



The National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice

Key Process and Outcome Evaluation Findings

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August 2019 (corrected November 11, 2019)

This brief summarizes key findings from the Urban Institute’s evaluation of the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice, an effort to promote changes in law enforcement culture, policies, and practices to enhance respectful policing and improve police-community relationships in six cities.

Many communities that experience high levels of crime and concentrated disadvantage—particularly communities of color—also distrust the police, making them less likely to report crimes and partner on crime prevention and violence reduction efforts (Johnson et al. 2017; Tyler and Fagan 2008; Tyler and Jackson 2014). In 2014, the US Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs launched the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice (National Initiative). Spanning six cities, the initiative consisted of officer training, departmental policy changes, and community engagement designed to repair and strengthen police-community relationships by addressing the deep historical roots of distrust in the police among people of color and other marginalized populations.

National Initiative Evaluation Publications

This brief draws from findings represented in the following publications:

Views of the Police and Neighborhood Conditions: Evidence of Change in Six Cities Participating in the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice

Impact of the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice on Police Administrative Outcomes

Impact of the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice on Police Administrative Outcomes: Supplemental Materials to Impact Analyses

Learning to Build Police-Community Trust: Implementation Assessment Findings from the Evaluation of the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice

Background

Led by John Jay College of Criminal Justice's National Network for Safe Communities (NNSC), and in partnership with the Center for Policing Equity (CPE), Yale Law School (YLS), and the Urban Institute, the National Initiative brought together practitioners and researchers to implement the program in six cities: Birmingham, Alabama; Fort Worth, Texas; Gary, Indiana; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Stockton, California.

The National Initiative was organized around three core areas or “pillars” that research and practical experience suggest could generate measurable improvements in officer behaviors, public safety, and community trust in the police. The first pillar, **procedural justice (PJ)**, focuses on how interactions between police officers and members of the public impact community members' views of the police and their willingness to comply with the law and partner on crime prevention practices, as well as crime rates. The second pillar, **implicit bias (IB)**, focuses on how unconscious biases may shape police officers' interactions with members of the public and result in racially disparate outcomes even when those interactions are not overtly racist. The third pillar, **reconciliation**, focuses on how candid conversations about law enforcement's complicity in historic and present-day racial tensions and harms can repair relationships and foster trust between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve.

Core National Initiative interventions included (1) training and technical assistance for police officers on engaging with residents in a procedurally just manner, (2) trainings that helped officers understand and mitigate their personal implicit biases, (3) recommendations for changes to police department policies to promote more respectful and accountable policing, and (4) reconciliation discussions, during which police leadership acknowledged law enforcement's role in biased policing and sought to repair relationships with the community members that such policing has impacted the most.

The Evaluation of the National Initiative

The Urban Institute evaluated the National Initiative's implementation and impact to inform replications of and/or modifications to National Initiative components, and to guide future research on community trust-building efforts by police. The following questions guided the implementation and impact evaluations:

- Were National Initiative activities designed and implemented as planned?
- Were the National Initiative training and technical assistance activities effective in transmitting information?
- What interventions were designed and implemented?
- What interventions were designed and implemented specific to the target groups?
- Was the National Initiative associated with changes in residents' perceptions of the police and police-community interactions and relationships?

- Was the National Initiative associated with changes in residents' neighborhood conditions, victimization experiences, and perceptions of safety and disorder?
- Was the intervention associated with changes in police departments' practices (e.g., pedestrian stops, arrests)?

The implementation evaluation focused on National Initiative activities undertaken from January 2015 through December 2018, whereas the impact evaluation covered the period through December 2017. Researchers collected the following qualitative and quantitative data to support the evaluation:

- monthly teleconferences among the National Initiative implementation team that included partners from CPE, NNSC, and YLS
- publicly available information and media coverage of the National Initiative and issues pertaining to police-community relations in the pilot sites
- fieldwork that included observations of National Initiative activities and interactions between National Initiative partners and site stakeholders
- routine teleconferences with site coordinators, police chiefs, and other city stakeholders
- documents provided by the sites and National Initiative partners
- semistructured interviews with police and community stakeholders in each site
- learning assessment surveys of officers receiving National Initiative trainings in each site
- surveys of residents living in areas with high levels of concentrated crime and poverty/disadvantage in each site
- administrative data from National Initiative police departments on crime events and arrests, calls for service, pedestrian and traffic stops, and use-of-force incidents

National Initiative Implementation

Delivering the National Initiative components to all the officers in the six departments required a major commitment of agency resources to infusing new concepts into policing practice. The reconciliation framework also represented a substantial conceptual advance in the practice of improving relationships between police and communities, and implementing that framework developed new insights and innovations regarding how this could look in practice. Moreover, police departments made changes to their policies to build trust and institutionalize the changes they implemented through the National Initiative.

