. Advance budget justice and participatory budgeting

#5. Identify, scale, and build existing community safety projects into a larger ecosystem rooted in a paradigm of safety beyond policing

#6. Orient residents toward community safety practices and institutions

#7. Create structures and practices of collective learning, skill-sharing, strategizing, and governance among community safety strategies and institutions

#8. Establish coordination and communication networks across community partners

#9. Develop a plan to transition police and other carceral workers out of carceral work

#10. Engage in ongoing evaluation and improvement

Creating Community Ecosystems of Collective Care Cohort



In 2021, we began planning for and recruiting a cohort of organizations across the U.S. who were grappling with these questions and challenges. We specifically sought out groups who were already engaged in a process of cataloging, assessing, networking, scaling up, and strengthening non-police strategies for preventing, intervening in, and healing from harm, and meeting community needs, and weaving them into a neighborhood or citywide ecosystem of care. In March of 2022, we launched the Creating Community Ecosystems of Collective Care Cohort with over a dozen organizations working in community safety coalitions in Miami, Durham, NC, Seattle, Milwaukee, Phoenix, Minneapolis, and Atlanta.

The cohort was designed as a virtual space for organizers to learn, practice, and strategize together toward building more robust community ecosystems of care at the neighborhood and city-wide levels. We met virtually for a total of eight sessions, two to three hours per session, during which groups shared skills, strategies, practices, and tools.

DURING THESE SESSIONS, GROUPS DISCUSSED:

- **Assessing what resources, teams, and institutions currently exist in the community to prevent, interrupt, and heal from harm**
- **Discerning where there are gaps in the ecosystem and what skills, relationships, and infrastructure are required to fill them**
- **Developing shared values, practices, and communication across ecosystems of community care**
- **Assessing strategic relationships to municipal infrastructures of community safety**
- **Identifying new relationships, programs, supporting infrastructure, and next steps toward a more robust collective care ecosystem**
- **Determining feasible phases and timelines to build and strengthen ecosystems**

We recognized that none of us has all the answers; when it comes to creating collective ecosystems of community care, we are all building the bike as we ride it. Our intention was to learn from and accompany each other on the journey and to work together to find answers for each of our unique communities.

Our hope was that people could commit to 10 hours in between sessions to practice what they learned and bring their learnings back to the group. If that was not possible — which it often wasn't — we asked cohort members to stay with us and talk about what they were facing and what is needed to make this work possible in this moment or in the future.





We intentionally worked to create a space of joy, care, and curiosity, free of judgment, in which to share skills, strategies, practices, and tools. We also worked to remain capacity-informed, meaning that we changed, adapted, and paused the cohort in alignment with our actual capacity rather than our hope of what our capacity might be. By creating a space of shared learning, we hoped to model for each other what we have made possible in our communities. Not everything will work everywhere, but the collective lessons are powerful and can help us take the next indicated steps toward our collective visions of liberation.

In addition to breaking isolation, cross-pollinating across communities, and creating a virtual community of practice, our goal was to collectively create resources to support communities beyond the cohort who are grappling with similar questions that we could share at the end of the cohort. This toolkit is that vision come to life.

As communities face increased policing, criminalization, and organized abandonment; mounting state violence, repression, and authoritarianism; escalating white supremacist, homophobic, and transphobic violence; and climate collapse, building skilled, coordinated, expansive, and robust ecosystems of collective care is only becoming more and more essential to our collective survival. We hope that these shared learnings, processes, and resources will be helpful to communities seeking to strengthen networks of community care and advance transformative justice.



Building on Black Feminist Abolitionist Histories

As we do this work, it is important to remember that these are not new practices or questions; Black women, girls, trans people, and feminists have been building communities and networks of care and shared survival for centuries. Within the past two decades, there are a number of abolitionist experiments we can learn from, including the Audre Lorde Project's Safe Outside the System, Sista II Sista's Sistas Liberated Ground, and the Oakland Power Projects and Build the Block, both led by members of Critical Resistance.

We kicked off the Creating Ecosystems of Collective Care Cohort with a presentation by kai lumumba barrow, a Black feminist abolitionist organizer and artist and former staff member at Critical Resistance and INCITE! Feminists of Color Against Violence. As a New York City organizer, kai was instrumental to conceiving and practicing the creation of neighborhood-based "harm free zones," which have been adapted and practiced by a number of organizations in New York City, Berkeley, New Orleans, and Durham, NC.

To learn more about harm free zones, please read "Dare to Dream" written by kai for Spirit House, an anchor of the Durham Harm Free Zone, and check out the excerpt of Practicing New Worlds: Abolition and Emergent Strategies on Harm Free Zones in Appendix A.



Mapping Your Ecosystem

**“Everyone is a researcher; everything is a map.”
– cohort participant**

Ecosystem Mapping

MY EXISTING ECOSYSTEM

--	--	--

--

--	--	--

--

Ecosystem Mapping

THE ECOSYSTEM WE NEED RIGHT NOW

(fka The Ideal Ecosystem)

--	--	--

--

--	--	--

--

Ecosistema Cartografía

MI ECOSISTEMA EXISTENTE

--	--	--

--

--	--	--

--

Ecosistema Cartografía

EL ECOSISTEMA QUE NECESITAMOS AHORA MISMO

--	--	--

--

--	--	--

--

Ecosystems

Case Study #1 Chicago, IL

Food Systems

- The Rogers Park Yard Sharing Network
- MASK Free Store & Free Fridges
- Westridge Community Response Team

Safer Streets

- One Lawndale
- Men Making a Difference
- So Fresh Saturdays

Childcare & Support

- Chicago Childcare Collective
- Mask Peace Academy
- Monthly Diaper Club

Throughout the cohort, members shared the strategies they used to map their ecosystems.

Black Brilliance Research Project

The Black Brilliance Research Project was formed in the cauldron of the 2020 Uprisings in Seattle to build a vision of community-based safety through participatory budgeting. The project trained and compensated over a hundred community-based researchers from all walks of life, with a particular focus on criminalized communities, to engage their family, friends, neighbors, and networks around three simple questions:

- What creates true community safety?
- What creates true community health?
- What do you need to thrive?

The results were organized into five issue areas, with specific recommendations for existing and new programs. Learn more about their process through the Black Brilliance Research Report, which includes a “cookbook” for community-based research in its Appendix A.

