

Rochester’s Community Response Team

This case study tracks the evolution of Rochester’s Community Response Team (CRT). The CRT is an initiative proposed by a group of community leaders in positions that provide opportunity to address systemic disparities. These volunteers organized under the auspices of “Unite Rochester” and worked to promote communication, trust, community education, and a positive, non-violent plan to respond to events or issues of race and racism. The CRT will also engage in activities to raise awareness about race and racism, and inspire a more inclusive and creative approach to solving community problems.

INITIATIVE – grounded in collaboration

CRT is a spin-off of “Unite Rochester”, a collaborative effort spearheaded in 2012 by the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, which was designed to

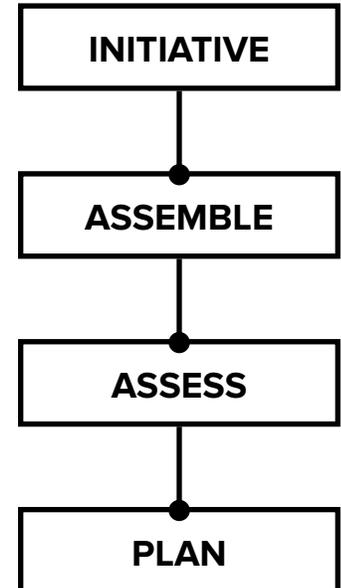
1. Raise awareness about racial inequities.
2. Help facilitate community conversations about race.
3. Encourage more inclusive problem-solving and effect positive change.

Unite Rochester began after a conversation over hot chocolate and donuts where Jim Lawrence, the Democrat and Chronicle’s editorial page editor, reached out to the Rochester Center for Dispute Settlement (The Center) to develop a collaborative effort around structural and systemic racism lingering in the greater Rochester area. The Democrat and Chronicle’s opinion page captured the vision and mission of Unite Rochester:

“For months now, dozens of leaders in our community have been volunteering their time to tackle the taxing problems associated with race and poverty... all of Unite Rochester volunteers recognize that we can’t go this way—two Rochesters divided by the haves and have nots.”

– James F. Lawrence¹

Unite Rochester charged the Center with creating a safe environment for a Greater Rochester listening tour on race and poverty. Unite Rochester’s listening tour was a forum for difficult conversations, an opportunity for residents “who normally wouldn’t be able to talk to one another to sit down and engage in a discussion about racial issues.”² To support candid participation the newspaper agreed not to report on what was said during listening sessions.



“One of the biggest pluses about the work that’s been done so far is the fact that we brought together people who don’t normally come together,” Lawrence says, pointing to examples of leaders from the city and suburbs, as well as Democrats and Republicans. After more than a year, more than 150 community members attended the listening tour including civic leaders, elected and appointed, organizational leaders representing educational institutions, businesses and not-for-profit agencies showed up to speak and listen to each other about issues of racism and poverty in the community.

In 2014, under the leadership of Unite Rochester Justice Committee Chair Cynthia Herriott-Sullivan, the group launched the Community Response Team. In 2015 the Democrat and Chronicle reported that the CRT would

“Work in collaboration with law enforcement or other government entities and communities to promote communication, trust, and positive, non-violent response to events or issues of community concern. It will also engage in activities to raise awareness about race and racism, and inspire a more inclusive and creative approach to solving community problems.”

Herriott-Sullivan stated CRT was “Taking a pro-active initiative to bridge communication between law enforcement ... and the community so we don’t get to a point like we have in Ferguson,” where divisive issues “have been brewing.” Herriott-Sullivan was concerned that law enforcement and the community seemed to be growing further apart, rather than coming to an improved understanding.

ASSEMBLE a planning group

“Our focus is not only to focus on responding to a critical incident, but to also employ strategies that prevent one from occurring.”

– Cynthia Herriott-Sullivan

“Our work is toward community building. Building a resilient community that can withstand fracture.”

– Frank Liberti

Herriott-Sullivan, a local housing authority official and a former police officer convened CRT with representatives from the Center, the judicial system, the county and the public defender.

Local Judge Craig Doran became “intrigued” about Unite Rochester because of its focus on the justice system. While the Democrat and Chronicle regularly criticized the justice system, Doran felt it was important to have constructive conversations about the justice system. Doran began his engagement with the CRT after a conversation about jury duty over coffee and donuts. From then, a relationship was formed and a level of trust was developed between a “conservative Republican and a liberal Democrat”. Doran was convinced the Justice system had to be part of the conversation and part of the solution to the problem of bias and division in the Rochester community.

