The Community Activation Network

The Community Activation Network (CAN) was initiated by the Center for Nonprofit Excellence (CNPE) in late 2020. CAN aspires to be a network of people and organizations who create and nurture a thriving nonprofit/social impact ecosystem marked by inclusion, co-creation, and interdependence. It is based on the belief that collective voices and efforts are powerful – indeed, all of us together can accomplish more for our community than any of us can individually. Participation in CAN is open to anyone who shares these beliefs and aspirations.

Five co-hosts develop agendas and facilitate meetings: Ashley Parrott, Anthony Smith, Matthew Barzun, Ann Coffey, and Ed Cortas. CNPE hosts the CAN meetings.

The Series of Gatherings on Public Safety

Through surveying of the community, research, reflection on the challenges facing our community, and a series of discussions, it was decided that CAN would devote several meetings to the issue of public safety. The series of monthly, virtual gatherings that followed attempted to examine public safety through various lenses and from a number of vantage points. These lenses and vantage points included:

- Community organizations dealing directly with public safety and violence
- Community organizations dealing with individuals touched by violence
- Louisville Metro government agencies
- Louisville Metro Police Department
- Fraternal Order of Police
- Louisville Metro Council
- Legislators at the state and federal levels
- Educational institutions
- Members directly involved in the movement for racial equity and social justice

Represented by design within this cross-section of institutions, organizations, and individuals were:

- Black, Latinx, and other people of color
- Members of the LGBTQ+ community
- Women
- Young people
- People with disabilities

Most virtual sessions consisted of a discussion in which a panel of experts would share their reflections on their understanding of and vision for public safety, how that understanding and vision is reflected in
their work, and how the nonprofit sector can join their efforts. Following the panelists remarks, participants were placed into small groups and asked to share their reflections, identify what additional questions they might have, and discuss how the nonprofit sector might support the panelists’ work to increase public safety. Participants then reconvened and shared what they had heard.

In all, 11 sessions were convened, monthly January through November, 2022.

**What did we hear?**

Themes that emerged from these gatherings included:

- **Root Causes:** At the root of violence and the lack of public safety in our community are (a) the structural violence resulting from profound inequity within our community, (b) the injustice endemic within our public institutions and systems, and (c) the trauma these cause communities and individuals. 

  Violence and the lack of public safety is a byproduct of other, fundamental issues: racism, houselessness, mental illness, physical illness, poverty, lack of educational opportunities, and the like. To effectively address violence, we must address these underlying issues.

- **Funding:** Nonprofit organizations on the ground, close to the issue, are working on the root causes of violence in our community with those who are directly and indirectly impacted – both victims and perpetrators. They have knowledge, expertise, the track record and passion. What they do not have is the capacity to adequately address the issues – due to a serious lack of funding.

  City offices tasked with public safety have evidence-based research and experience, dedicated staff, and passion. But they, too, lack the resources to adequately address the issues due to the steady decline of funding for these efforts over the years. To effectively address public safety head on, it will take all sectors working together to collectively invest in public safety in the community.

- **Advocacy and Policy:** Federal and state government are aware, certainly, of the issues around public safety, but have proven limited in their ability to address issues at the local level. Our federal and state representatives can be advocates in Frankfort and Washington. But we as individuals and organizations need to step up and engage them, pressing the issues and asking hard questions. It is also critical that we engage with Louisville Metro Council and the mayor’s office to educate these entities and encourage financial support for public safety. As was noted many times, now is the time for bold, collective action.

- **Law Enforcement:** Policing is only a part of what should be our community’s total effort to ensure public safety. We need to stop asking police officers to be therapists and social workers – work that they are not trained and prepared to provide. We need to shift those roles and responsibilities (as well as funding) to professionals in those fields – who, in turn, can work in partnership with law enforcement. At the same time, officers need to incorporate methods of de-escalation more frequently in confrontational situations. In addition, in it is becoming more difficult to attract and retain new individuals to law enforcement work.

- **Transparency and Inclusion:** Contributing to the community’s challenges around public safety is a lack of transparency and community input around processes and decisions that impact public safety (e.g., the development of agency budgets and the negotiation of the LMPD contracts).
We need to start looking at who is sitting at these decision-making tables affecting our community—and invite those who rarely have a seat. But it cannot stop at invitation. There needs to be an intentional act of inclusion—listening to, valuing, and acting upon the input of those invited. Everyone’s voice matters.

The lack of public safety is a community-wide issue and affects all of us—indirectly if not directly. It is not a problem associated with a particular racial, ethnic, and/or socioeconomic class—as it is often portrayed. Public safety must be embraced by the entire community, especially white people not directly impacted by the violence prevalent in other parts of our community.

- **Movements:** Work done by institutions and organizations is critical—but we must also find ways to collaborate with and incorporate the work of the “less formal” (though structured) entities providing the energy for social change.

**Where do we go from here?**

CAN is envisioned as a space where creative thinking and sharing and learning lead to decisive action on critical priorities that transform our community. Throughout the CAN gatherings, participants shared ideas and opportunities regarding how to put into action what was learned. Three themes emerged:

1. **Direct Program Support:** A clear message from the panelists that connected with nonprofits working on the ground in the public safety space is the need for expanded capacity.
   - How can we communicate this need for capacity in a way that inspires individuals, businesses, and other entities to donate to these organizations and/or provide volunteers?
   - How can we direct the flow of funds in this community to organizations doing this work?
   - How can nonprofit organizations re-envision their work (within the framework of their missions) to lend capacity to increasing public safety?