From this foundation, Seattle community members built a community response cohort of 13 people who were paid to attend skill building sessions covering a range of topics including healing justice, de-escalation, safety planning, and gunshot wound treatment.

Our Cities, Our Future

Our Cities, Our Future — a Dallas-based collective of femmes and gender non-conforming organizers and cultural workers — created a bilingual ambassador program where community members led visioning sessions across the city to inform the creation of a budget detailing investments needed to create safety in their communities.

Durham Beyond Policing

Durham Beyond Policing is a grassroots formation to divest from policing and prisons and reinvest municipal resources into supporting the health and wellbeing of Black and Brown communities, benefiting all community members in Durham, NC. Durham Beyond Policing initially came together to oppose the 2016 plan by the Durham City Council to devote \$71 million to building a new police headquarters. The formation developed a proposal for a community-led safety and wellness task force.

As part of their ecosystem mapping, they used a geographic map of Durham County to plot their organizational and community relationships, using proximity to show closeness or alignment, mapping lineages, and as a tool for storytelling. This mapping was used as a tool to help understand who community members can reach out to for support in navigating safety, conflict, and other forms of support.

The Outreach Squad built out an “alternatives to policing” resource guide showing where people in the community can go to try and get needs met and identifying the likelihood that each resource would engage with law enforcement.

Durham Beyond Policing’s “East Durham Community Design Project” is conducting a participatory action research project where Black and Brown community members are interviewing each other in order to co-create a new tool to reduce harm and violence in their homes and neighborhoods, using their existing resources and relationships.

WHEN MAPPING COMMUNITY SAFETY RESOURCES IN YOUR COMMUNITY, SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK INCLUDE:

- **What does the group or program offer?**
- **When and where does it operate?**
- **Who can access it?**
- **How accessible is the resource?**
 - Language access?
 - Safety planning options for undocumented folks?
 - Is the resource physically accessible?
 - Is it welcoming to drug users? People in the sex trades?
 - Is it welcoming to neurodivergent people?
 - Is it welcoming to queer people? Trans and nonbinary people?
- **Who is involved in running it?**
- **What values guide their work?**
 - How do they practice their values?
- **If conditions shift, who has the power/ability/access to change how the resource is functioning?**
- **Do they ever engage law enforcement? ICE? The family policing system (aka the “child welfare” or “foster” system)? Coerced medical interventions?**
 - Why?
 - How?
- **How does the resource work? Is it government funded? Mutual aid? Foundation funded?**
- **What data do they collect about people who access the resource? Who is it shared with?**
- **Who are the decision makers?**
- **Are there parts of the program or people involved who are committed to not calling cops?**
 - When do they operate/work there?

What other questions would you ask? What additional information would you want to know about community safety resources in your community?



Assessing Capacity and Creating Accountability

The process of mapping community safety resources can be overwhelming — both because of the scale of the task, the number of people we need to talk to, and the number of questions we need to ask and because of the breadth of unmet need in our communities. Many of our communities have been experiencing organized abandonment for decades, with the cops serving as the only resource offered by the state to meet every form of conflict, harm, or need and leaving individuals and families with fewer and fewer resources to draw on. Society’s reliance on policing has not only captured our imaginations about what constitutes public safety, it has consumed an ever growing share of our resources and has isolated, deskilled, and conditioned many of us to outsource solving problems within our communities to a violent, carceral state.

Cohort members shared that, in many cases, the process of mapping safety resources and needs in their communities exhausted their members’ time, resources, and capacity, which meant that mapping ended up being both the beginning and the end of the process. Others talked about feeling pulled to extend beyond their capacity and skills to fill the gaps and build the things their communities needed on a timeline that reflected the urgency of the need, but not the group’s capacity, and quickly becoming drained, devolving into conflict, or reaching individual and collective limits.

So many of us move based on aspirational capacity; we do this work because we need it for our own lives and communities. The need feels urgent even though the resources are limited. There are so many things that are needed to create a lived reality free from policing and criminalization. The need can feel so great that it's easy for the overwhelm to envelop us so much that nothing feels possible.

Our second session emphasized the importance of assessing and moving within our actual individual and group capacities as we build our collective ecosystems of community care.

As cohort members engaged in mapping processes between sessions, they were invited to reflect on the following questions – first individually, and then collectively as an organization.

Capacity Check-in

INSTRUCTIONS

Use this exercise to check-in around your personal and organizational goals, paying special attention to your personal capacity and priorities, before (and after) conducting the Ecosystem Mapping exercises with your group.

What I/we NEED to do right now to bring us closer to the ecosystem we need:

What I/we WANT to do right now to bring us closer to the ecosystem we need:

What I/we HAVE to do right now to bring us closer to the ecosystem we need:

What I/we CAN do right now to bring us closer to the ecosystem we need:

Reflection Questions

What came up for you as you filled out these quadrants?

Where is there alignment? Disalignment?

What might you do to increase your capacity to accomplish these goals?

During the second session, we delved deeper into the capacity questions that emerged from these reflections – both in terms of completing mapping processes within the month between sessions and moving toward identifying steps to strengthen their communities' ecosystems of care. We noted that there is often a lack of alignment between individual and organizational assessments of capacity and asked ourselves what might be pushing us to move beyond our personal and collective capacities when doing this work.

Discussion

How did it feel to map your individual capacity?

What does self-accountability look like in relationship to your individual capacity?

How did it feel to map your collective capacity?

Did you have a shared understanding of your capacity?

What does accountability (to each other, your community) look like in relationship to your capacity?

How did it feel to map the ecosystem that exists and the ecosystem you need?

Barriers, challenges, curiosities?

How did that affect your capacity assessment?



Questions to Consider

What might be pushing you/your org past capacity?

Passion

Calling

Need/urgency

The city is moving

Why is it intolerable to acknowledge capacity limitations?

Curiosities

Should you be the org to meet the need?

If not, who can?

Is there another option that is not a full on response? What strategies can you imagine instead of a full on response?

What is something you/your organization does well? How can you connect what your organization does well with the need identified?

What is your role? What skills do you bring to it?

Accountability

Accountability — to oneself and to a collective — is essential to navigating questions of capacity and to creating collective ecosystems of care that are sustainable in the long term. Too often, our hopefulness and visions for change run into the wall of interpersonal and inter-group conflict. Strong personal and group accountability skills can be important tools for supporting collectives to stay in right relationship and move together towards a shared vision.