Monroe County Sheriff, Patrick O’Flynn, “wanted to be up to speed regarding any opportunities to assess information, intervene... or support the community in public safety.” According to O’Flynn, information derived from the clergy, neighborhood groups, and other citizens was very informative and helpful in support of public safety efforts for the whole community. The type of intervention the Monroe County Sheriff’s office would provide depended on the type of crisis and the specific needs. In partnership with the Rochester Police Department, the “flashpoint” could be identified so an appropriate conflict intervention could be identified.

The Monroe County Public Defender's office became involved after a couple of high-profile events in the Rochester community: the videotaping of a woman during a police arrest; and, the arrest of a pregnant woman. Public Defender Tim Donaher explained that the community leaders serving on the CRT's advisory committee enhanced the project's legitimacy.

As the advisory group developed, it considered how to engage diverse segments of the community. Liberti explained, "Those outspoken activist groups in our community should be part of this effort; whether they have been invited or have self-excluded is unclear. No effort will be successful without engaging all groups. Bringing all people to the table will help to heal any real or perceived divisions on all sides. It is imperative we build cohesiveness... A fundamental way of building consensus is by engaging one's most outspoken opponent." O'Flynn agreed that that it would be hard to identify who should not be involved. Donaher noted that "lay" leaders and community groups ought to be identified and more integrally involved to be the responders when an incident occurs.

Train and ASSESS Readiness

“Being ready also means having the proper training.”

– Tim Donaher

CRT leaders initially disagreed about the best method for assessing readiness. O'Flynn says, "The question is whether we have the mechanisms and are prepared prior to a crisis. Where does the CRT fit? How do we determine when and if there is activation of the CRT? What are the safety and legal issues to be addressed? At what level do we activate and who does that involve?"

Some members suggested engaging in a simulation would help the CRT assess whether the community is ready to respond to a community crisis. Others thought the best way to assess readiness is to see how the community and the CRT respond to a divisive community incident.

Herriott-Sullivan suggested dialogue: "bringing stakeholders to the table and asking for their input on an assessment tool" would help determine Rochester's readiness.

In September 2017, CRT hosted a two-day event to 1) update the Rochester community on the progress of the CRT effort; and, 2) train CRT members to respond to crisis and use an assessment tool to begin identifying whether the community is prepared to respond to a divisive event.

The first day was a public forum open to the community to learn about the Community Response Team efforts and progress. Two speakers were highlighted. One was Judge Peggy Hora from California, the other former chief, Andre Anderson, from Ferguson, MO. They spoke expertly and candidly about the issues and possibilities for appropriate responses by law enforcement and community members when the potential and actual threats of civil unrest occur.

The second day was a training workshop conducted for prospective CRT responders. Rochester's Center for Dispute Settlement conducted the training including sessions on effective communication, recognition of various values among cultural, ethnic, racial, economically diverse groups, anger management and its physiological impacts, effective and