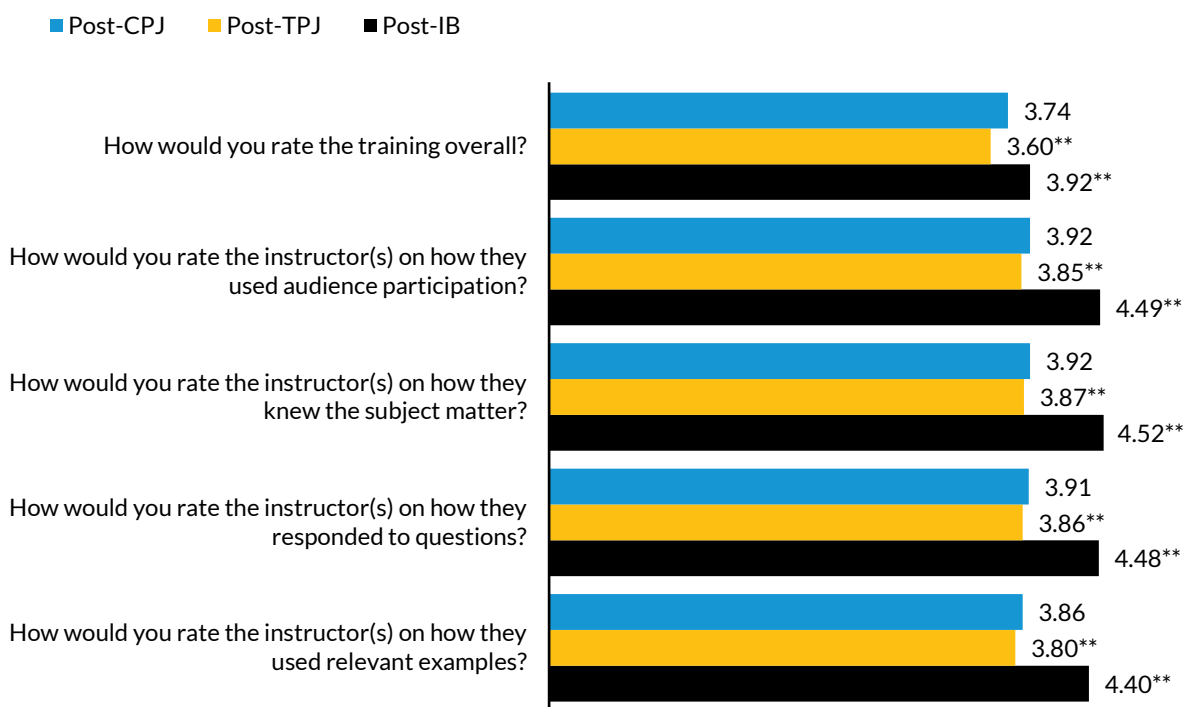
Training

Training police officers in the concepts of procedural justice and implicit bias was a foundational component of the National Initiative. Between December 2015 and April 2018, every sworn officer in

the six police departments participated in three full days of training: the first day was devoted to conceptual procedural justice (CPJ), the second to tactical procedural justice (TPJ), and the third to implicit bias. This was the most resource-intensive National Initiative component for the participating police departments.

Training surveys and stakeholder interviews indicated widespread (though not universal) receptivity to the content. Results from posttraining learning assessment surveys indicate that officers in all six sites were more likely to agree with procedural justice principles after the training. Although officer ratings of the trainings were positive across the board, they rated the implicit bias training more favorably than the other two training curricula (figure 1). Stakeholders across all six sites considered the implementation of the PJ and IB trainings to be one of the National Initiative’s major successes. Police trainers also developed innovations during training implementation, including community-facing versions of the trainings intended to convey the core PJ and IB concepts to community members.