In our second session, Shannon Perez-Darby, co-founder of the [Accountable Communities Consortium](#), shared tools for building and strengthening self-accountability, one of the core building blocks of collective accountability. Accountability is being responsible to yourself and those around you for your choices and the consequences of those choices. Many of us are under-practiced at meaningful accountability because we've never had the support or modeling of what non-punitive accountability looks like in our everyday lives. Too often, we rush to questions of how we address complex questions of accountability outside the criminal legal system without building a foundation of everyday accountability.

Self-accountability is a process we do with and for ourselves. It's a practice of getting grounded in our values, understanding our patterns, and then noticing when our actions are not aligned with our values. This foundation of self-accountability can help us build a foundation where accountability in our collectives is possible, expected, and likely.



SELF-ACCOUNTABILITY

Centered


Self-accountability is a grounded process we do with and **for ourselves**

Proactive

It's pro-active accountability, critically thinking about choices in advance

Foundational

Self-accountability is an essential skill if we want to look at how to take accountability in relationship with others



Accountable Communities Consortium



AUTORRESPONSABILIDAD

Centrado


La auto-responsabilidad es un proceso que hacemos con nosotros mismos, para nosotros mismos

Proactiva

Es responsabilidad proactiva, pensando críticamente sobre nuestras elecciones de antemano

Fundacional

La auto-responsabilidad es una habilidad esencial si deseamos ver cómo tomar responsabilidad en las relaciones



Accountable Communities Consortium

ASK YOURSELF

What
happened?

What was
going on
for me at
the time?

What am I
going to
do about
it?

Accountable Communities Consortium

PREGÚNTASE

¿Qué
pasó?

¿Qué me
estaba
pasando a
mí?

¿Qué voy
a hacer al
respecto?

Accountable Communities Consortium

“Did I say I would get the agenda to you by Tuesday, and now it’s Friday, and I still haven’t gotten to it?” Self-accountability is about noticing the gap between what we said we would do and what happened. It’s not about beating ourselves up. There might be a lot of very important reasons we didn’t get a chance to finish the agenda. There may have been a community member with urgent needs we were helping to support, or we may have over committed, wanting to get it done without the capacity to do so.

Self-accountability invites us to ask ourselves what happened, what was going on for me at the time and, most importantly, what am I going to do about it? Accountability requires reflection but, most importantly, is about action. Apology without changed action is not accountability.

When each member of our collectives practices self-accountability, it helps to build a foundation of collective action within our shared values and commitments. When mapping how accountability works while organizing together, some core questions include:

- What values ground us in being accountable?
- What practices do group members have in place to notice when there is a gap between their values and their actions?
- Who are we accountable to in our group and in our communities?
- How do they know we are accountable to them?
- How would we know we are acting outside our values?
- How can our collective members support us to be accountable?
 - What are the feedback mechanisms?
 - How do we address feedback? Failures?

For more tools on centered self-accountability see, [Centered Self-Accountability](#) by Shannon Perez-Darby, [The Four Parts of Accountability & How To Give A Genuine Apology](#) by Mia Mingus, and Skillshare: Project Nia [Abolitionist Toolbox](#) | [An Introduction to Restorative Conversations](#) by nuri nusrat.



Moving in Capacity-Informed Ways

As we grappled with issues of capacity and accountability when building collective ecosystems of community care, we invited cohort members to press PAUSE (Put on the brakes, Assess, Understand, Self-Accountability, Evaluate next steps) and to ask themselves the following questions when contemplating the gaps in their capacity to meet the needs of communities ravaged by divestment.



Questions to Consider

P	Put on the Brakes
A	Assess
U	Understand
S	Self-Accountability
E	Evaluate Next Steps

How do you **PAUSE**?

How might you build in more **PAUSE** practices in your organization/ecosystem?

We talked about how pressing PAUSE doesn't necessarily mean stopping the work altogether, and we explored methods of continuing to move in capacity-informed ways to meet community needs by asking the following questions.

- * How does it feel in your body to press PAUSE? Your heart? Your spirit? How do we acknowledge and move through the grief of our capacity not matching the urgency of need and our desire to meet it?
- * How do we come to shared understandings of capacity, and how to move in alignment with it?
- * What's one thing your organization does well and with ease? What might it look and feel like to just do one thing well? How can that one thing serve the community's needs?
- * What are the dangers of moving beyond capacity?
 - Collapse
 - Conflict
 - Burn-out
 - Creating a felt experience in our communities that community ecosystems of collective care are not reliable, which undermines our long-term efforts to build a world beyond policing

Based on your responses to these questions:

- * Should you be the organization to meet the need?
 - If not, who can? How can you support them?
- * Is there another option that is not a full-on response? What strategies might you imagine beyond a full response?
 - There are options! Move through the 5Ds:

- Do it
- Don't do it
- Delay doing it
- Do just enough
- Delegate





Building Shared Definitions of Safety

Gaining clarity on shared values and building shared definitions and practices around what constitutes safety and how we achieve it are essential to building strong, sustainable ecosystems of community care.



Setting the Container

We began by discussing how charged conversations around safety — a core human need — can become and the importance of carefully creating containers in which to have them. [nuri nusrat](#), a former member of the [Ahimsa Collective](#), shared a practice for preparing space for conversations about how we think about, understand, and experience safety.

Values Sharing Exercise

Facilitator Notes: Ask the group to sit in a circle formation. If on zoom, assign a sharing order on zoom. Let each person know will have a chance to share without interruption in the seating order (or zoom order). They also have a right to pass.

I don't do this exercise in isolation. I do this exercise after doing an icebreaker, check-in question, and after co-creating community agreements. I recommend doing all of those -or at least a check in and community agreements before this exercise.



Step 1: Take a piece of paper and draw an outline of a sun with 5 rays.

Step 2: Think about a person or animal or place where you feel welcomed and accepted to share authentically. Some of us may not have this, so the invitation is to imagine what it might feel like to be able to share authentically and be accepted.

- For some folks it might be a friend, for others it could be a place-like in bed writing in their journal. F

Step 3: Please think of some of the values that the person, animal, or place offers that makes you feel accepted. (For example, my dog gives unconditional love or the beach allows me to be quiet, or my friend brings humor).

Write one value in each ray of the sun.