courtesy of Frank Liberti

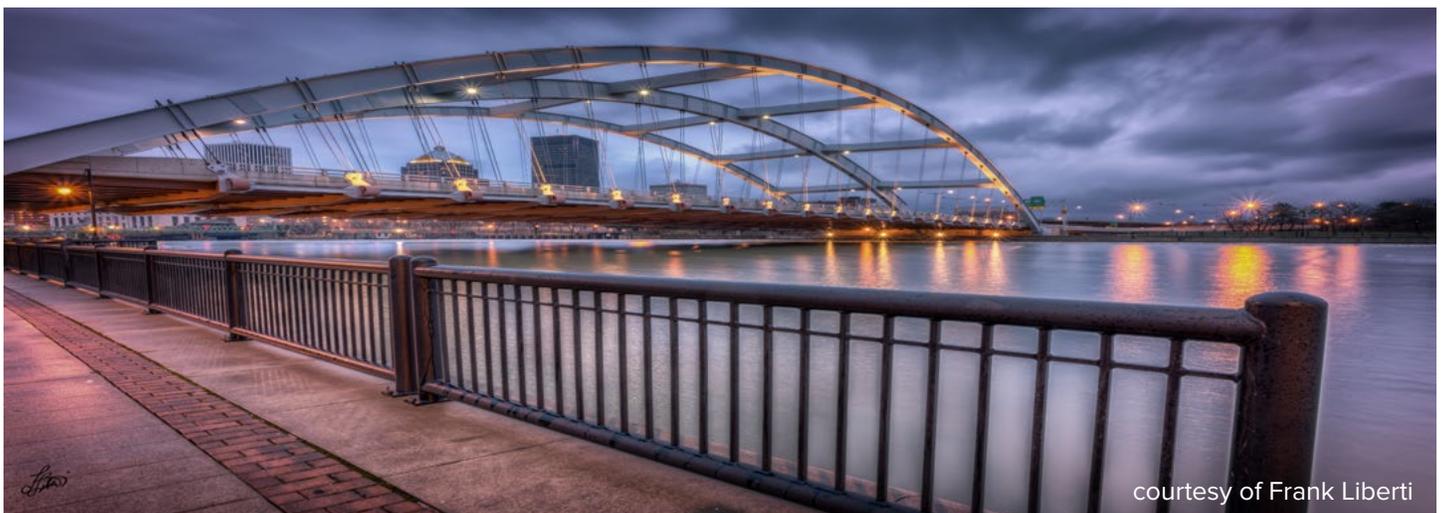
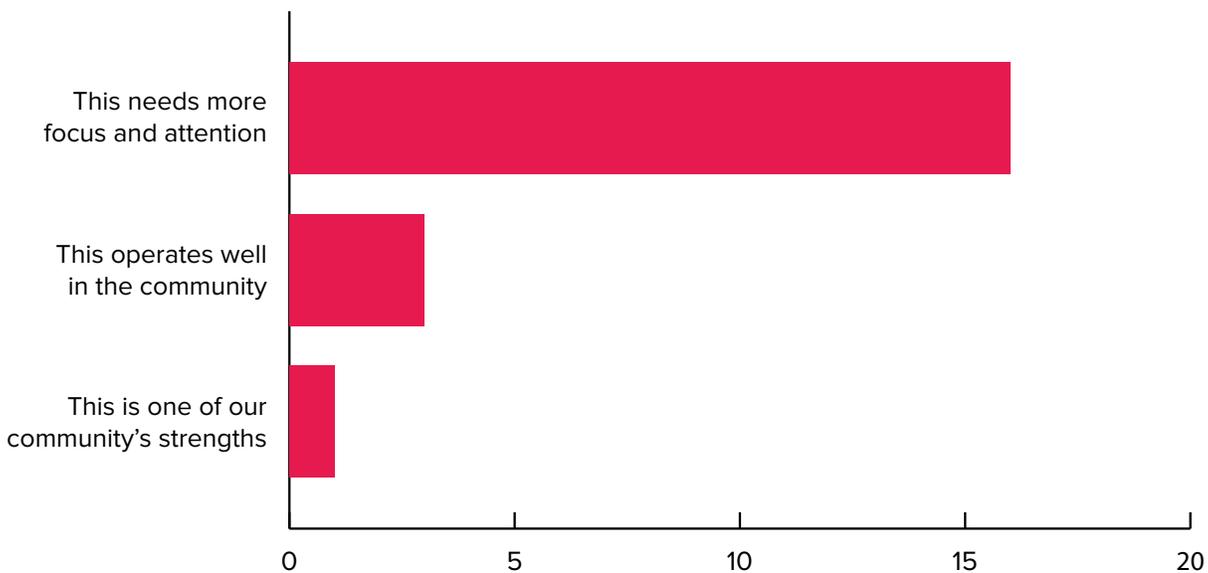
reflective listening, and implicit bias. The training also included various theories of conflict and the appropriate intervention for each conflict theory.

The fourteen participants at the full-day workshop were invited to take a prototype of the Divided Community Project's Community Preparedness and Assessment Test. Fourteen participants took a pre-workshop assessment; six took a post-workshop assessment. CPAT participants were asked questions related to the Rochester community's identify, whether Rochester has examined division within the community, how Rochester deals constructively with division, whether the community is read to deal with volatile situations, among other issues.