Nonprofits and other organizations that are doing this work, that need additional capacity and support, and with whom individuals and organizations can become involved include:

- No More Red Dots
- Pivot to Peace
- Christopher 2X Game Changers
- Gap Felony Prevention Project
- Office for Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods
- ACE Project
- Cycle Breakers Breaking Chains

2. **Collaboration and Inclusion:** The root causes of violence in our community are many, varied, and inhabit every level and corner of our society. The lack of public safety is a Gordian knot: a complicated problem requiring a bold solution. Coming up with that solution is beyond the capacity of individual organizations operating autonomously. What is needed are collaborations and networks of individuals and organizations coming together with various vantage points and expertise.
   - How can individuals, nonprofits, neighborhoods, government, and businesses creatively combine their efforts with one and other to address public safety issues?
• How can individuals, nonprofits, neighborhoods, government, and businesses move into a new space to reach out and include others who share their passion for public safety but with whom they have never partnered – or even considered partnering? How might we build “a bigger we”?

Organizations engaged in such partnerships include:
• Office for Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods
• Peace Ed
• Louisville Urban League
• Cities United

3. **Advocacy and Policy:** Work on the ground must be accompanied by efforts to change institutions, policies, and process at the highest levels – systemic change that eliminates the most foundational causes of our community’s issues around public safety.

• How do we most effectively engage legislators and other leaders at the local, state, and federal levels?

• How do we advocate on behalf of individuals and organizations on the ground doing the grassroots work?

• How do we engage with Metro Council around budget priorities?

• How do we inspire more public input and transparency around decisions, contracts, and agreements that affect our community?

Organizations engaged in advocacy and policy work include:
• Metro United Way
• ACLU KY
• Office for Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods
• Louisville Urban League
• No More Red Dots
• Moms Demand Action
• Cities United

**Next Steps and Call to Action**

As CAN enters the new year, it will continue its emphasis on learning as well as gathering and curating information and ideas so that individuals and organizations can continue the work.

Throughout the year, many CAN participants expressed a strong desire to take action. This report has been issued to encourage participants to do just that.
## Appendix 1: CAN 2021 Meeting Dates, Topics, Guests, Attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Guests</th>
<th># Attended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| January 28 | The City’s Response to Public Safety                                  | Vincent James, Chief of Community Building, City of Louisville
Monica Williams, Director, Office of Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods, City of Louisville | 90         |
| February 25| LMPD and Public Safety: A Conversation with Chief Shields             | Erika Shields, Chief of Police                                                                                                               | 127        |
| March 25   | Community Response to Public Safety                                   | Dr. Eddie Woods, CEO, No More Red Dots
Deborah Barnes-Byers, Project Manager, Pivot to Peace (Peace Education Program)
Trinidad Jackson, Project Manager, Youth Violence Prevention Research Center | 68         |
| April 22   | Metro Council’s Response to Public Safety                             | David James, Metro Council President, Councilman District 6
Nicole George, Councilwoman District 21                                                                                             | 52         |
| May 27     | Federal Response to Public Safety                                    | Congressman John Yarmuth
Dana Mayton, District Director, Congressman John Yarmuth                                                                  | 57         |
| June 24    | A CAN Community conversation on the impact of violence in our community, its causes, and solutions |                                                                                                                                           | 30         |
| July 22    | Metro Louisville FOP’s Perception of Public Safety                    | Dave Mutchler, Press Secretary, River City Fraternal Order of Police, Lodge 614                                                        | 39         |
| August 26  | Public Safety: The Latinx Perspective                                 | Karina Barillas, Executive Director of La Casita Center
Dr. Laura Escobar-Ratliff, College of Social Work, University of Kentucky
Professor Enid Trucios-Haynes, Brandeis School of Law, University of Louisville                                      | 52         |
| September 23| The Public Safety Priorities of the Kentucky Legislature               | Lisa Willner, KY State Representative, District 35
Morgan McGarvey, KY State Senator, District 19
Keturah Herron, Policy Strategist, ACLU of Kentucky                                                                     | 36         |
| October 28 | Community Youth Response to Public Safety                             | Darryl Young, Executive Director, Coalition Supporting Young Adults (Moderator)
Imani Smith
Jailen Leavell
Kenneth Rhodes                                                      | 49         |
| November 18| Public Safety: More Voices, Deeper Insights                           | Mike Slaton, Executive Director of the Louisville Pride Foundation
Tai Tomasi, Director of Accessibility, Diversity, and Inclusion at American Printing House for the Blind
Elizabeth Wessels-Martin, CEO of the Center for Women and Families                                                      | 32         |
Appendix 2: Demographic Profile of CAN Attendees

CNPE is committed to ensuring that its programming reflects the diversity of organizations and individuals in the community. It is also committed to ensuring that it is hearing voices from every corner of our nonprofit/social impact sector; gaining insight from their wisdom, and understanding their needs along the way. At the beginning of the meeting, participants were asked to complete a brief demographic poll in an effort to better assess and understand its audience and participants. This key data will help CNPE develop a deeper understanding of which voices it is attracting and – perhaps more importantly – which voices it is not.

Participants were assured that the poll was anonymous and any reporting using the data would be in the aggregate only and would not contain any personally identifiable information.

The data below represents the average of each demographic across five meetings, beginning with the July meeting and concluding with the November meeting.

1. What gender do you identify yourself as?

Female 66%
Male 26%
Non-binary 8%

2. Do you consider yourself a member of the LGBTQ community?

Ally 42%
No 33%
Yes 25%

3. How would you describe your Race? (check all that apply)

White 64%
Black or African American 30%
Hispanic, or Latinx 5%
American Indian or Alaska Native 1%
Asian 1%
Middle Eastern or North African 1%
Additional Race Not Included 1%