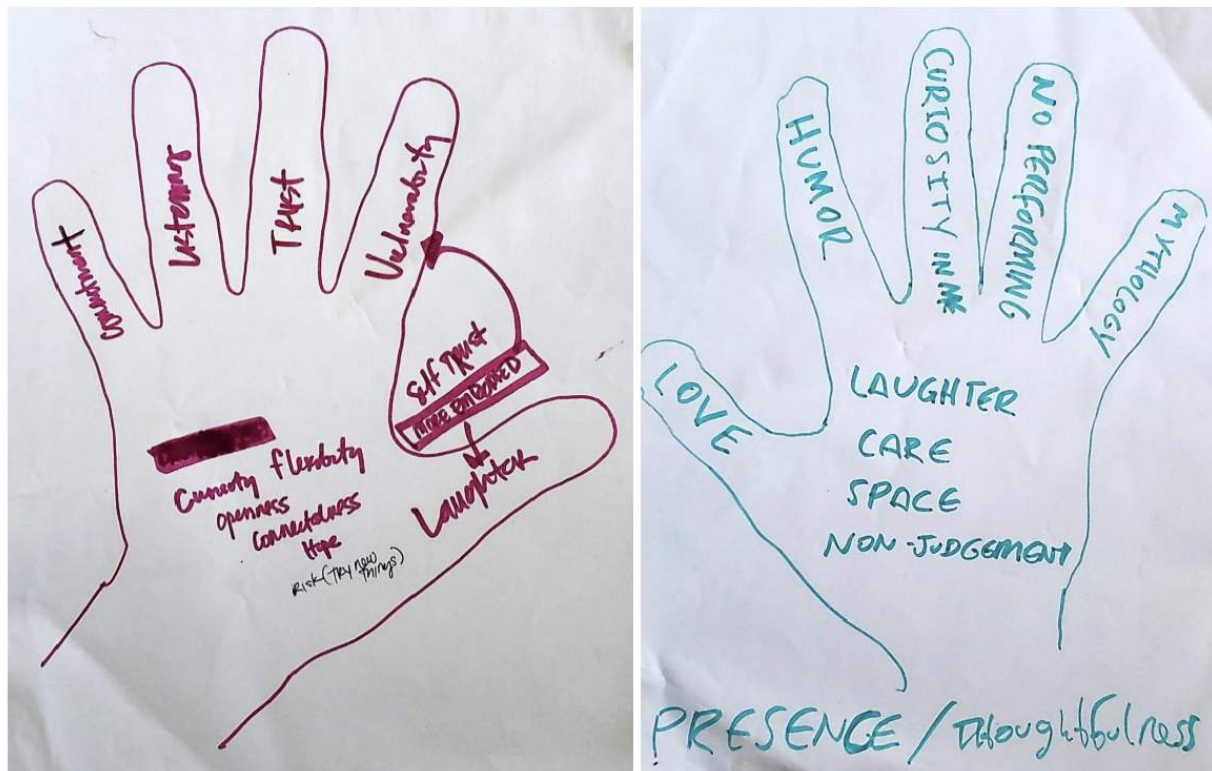
Step 4: Next, think of how you show up when you get all of the things you wrote in the rays of the sun. When you get all of the things you wrote in the rays of the sun, what are you able to offer? Write what you are able to offer in the center of the sun. (For example: I bring compassion, real listening, etc.)

In the circle or zoom order, invite each person is invited to share: 1-2 values they wrote in the ray of the sun, along with a story about who/where they thought of when writing it. And to also share what they wrote in their palm (what they can offer).

Step 5: Facilitator can frame this as, now we know a little more about what each person here needs to feel like they can show up somewhere authentically.

Step 6: Do one round of check-out or appreciations to close the space.

Here are some examples of this exercise from others. (Folks who did this drew a hand instead of a sun).



For more information on restorative conversations, please visit [“A Restorative Conversation Toolkit,”](#) created by nuri.

Assessing and Building Alignment around Shared Practices of Safety

Interrupting Criminalization Transformative Justice Fellow Shira Hassan shared a framework for building shared definitions and practices of relationship based organizing.

- ✱ **Identify the organizations in your ecosystem with whom you are in deep political alignment and have shared practice values**

- ✱ **Map out how you understand and practice safety, focusing less on wordsmithing the perfect definition of safety and more on naming how you live out that definition in practice**

What kind of space are you creating? Who is it centered around? Who is welcome? Who is not allowed in (i.e., cops, adults, social workers, mandated reporters, etc.)?

What does safety look like/feel like to the people who are centered in the space?

- Food
- Space to rest or sleep
- Child friendly

How do you navigate harm that happens within the space? What steps do you take to prevent it?

How do you respond to:

- Drugs or alcohol?
- Violence?
- Police presence?

*** Note where there are similarities and differences in your definitions and practices, and assess whether any action is required to address them**

*** Remain in communication and collaboration around practicing values of safety**

*** Expand conversations to groups who you might be less closely politically aligned with, but want to be in relationship with, moving in concentric circles outward from most closely aligned to least closely aligned**

*** Engage in political education and skill shares with organizations who are open to shifting their definitions and practices of safety**

*** Gain clarity around where alignment is not possible and how to move in relationship within the ecosystem**

*** Cohort members were asked to reflect on:**

- How they build and tend to relationships*
- How they have conversations about safety with people in their lives*



Engaging Government Task Forces and Agencies

Our final session of 2022 focused on how groups were engaging with municipal departments of community safety — whether they had been created in response to movement demands, as is the case in Durham, or pre-existed the 2020 Uprisings.

Some groups, like Durham Beyond Policing, described themselves as “flying dangerously close to the state” by fully participating in the community safety task force they fought for and building out unarmed non-police community crisis support teams completely funded by the government. Others, like African American Roundtable, tried to work with the existing city Office of Violence Prevention but quickly withdrew when it became clear that police were central to the office’s vision and practice.

Others, like Seattle Solidarity Budget, supported groups in applying for funding they had won for community safety projects through their budget organizing by:

- Conducting outreach to small community-based safety projects identified by the Black Brilliance research project and other mapping efforts
- Offering them support to apply for funding, sometimes sitting with them to complete the application
- Working with an ally inside city government to support groups in applying
- Encouraging large non-profits that were not aligned with the values and practices of the ecosystem they were building to NOT apply for the funds won through budget campaigns

And still others, like Relationships Evolving Possibilities in Minneapolis, “don’t mess with city money” because of the strings attached that are not aligned with their values and practices, including moving at the speed of trust, taking intentional time to reflect on and assess how their program is operating and the impacts it is having in the community, and refusing collaboration with any carceral state systems that are often required by city, state, or federal funding.