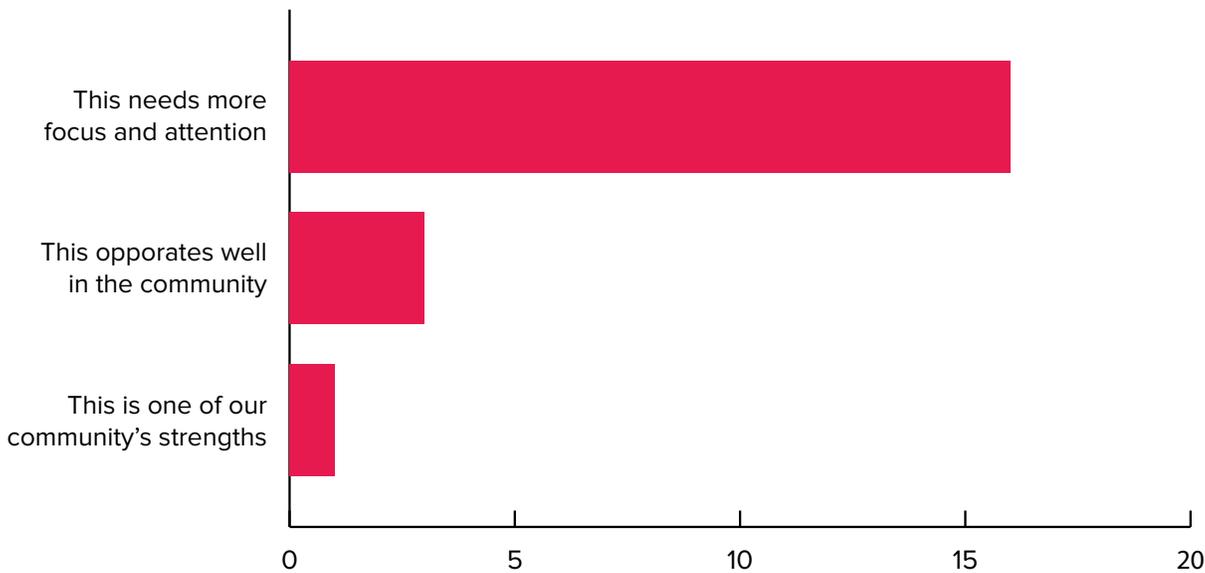
Shockingly and quite overwhelmingly, survey participants responded that the following areas need "more focus and attention":

- Does the community deal constructively with division when compared to other communities?
- How does the community deal constructively with division from a historical perspective?
- Is the community ready to deal with volatile situations stemming from community division?
- In the context of the Community's readiness to deal with volatile situations, Officials are trained to frame issues raised during crisis
- Does the community have an early warning system to communicate about developing concerns?

Does the community have an early warning system to communicate about developing concerns?



Is the community ready to deal with volatile situations stemming from community division?



While the prospective responders engaged in a one-day training, Donaher explains, one day is “wholly inadequate for such an undertaking.” Training “should be longer and more comprehensive preparing CRT members to properly address crisis situations.”

PLANNING Hurdles

CRT leaders developed draft protocols that illustrate how and when CRT would engage in the Rochester community. The draft protocols included provisions defining CRT membership, CRT’s advisory board, CRT’s officers (including a team coordinator, assistant team coordinator, secretary, training coordinator, communications specialist), training requirements, protocol for activation of the CRT in the event of potential community concerns, or potential civil unrest, identification of CRT member activities, protocol for confidentiality and conflicts of interest, and after-action reporting. The protocols were neither edited nor finalized, and are not publicly available.

Initially there was an expectation that a coordinator would provide direction to the project and make decisions. CRT Steering Committee members do not have the bandwidth to personally manage the day to day development, outreach, recruitment, training and other logistic activities for managing an effective CRT. Steering Committee members were generally in agreement that their role would be to serve as community leaders supportive of boots-on-the-ground CRT volunteer team members.

It is clear that developing a team of respected community volunteers, trained and prepared to respond to critical community events, would require leadership and coordination by a dedicated, highly respected person or persons intimately familiar with in the Rochester/Monroe County area. The CRT staff, working under the guidance of the Steering Committee, would be charged to conduct extensive public outreach to community groups; develop and provide training for the volunteers; develop protocols for notification and activation of CRT volunteer members; facilitate regularly scheduled Steering Committee and Volunteer Responders meetings; and stay abreast of developments in the community resiliency building field.

Donaher explains, “If the CRT is going to be successful, it must have a dedicated person, community buy-in, and involvement of community organizations and the faith community.” Liberti agrees that funding is necessary in order to coordinate, manage, and oversee the CRT project.

Indeed, the CRT’s work has stalled. CRT leaders have not had formal conversations since September 2017.