FIGURE 1
Overall Training and Instructor Ratings



Notes: Valid N = 8,011. Response options ranged from 1 (unsatisfactory) to 5 (excellent). Statistically significant differences are indicated for post-TPJ relative to post-CPJ, and post-IB relative to post-TPJ, and were assessed using t-tests.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

Reconciliation

Of the three pillars, reconciliation was the most nascent and previously untested when the National Initiative began. National Network for Safe Communities developed a framework for a police-community reconciliation process, something that had not existed in the US before the initiative launched. The process provided residents a space to raise issues and concerns, some of which led directly to changes in police practice. The reconciliation framework consisted of the following five key components:

- **Fact-finding.** Fact-finding yielded context about police departments’ past harms (such as enforcing Jim Crow laws) and present harms maintained through policies and practices with detrimental effects on safety, equity, and justice.
- **Acknowledgment of harm.** Police leadership delivered acknowledgements of harm that recognized the police’s past and present harms, as well as ongoing problems that fuel mistrust between the police and community.
- **Sustained listening.** Listening sessions were designed to be intimate and nonadversarial to encourage community members to share their experiences with and insights about law enforcement candidly.
- **Narrative collection and sharing.** Narratives captured community members’ perceptions of police and the police’s perceptions of communities.
- **Explicit commitments to changing policy and practice.** Departments made such commitments in areas identified through the listening sessions.

Each listening session convened different populations of focus, ranging from residents in heavily policed African American communities to youth and members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Though the reconciliation process was implemented in all six cities, the timing and quantity of sessions varied across sites during the evaluation period (table 1).

TABLE 1
Reconciliation Listening Sessions by Site

Site	Date of first listening session	# of listening sessions (through 12/2018)	Areas of focus
Birmingham	8/2016 10/2016 (circles)	19 3-week series of intensive small group circles	Internal PD, intimate partner violence survivors, Latinx/immigrant communities, LGBTQIA+, neighborhood, youth
Fort Worth	12/2017	3	Neighborhood
Gary	4/2017	6	Intimate partner violence survivors, neighborhood
Minneapolis	8/2016	8	African Americans, clergy, Latinx, LGBTQIA+, Native Americans, neighborhood, youth

Site	Date of first listening session	# of listening sessions (through 12/2018)	Areas of focus
Pittsburgh	11/2018	3	Youth
Stockton	10/2016	20+	Community organizations, group violence intervention client, LGBTQIA+, neighborhood, racial/ethnic communities, youth

Policy Change

The National Initiative was based on the premise that improving public trust in police required new thinking and practice, and changing law enforcement policies was a critical method of embedding and sustaining that new thinking in the police departments. Policy changes occurred throughout the implementation period, in part because the sites identified changes to policy and practice through a variety of mechanisms, including CPE policy reviews, model policies developed by YLS, internal reviews of existing policies and practices, and reconciliation conversations. Table 2 summarizes policy changes resulting from or influenced by National Initiative activities.

TABLE 2

Policy Changes during the National Initiative Implementation Period, by Department

City	Policy changes
Birmingham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ designated a sergeant as a liaison to the LGBTQIA+ community (September 2016) ■ modified policy language to explicitly reinforce commitment to unbiased policing (2017) ■ protection from abuse orders provided to all precincts by court rather than stored only in the precinct where the order was awarded, or rather than survivors being responsible for providing the order (2017) ■ created new command-level position overseeing all community engagement (October 2018)
Fort Worth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ revised general order on bias-free policing (February 18, 2016) ■ created standard operating procedures for Procedural Justice Unit (November 2016) ■ began reporting use-of-force, arrest, stop, and discipline policies and statistics online (2017) ■ revised general order on sexual assaults (July 2017) ■ issued new order on racial profiling that reaffirmed the department's commitment to unbiased policing (January 2018) ■ revised general orders on use of force/force options and reporting uses of force (March 2018) ■ revised departmental mission statement to add commitment to respect the sanctity of human life and preserve the rights and dignity of each individual in the community (March 2018) ■ created new Police and Community Relationships general order, including role of Procedural Justice Unit (July 2018) ■ added a duty to protect the safety and physical health of arrested and detained persons to the department's Arrest Procedures General Order (August 2018)
Gary	None

City	Policy changes
Minneapolis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ added transgender/gender nonconforming policy (June 2016) ■ amended use-of-force policy to prioritize sanctity of life for both officers and civilians (July 2016) ■ added policy requiring officers to intervene in incidents in which other officers use excessive force (July 2016) ■ began tracking race and gender on traffic stops and other stops (September 2016) ■ changed body-worn camera policy to require officers to turn on cameras as soon as they begin responding to 911 calls (July 2017) ■ began reporting officer use-of-force, complaint, stop, crime, and arrest statistics online (2017) ■ failure by an officer to comply with a lawful investigation of misconduct shall be deemed an act of misconduct (September 2018)
Pittsburgh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ created ethics document (2016) ■ added procedural justice concepts to evaluations of field training officers and recruits (2016) ■ added order on transgender and gender nonconforming employees (August 2016) ■ began posting policies online (January 2018)
Stockton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ added procedural justice language to general order on how canines are deployed (May 2016) ■ modified field training officer evaluations to add demonstration of PJ practices, and required supervisors to evaluate officer understanding of PJ in considering transfer/special assignment requests and promotional examinations (2016) ■ mandated that officers receive annual mental health training ■ mandated that officers make every attempt to mediate and defuse situations with people experiencing mental health crises (July 2016) ■ added policy stating that “sworn personnel of the Stockton Police Department shall not stop, question, detain, arrest or place ‘an immigration hold’ on any person solely on the ground that he or she may be a deportable alien” (January 2017) ■ added PJ language to rules and regulations regarding conduct toward the public and fellow police members (May 2017) ■ tenets of procedural justice added to equestrian unit order (June 2017) ■ policy on release of body camera footage (July 2017) ■ Unmanned Aircraft System policy created with community input (November 2017)