Lessons

Collectively, we learned some important lessons about creating collective ecosystems of community care.

#1

IT TAKES TIME

We were overly ambitious in assuming that even groups who were actively engaged in this work could map their existing and ideal ecosystems, solidify shared definitions and practices of safety, weave stronger ecosystems of care, resource them, and conduct outreach to community members to engage the ecosystem, all while sharing back lessons learned in between monthly meetings.

Mapping and building ecosystems of community care is a process that takes years, even decades. It takes time to build relationships and trust; to experiment with, practice, and refine collaborations; to have challenging conversations; and to navigate inevitable bumps on the road. While the six month time frame of the cohort enabled us to crystallize important questions and practices to guide the process, it is unrealistic to expect any significant progress to be made within that time frame.

We paused the cohort in September 2022 to make space for groups to integrate and practice what we learned. When we reconvened in January 2023, cohort members, who were feeling discouraged after the first four months of the cohort, returned energized, taking turns reporting on, marveling at, and celebrating what they had been able to accomplish with additional time. And, still, they all described a long road ahead.

#2

IT TAKES PEOPLE POWER AND ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

While we recruited coalitions of groups working in a particular community to the cohort, often only a single staff person from each organization was able to participate. These staff members described feeling isolated and overwhelmed in doing this work within their organizations on top of other responsibilities. They also struggled to bring back and translate what they learned in the cohort with their comrades in the time frame between sessions. While some found the workbook questions helpful to move through as a group between sessions, others were not able to engage staff or membership in work connected to the cohort.

- Some groups dropped out of the cohort early on due to lack of capacity to fully engage the work. Others stuck with it and continued to grapple with how to gauge and act within their capacity while still making bold moves toward building ecosystems of community care.
- Poder in Action addressed this issue by allocating a full-time staff member to this work and incorporating the mapping process into its organizational strategic plan, pairing it with development of The Pueblo's Budget that would demand the resources needed to strengthen and build out the ecosystem.
- Other groups similarly integrated the mapping process into their organization's ongoing work, with much greater success.

Additionally, IC had to contend with our own capacity to host, facilitate, and support the cohort; in the years following the Uprisings, many of us were being pulled in multiple directions as we worked to create resources, trainings, practice spaces, and tools to help sustain the momentum of abolitionist organizing that blossomed in 2020. Alongside cohort members, we had to assess our own aspirational capacity against our actual capacity, and the impacts of the gap between the two on the work we were trying to do. We too had to recognize that the work of building an ecosystem to support organizers building ecosystems of community care needed more time and organizational capacity.

#3

COMMUNITIES ENTER THE CONVERSATION FROM DIFFERENT PLACES AND AT DIFFERENT STAGES

Some formations, like those in Atlanta, Durham, Phoenix, and Miami had been investigating community needs and, in some cases, building out municipal community safety task forces and programs for years, long before the 2020 Uprisings. Others were just at the beginning of these conversations and practices. While groups were able to learn from each others' experiences and support each other no matter where they were in the process, going forward we will contemplate how to address different levels of experience within the cohort without creating hierarchies among groups given that, in truth, relatively speaking, all of us are close to the beginning of the journey.

#4

COMMUNITIES ARE BUILDING AND STRENGTHENING ECOSYSTEMS AT DIFFERENT SCALES

Some cohort members were working at a city-wide level while others were working at the level of communities, neighborhoods, or even just a few blocks. While we originally imagined splitting the cohort into breakout groups based on which approach they were taking, we found that, at least at this stage, groups were grappling with the same issues.

As we paused the cohort between September 2022 and January 2023, we invited participants to consider the following questions.

*** How does it feel to PAUSE this cohort right now? How might you build in more PAUSE practices in your organization/ecosystem?**

*** What were your original goals for joining this cohort? How will you continue to work toward those goals?**

- *What can you individually/organizationally commit to doing between now and January 2023 to advance your original goals for joining this cohort?*
- *What are some existing spaces held by IC and others that can support this work?*

*** How are conditions for this work shifting?**

*** How are we resourcing this work?**



WHERE ARE WE STRONG?

*** Where are we learning/growing?**

- *What tools/resources do we need to support areas where we need to learn/grow?*

*** What could next steps for this group look like with more time and capacity to practice?**

- *Quarterly check-ins/report backs?*
- *Role plays?*
- *Experimentation and workshopping in one or two places supported by the whole group?*
- *Something else?*



When the cohort reconvened in January 2023, cohort members shared the progress they had made and agreed to meet quarterly to train each other on the methods they had used to map, build, and strengthen their collective ecosystems of care. What follows are summaries of three of these trainings.

In 2024, we will continue to assess how we might best support cohort members in creating collective ecosystems of community care going forward.



Case Study

DREAM DEFENDERS

The Dream Defenders was founded in April 2012 after the tragic killing of 17-year old Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman in Sanford, Florida. That Spring, young Black, Latinx, and Arab youth marched from Daytona Beach, Florida, to Sanford, Florida, where Trayvon Martin was killed. With that fire in their bellies, they then went back to their communities and campuses to organize. One year later, after George Zimmerman was acquitted, the Dream Defenders occupied the Florida State Capitol for 30 nights and 31 days, demanding a repeal of the Stand Your Ground law. Although the law wasn't changed, Dream Defenders built the groundwork for a movement that would spark thousands of young people in Florida and across the country to take action.

Today, the Dream Defenders is organizing Black and Brown youth to build power in their communities to advance a vision of safety and security — away from prisons, deportation, and war — and toward healthcare, housing, jobs, and movement for all.

In June 2023, Dream Defenders generously shared their mapping experience and important lessons learned with the Ecosystems of Collective Care Cohort.