There appears to be a desire to strengthen community resiliency, perhaps through the development and implementation of a Community Response Team, or other means. The CRT itself may be a good start in preparing to build community resiliency but CRT efforts must be clearly identified and supported. Doran says very plainly “Communication, trust and relationship building” are integral. It is also clear there are critical areas of preparedness that need further exploration and work. Liberti expressed optimism that a local university – perhaps supplemented with community grant funding – will provide resources to activate, organize, and train CRT leaders and volunteers.

Sherry Walker-Cowart, **Past President & CEO for CDS**, is the primary author of this case study. Editing assistance was provided by Tymon Cameron, postgraduate candidate at Georgia State University, and Frank Liberti, Current President & CEO of CDS. The author sincerely thanks Timothy Donaher, Patrick O'Flynn, Craig Doran, Cynthia Herriott, Frank Liberti, and James Lawrence for giving up their valuable time to sit for interviews for this project.

Endnotes

- 1 James Lawrence, The long, hard work of uniting Rochester has begun, DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE (June 24, 2014), <https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/opinion/2014/06/27/unite-rochester-coming-sunday/11451325/>
 - 2 Karen Magnuson, Diversity Can Bring Communities Together, NIEMAN REPORTS (June 11, 2015), <http://niemanreports.org/articles/diversity-can-bring-communities-together/>.
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APPENDIX – Summary of Draft CRT Bylaws

Draft CRT bylaws were circulated in 2016, but are not publicly available.

Mission:

The Community Response Team (CRT) is a group of volunteers organized under the auspices of Unite Rochester that works in collaboration with law enforcement or other government entities and communities to promote communication, trust, community education, and a positive, non-violent response to events or issues of race and racism. The CRT will also engage in activities to raise awareness about race and racism, and inspire a more inclusive and creative approach to solving community problems.

Specific activities summarized:

- Responds to rumors and crisis in the community;
- Provides direct intervenors between law enforcement and community;
- Assists with educating the community and facilitating dialogues to enhance communication among and between community, law enforcement and other governmental entities.

Membership summarized:

- Diversity based on age (18 years of age and older), race, gender, ethnicity, culture and socio-economic backgrounds;
- Willingness to serve the community for at least 3 years, maintain confidentiality, remain objective and participate in meetings and activities of CRT.

Advisory Board:

- Sets policy and procedure, establishes guidelines, assesses operations, serves as resource
- Not more than 5 members.

CRT officers (it was important to the CRT that the team leader is a community member in good standing and not a political leader).

- Team coordinator (serves as presiding president),
- Assistant team coordinator,
- Secretary,
- Training coordinator
- Communication specialist.

Training consisting of mediation, conciliation, crisis intervention, community issues, criminal justice system, police policies and community service.

Three levels of activation:

- Level 1 Civil disorder and/or unrest has occurred or is imminent.
 - After any activation a review will be conducted with advisory board and CRT members.
 - Emphasis is placed on confidentiality and conflicts of interest.
- Level 2 - Utilized in situations where credible information suggests a concern may rise to the level of disorder. the focus would be on preventions:
- Level 3 - Community concern raised, but not likely to result in civil unrest.

The Divided Community Project's **Community Resiliency Initiative** is a coalition of organizations and volunteers who support communities seeking to transform community division into forward-looking action. As of July 2018, the Divided Community Project anticipates publishing case studies from five partner communities: Rochester, New York; Orlando, Florida; San Mateo County, California; Columbus, Ohio; and, San Leandro, California.

For more information about the Divided Community Project, take a look at our website, <http://moritzlaw.osu.edu/dividedcommunityproject>, or email Deputy Director William "Bill" Froehlich at Froehlich.28@osu.edu.

The AAA-ICDR Foundation provided significant support the Community Resiliency Initiative case study project.



Additional publications from the Divided Community Project are available as follows:

- Facing Hate (forthcoming, 2018)
- The Midland Simulation: A Tabletop Exercise on Community Division During Civil Unrest (regularly updated), email Froehlich.28@osu.edu for more information
- Divided Communities and Social Media: Strategies for Community Leaders (2017), go.osu.edu/DCPsm
- Planning in Advance of Civil Unrest (2016), go.osu.edu/DCPpia
- Key Considerations for Community Leaders Facing Civil Unrest: Effective Problems-Solving Strategies that have been used in Other Communities (2016), go.osu.edu/DCPk

In addition to the AAA-ICDR Foundation, The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law, the JAMS Foundation, the Kettering Foundation, the Jacques M. Littlefield Foundation, Nextdoor, the Ohio State University Emeritus Academy, and the Ohio State University Democracy Studies Program also support the Divided Community Project.



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