

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document distills lessons from recent experience with community unrest that can be useful to those who want to have a plan in place before turbulence occurs. Each community can adapt these general lessons as its leaders prepare a plan tailored to their community and the reasons for division within that community. The planning suggestions offered in this document can be used to assess and improve the resilience of a community, to identify issues and create ways to address them before they cause an eruption, and to be prepared to deal constructively with unrest if it occurs.

The recommended strategies do not stifle the public expression of concerns and emotions in large group settings. Indeed, the strategies recognize the key role protest and unrest play in a democracy. Rather, the message offered in this document reflects the conclusions of experienced mediators, public officials, and advocacy group leaders that communities with division need not become polarized communities with groups that have stopped listening to opposing viewpoints, have demonized those who subscribe to them, and are prone to destructive and violent community unrest. Instead, communities can develop effective ways to solve problems even in the midst of differences and avid advocacy for change. They can also gain by being ready in the event that community unrest occurs, either as the result of local concerns or outside groups seeking to use a local event to express concerns about a national issue.

### *The planning steps include:*

1. First, a respected entity within the community should **take the initiative** to promote a planning process by **creating** a checklist of planning activities and identifying experts and resources.
2. Next, the convening entity should begin by engaging other key individuals in conducting an **assessment** of the community's ability to handle division; the potential cost, broadly construed, of community unrest; and the potential gains for the community when residents can handle their divisions constructively.
3. Then the preliminary planning group should use the assessment as a basis to **assemble a planning group** that includes key public officials and also reflects the broader community to gain the input, commitment, and legitimacy needed to plan well and gain implementation. The group can be augmented as needed during the course of planning.
4. This planning group should **develop an early warning system** that there are concerns among a segment of the community or that an event is occurring that might bring outside groups to the community to bring attention to national issues.
5. Given likely areas of concern, the planning group should **develop processes** and opportunities for residents to **raise problems and work with public officials**.
6. The planning group should help **establish a pattern of using constructive practices** to solve problems within the community, including holding regular meetings with spokespersons and key public officials to discuss hot button issues, enhancing relationships among diverse groups, training public officials to encourage these patterns, and more.

7. The planning group should encourage public officials and others to develop **concrete plans for their actions during the first hours and weeks of community unrest**, should it occur. This would include ways to work with outside groups that want to take advantage of a local event to bring attention to national issues.
8. The planning group should develop an overall **implementation plan**, including ways to maintain the training and protocols as public officials and other leaders change and transparent accountability measures.

This document details strategies for each planning step, explains why that step matters, and offers examples. The appendix includes an example of a planning checklist and planning resources. The Divided Community Project has written another document that offers more detail on Planning Step 7, reactive strategies in the midst of community unrest: *Key Considerations for Leaders Facing Community Unrest* (2d ed., 2020).



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