STRATEGIES

- ✱ **Conducted listening sessions in 2015 after the murder of Mike Brown and heard communities need to know how they would be safe without police**
- ✱ **Took time to develop policies and practices on addressing harm when it happens within the organization**
- ✱ **Used that learning to organize and build on a community/neighborhood level**
- ✱ **Mapped who in the community was positioned to help build out a serious community safety strategy – including violence interrupters, therapists, and health care providers – and built a coalition based on that mapping**
 - Coalition partners: Dream Defenders, The Circle of Brotherhood, Dade County Street Response, and Touching Miami with Love
- ✱ **Took time to build shared trust and shared strategy within the coalition through grounding regularly in transformative justice values and focused on the following goals and commitments**
 - How do we reduce violence in Miami, with a focus on gun violence?
 - How do we keep people out of the prison system?
 - How do we improve health outcomes?
 - How does our project organize people to systemic solutions and build power?
 - How do we use services as a basis to advocate toward reduced policing and more programs like ours? How do we build a coherent decarceral survivor-led movement?

Together, the coalition built an urgent care clinic, mobile crisis program, and trauma recovery center offering counseling, case management, stabilization, and healing as well as youth programming focused on conflict and healing modalities under the umbrella of the [Healing and Justice Center](#). Learn more about the center and its work in its [2022 annual report](#) and [2023 annual report](#).

LESSONS SHARED

Harm is still happening — Harm doesn't stop while people organize; learning about building towards a new world while dealing with active harm happening in the present

Getting on the same page — Learning the importance of taking the time to build relationships, have shared training and skills, and building trust, especially where there is not full political alignment; Dream Defenders emphasized the importance of strong policies and protocols establishing central standards for outcomes

MOUs— Dream Defenders shared the importance of having memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with community partners. Initially, the coalition had co-applied for grant funding. Throughout the years, as staff and coalition members changed, they learned it was important to have clearly defined, written roles and expectations of each coalition member.

Political alignment — Multiple folks in the coalition were not abolitionists but were trusted folks in the community; Dream Defenders had to learn how to organize across lack of political alignment through deep relationships, study, and conversations with one other about how they see the world, what world they want to build, and where they could find alignment around ending the violence of police and prisons.

Count small wins — Dream Defenders gathered feedback from families and celebrated when they were able to have a positive impact.

Return to mapping — As conditions change, it's important to return to mapping



Case Study

PODER IN ACTION

Poder in Action builds power by investing in people’s power and then providing support as they realize and exercise their power. Poder does this through leadership development rooted in lived experience and inherent leadership. Poder provides support through trainings, invests in building leaders’ capacity by sharing decision-making, and supports them as they identify their own priorities and solutions. Poder leaders build coalitions, plan campaigns, and execute strategies that combine elements of advocacy, electoral, and direct action theories of change in order to disrupt and dismantle unjust systems and determine a new future. In 2018 and 2019, Poder in Action staff and community volunteers surveyed over 10,000 people, mostly in South Phoenix and Maryvale, Arizona, about their experiences and perceptions of police. The survey asked residents about safety, police interactions, and perceptions of the Phoenix Police Department. Their findings are summarized in “Phoenix Futuro: A People's Report On Policing And Safety.”

In July of 2023, Poder in Action shared the community mapping that took place as part of the Participatory Research Phase of building The Pueblo’s Budget. The Pueblo’s Budget was created through a large-scale outreach and survey strategy that crystallized four priorities in the community, which then formed the basis for articulating the following budget demands.

- Increase access to mental health and substance use resources for BIPOC residents
- Increase affordable housing, supportive services, and low barrier shelter
- Increase resources for parents and caregivers of children
- Increase resources for BIPOC youth ages 14-24

STRATEGIES

* Neighborhood-based organizing

The focus of the participatory research and mapping project was the neighborhood of West Phoenix with outreach primarily taking place in Maryvale, Arizona, where 75% of the population is Latinx.

* Promotores

Drawing inspiration from the work of Our Cities Our Futures in Dallas, Poder trained 36 trusted community members to support research into what fosters the health and well-being of the community.

- Promotores received one orientation and one four-hour training.
- Sessions were offered in English and Spanish.
- Promotores held 32 community/house meetings with a total of 335 participants.
- Community members were offered stipends to participate.

Participant + Worksheet Data (Mid October-Late October)

Participants

- Recruited through relational organizing
- 26% lived in Maryvale
- 79% under age 44
- 40% made less than \$35,000 / year
- 73% Latinx / 14% white / 5% Black
- 18% identified as LGBTQIA+ / 5% as trans / non-binary
- 8% identified as disabled
- A lot of folks that were familiar with Poder and many that weren't

Worksheets

- Are there any resources you love or use often in your neighborhood?
- What are resources in your neighborhood that you have tried using or want to use, but cannot because they are broken, unreliable, or hard to access?
- What resources do you want or need in your neighborhood, but to your knowledge they are not available?

Making Meaning

- Only gave ourselves two weeks to do an initial pass through of the data and identify the items that would become part of our budget
 - Most worksheets were handwritten
- Asked partner orgs about things that were outside our scope of knowledge (which was a lot of things)
- Major Issues: Quality of Parks, Street Lighting, Cleanliness of Streets, Access to Restrooms, Access to Mental Health Care, Access to Affordable Housing
- It's really hard to dream beyond what exists when basic, quality of life shit is so needed

✿ Decision Making

After the data from the community meetings was analyzed, Poder held The Pueblo's Budget Convening. Over 100 community members came together to help prioritize the needs emerging from community meetings and build the budget demands.

Pueblo's Budget Convening (October 29)

- 100+ community members
- Dot voting exercise used to identify priorities
- 62 potential budget line items for folks to choose from- inside + outside the state
- Organized into 6 stations for folks to rotate through
 - 5 stations with investment items
 - 1 station to support the campaign
- Afterwards counted up the dots to figure out people's priorities



✿ Documenting the Work

The Pueblo's Budget (in English and Spanish) was created in part to document and share the process with the community and so that organizers in other places could learn from the work done in this community.

Building Our Budget

- After the convening, we did a second pass through of the worksheet data and identified 7 additional items
- Jared supported us in pricing our items
- Decided to include all 69 items in the budget, but created a scoring rubric to help us figure out specific advocacy priorities
 - How many votes did this investment get at the convening?
 - Do we have any partner organizations already advocating for or supporting this investment?
 - If this is implemented, will this expand police presence in a community or expand the police budget? *(if the answer is probably or likely, we need to seriously consider how this needs to change for us to advocate for it)*
 - How easy will it be for us to get this investment implemented?
 - How much will this investment cost to implement?
 - What kind of traction does this investment have?
- In the midst of all this we also wrote a report that we're hoping other orgs can use as a guide if they wanna build a people's budget



LESSONS SHARED

Participatory research is critical – While the organization was able to reach a large number of people through their 2018-2019 survey, the initial survey questions were too general, and the total number of questions asked on the surveys were so many that it made data analysis really difficult. While the “Phoenix Futuro” report findings were helpful, they didn’t offer enough information on what people were relying on and needed to feel safer in their communities.

Participatory research requires a great deal of infrastructure and capacity

- **Logistical needs** – Doing things like paying 32 promotores through gift cards was values-aligned in terms of ensuring that people directly impacted by policing and immigration enforcement could lead the process, and logistically time consuming. It is important to remember the capacity it takes to make right on our political commitments.
- **Tools** – Poder emphasized the importance of having tools ready to share with community members. These tools include sample agendas, sign-up sheets, facilitator guides, project overview documents, report back templates, meeting materials guides, discussion worksheets, and event planning guides.
- **Hand written surveys** – Worksheets at the community meetings were completed by hand. There was tons of excitement about the response and interest, and it was time consuming to go through over 300 hand written responses. Investing in tablets and using technology might have made the process easier but perhaps less accessible to some community members.
- **Timeline** – The organization allocated four months for the whole process and only two weeks for data analysis; organizers HIGHLY recommend taking more time than this!

Making space and offering tools for dreaming beyond what exists – “It’s really hard to dream beyond what exists when basic, quality of life shit is so needed.”

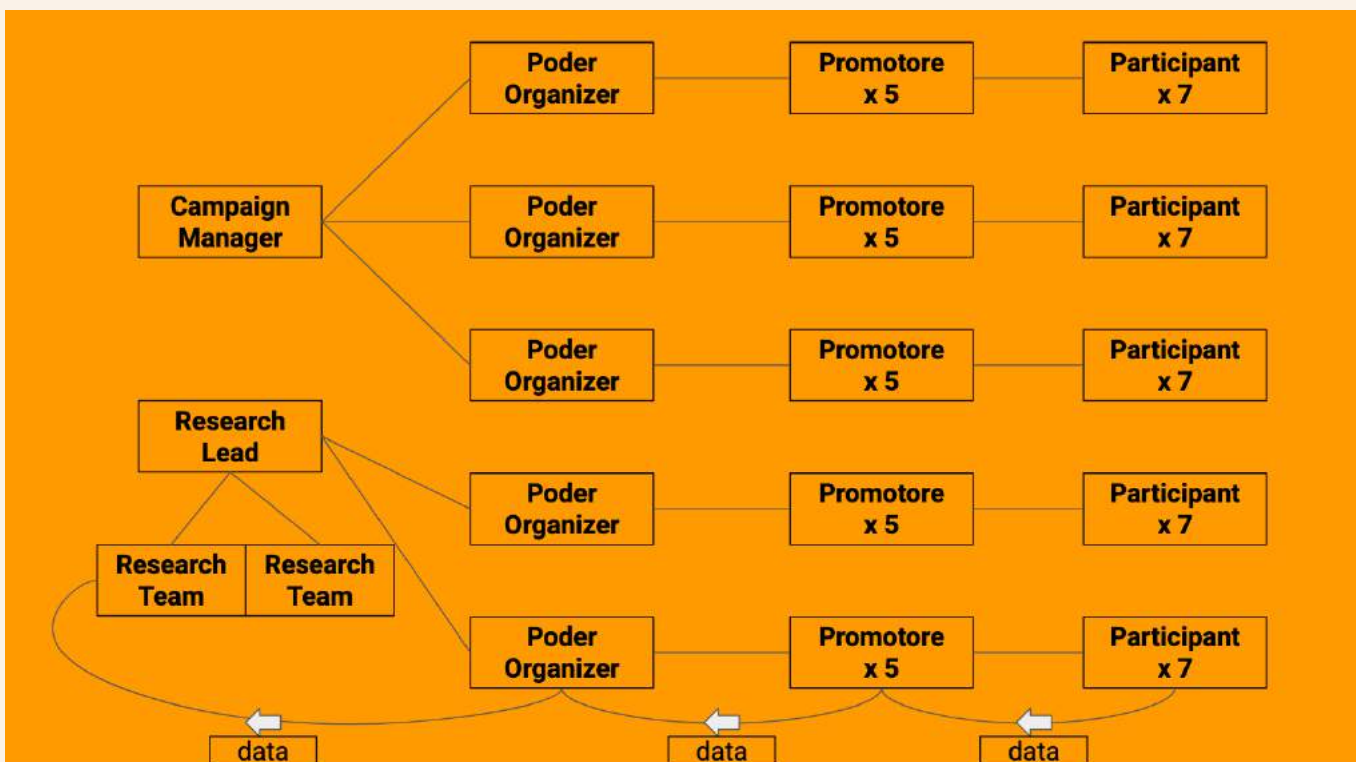
It's not possible to be perfect! — Even with SO MUCH engagement, discussion, and process, things were still missed. It was important to have moments to turn back to the priorities to look for things that were missed.

Investing in community — Part of what made all of this possible was the long term political engagement that had been done that prepared people for this process.

Responding to the ways survivors are used by police to promote criminalization — Poder responded to police use of survivors of violence to justify the need for criminalization by creating a survivor-led group who could speak and respond about the harms of criminalization.

Political education — Poder conducted hundreds of hours of political education around policing and the budget.

Proactive organizing — Poder undertook the mapping project as part of building a long-term strategy based on community needs rather than just reacting each year to the city's budget process.





Case Study

TALLER SALUD

“The definition of safety that came from communities was not the same as the one that comes from agencies that have a relationship with the police. It revolves around the questions *who and what can we count on?*”

— Taller Salud

Taller Salud is a Puerto Rico based project that carries out political advocacy actions to promote the transformation of the criminal justice system. Over the course of the cohort, they engaged in a practice of developing a shared definition of safety through their 100 Días Sin Muertes (100 Days Without Death) campaign and their Peace and Development Initiative, mobilizing the community to eradicate poverty, inequality, and structural racism through a culture of peace and community reconciliation that allows greater opportunities for development and transformation for individuals and their communities.

The organization developed a workshop focused on the question “What does community safety mean to you?” and then presented the results back to the community to inform a collective effort to build a safety plan. Safety strategies shaped by community responses included strengthening friend circles, reconciliation between youth and families after instances of violence, conflict mediation, community members adopting young people to support, fighting for land titles, and resisting exploitation of the area by developers. Ultimately, they are based on defining the community itself as safety.

TALLER SALUD



Taller Salud

Es una organización feminista de base comunitaria dedicada a mejorar el acceso de las mujeres a la salud, reducir la violencia en entornos comunitarios y fomentar el desarrollo económico a través del servicio directo, la organización comunitaria y la abogacía. Fundada en 1979, Taller Salud cuenta con sobre cuatro décadas de trabajo comunitario en Puerto Rico.

Iniciativa Paz y Desarrollo

Organizamos y movilizamos a la comunidad para erradicar la pobreza, la desigualdad y el racismo estructural. Promovemos una cultura de paz y reconciliación comunitaria que permita mayores oportunidades de desarrollo y transformación para las personas y sus comunidades. Realizamos acciones de incidencia política, para favorecer la transformación del sistema de justicia criminal.

Programa Acuerdo de Paz (ADP)

Acuerdo de Paz nace en el 2011 a raíz de los reclamos de las mujeres que perdieron esposos, hijos y familiares en nuestras comunidades loiceñas. Es uno de los programas que impulsa la iniciativa de Paz y Desarrollo de Taller Salud. Durante los pasados 10 años el programa ha demostrado que se puede reducir la violencia en los entornos comunitarios, y minimizar las muertes violentas.

SOBRE 10 AÑOS TRABAJANDO LA PAZ EN LOÍZA

TALLER SALUD



Taller Salud

Taller Salud is a community-based feminist organization dedicated to improving women's access to health care, reducing violence in community settings, and promoting economic development through direct service, community organizing, and advocacy. Founded in 1979, Taller Salud has over four decades of community work in Puerto Rico.

Iniciativa Paz y Desarrollo

We organize and mobilize the community to eradicate poverty, inequality and structural racism. We promote a culture of peace and community reconciliation that allows greater opportunities for development and transformation for individuals and their communities. We carry out political advocacy actions to promote the transformation of the criminal justice system.

Programa Acuerdo de Paz (ADP)

Acuerdo de Paz was born in 2011 as a result of the stories of women who lost husbands, children and family members in our Loiceño communities. It is one of the programs promoted by Taller Salud's Paz y Desarrollo initiative. Over the past 10 years, the program has shown that it is possible to reduce violence in community settings and minimize violent deaths.

NEARLY 10 YEARS WORKING FOR PEACE IN LOIZA

STRATEGIES

Paz y Desarrollo Initiative (Peace & Development Initiative)

Community mobilization project working to end poverty, structural racism, and the harm of criminalization through political action

Geographic based

This work is centered around the municipality of Loíza. Loíza is a municipality with the highest percentage of Black people in Puerto Rico.

Community leadership

This work was built as part of a call for action from community members and requested by community leaders.

Defining safety and conflict resolution

Deep exploration of what safety means to their community through building community-based conflict resolution in the municipality of Loíza

Door to door

Surveying the community of Loíza about their definitions of safety through listening meetings and doing a survey house to house; once completed, the surveys were analyzed, exploring questions about the concept of safety in Loíza and how people feel about police presence in the community

100 Dias Sin Muertes (100 Days Without Death)

Achieved 107 days without violent death in their community through focusing on youth engagement, community connections, and reducing gun violence

Centering youth

By recognizing the intergenerational nature of the violence they were seeing, Taller Salud decided to focus on mentoring and individualized case management for youth of the municipality of Loíza who are at high-risk of being targeted for criminalization

Sustained

This work has been happening over the course of 12 years. By 2023, they saw an average 63% reduction in violent deaths over a decade of uninterrupted work

LESSONS SHARED

Structural poverty and racism at the core of harm — The community narrative was that violent deaths were caused by drugs, but through their community work, Taller Salud learned that the problem was deeper and more connected to lack of resources, structural racism, poverty, and histories of violence without meaningful opportunities for intergenerational healing.

Support for men — As a feminist organization, when asking women in the community what they wanted, they wanted Taller Salud to do work with men in the community towards violence prevention.

Lack of referrals for young people — In supporting youth, one of the biggest challenges has been finding high quality services to connect young people to. The young people Taller is connected to can be stigmatized, making finding support for them difficult. While Taller is working to center these young people, other supports in the community may not be as available to do so.

Taking the office to the community — Learning that, while they can create safer spaces in their office, a lot of important work was about “taking the office to the community”.

Perception of police in community — When surveying the community, some people did say that police were a part of how they defined safety. Taller Salud shared about navigating this learning through listening and clarifying that the work they were doing, specifically with young people, was building safety with the community without the police.



Case Study

AFRICAN AMERICAN ROUNDTABLE

The African American Roundtable (AART) is an assembly of residents led by and serving Milwaukee's Black community. AART organizes, nurtures, and transforms Black leaders to build power in service of Black liberation. AART focused on and deepened relationship building among its staff, board, and base, engaging in a process of creating shared values grounded in self-accountability and generative conflict based on Creating Collective Ecosystems of Community Care cohort conversations and the In It Together toolkit created by Interrupting Criminalization and Dragonfly Partners. The organization relaunched a leadership development cohort focused on planning, designing, executing, and evaluating a campaign around participatory budgeting to build community safety projects. Program participants engaged in listening sessions with residents and emphasized that no singular approach would address the multitude of definitions of safety and needs described by residents.

In 2023, AART created a Participatory Budgeting Process that allowed members and residents of the Northwest Side to propose, vote, and eventually execute projects that will improve their community.

This project was led by a steering committee composed of seven resident and member leaders. The steering committee determined eligibility, criteria for proposals, the amount of money each proposal was eligible for, and the timeline for the entire program. Through this process, the steering committee emphasized that no singular approach would address the multitude of definitions of safety and needs described by residents.



Resources

- * [Durham Beyond Policing](#)
[Proposal for a Community-Led Safety and Wellness Task Force](#) (2019)
[Durham Community Safety and Wellness Task Force Report](#) (2023)
- * [Black Brilliance](#)
- * [Our City Our Future Budget Demands](#) (2020)
- * Dream Defenders [Healing & Justice Center 2022 Annual Report](#)
- * Poder in Action's [The Pueblo's Budget](#) (available in English and Spanish)
- * Taller Salud's [Estudio Comunitario de la Seguridad Pública y la Policia en Loiza](#) (Spanish only)
- * [2023 Annual Report](#)