Impact Evaluation Findings

Analysis of Administrative Data on Police Outcomes

To examine the degree to which the National Initiative interventions were associated with changes in crime rates and police practices (particularly reductions in racially biased policing), Urban analyzed administrative data from each agency on various outcomes of interest using structural break analyses. Access to data was extremely limited and uneven across sites; however, this was not because agencies declined to share the data with the evaluation team, but because most do not routinely collect the data of interest in an electronic format amenable to extraction and analysis. For example, only three of the six agencies routinely collect data on use-of-force incidents in a format that was extractable for purposes of data analysis. Of those agencies, two observed reductions in such incidents. Changes in calls for service, violent crimes, and property crimes were mixed across sites, while changes in the rates of pedestrian and traffic stops were more consistent: a decrease occurred during the National Initiative’s primary activities, but rates returned to previous levels by the end of the observation period in December 2017. Arrest rates across all demographic groups generally declined across sites.

Community Perceptions

A key component of the evaluation was an in-person survey of a sample of residents living in neighborhoods experiencing high rates of crime and concentrated poverty in each of the participating cities. Residents were asked about their views of the police and police-community relationships, their perceptions of crime and neighborhood conditions, and their willingness to partner with the police on crime control and prevention. We conducted two waves of these surveys to assess the degree to which perceptions improved or worsened during the National Initiative implementation period.

The baseline survey, conducted before National Initiative activities were implemented, showed that residents of neighborhoods experiencing high crime rates across the six cities held largely negative views of their local police department and their neighborhood conditions, yet believed in the rule of law and were willing to contribute to crime control and prevention efforts (La Vigne, Fontaine, and Dwivedi 2017). The second wave of surveys, administered after a period of sustained National Initiative implementation, yielded similarly negative perceptions of the police, but those views were markedly more positive than at baseline (table 3). Importantly, when analyzing the survey data by key sociodemographic groups, perceptions of the police among Black respondents became considerably more positive.

Nonetheless, we observed notable variation among respondents across the six National Initiative cities. In particular, residents' perceptions of and experiences with their local police department, police-community relationships, and neighborhood conditions improved considerably in Minneapolis, Gary, and Stockton. In Fort Worth, there was no measured change in residents' perceptions of the police or police-community relationships or in their perceptions of neighborhood conditions. In Birmingham, residents perceived improvement in some of their neighborhood conditions and the police and police-community relationships. Finally, in Pittsburgh, though residents perceived improvement in some of their neighborhood conditions, their perceptions of the police and police-community relationships grew more negative.

TABLE 3

Scale Differences by Wave*Perceptions of the police and neighborhood conditions*

	Wave 1 (n=1,278)	Wave 2 (n=1,202)
Perceptions of police and police-community relationships		
Procedurally just treatment by police ^a	2.88	3.04**
Police legitimacy ^b	2.97	3.14**
Police bias ^b	3.35	3.20**
Police alignment with community concerns ^b	2.61	2.79**
Legitimacy of the law ^b	3.80	4.00**
Relatability of the police ^b	2.83	3.01**
Willingness to partner with police ^c	3.54	3.61
Perceptions of neighborhood conditions		
Neighborhood safety ^d	3.28	3.52**
Neighborhood disorder ^e	2.97	2.65**
Frequency of neighborhood crime ^f	2.15	1.91**
Personal victimization experience ^h	0.16	0.14
Vicarious victimization experience ^h	0.29	0.21**
Concerns about various property and violent crimes ^g	2.67	2.41**
Precautionary behavior ^c	2.87	2.74**

Notes: Statistically significant differences were assessed using t-tests.

^a Scale from individual item response options ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always).

^b Scale from individual item response options ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

^c Scale from individual item response options ranging from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely).

^d Scale from individual item response options ranging from 1 (dangerous) to 5 (safe).

^e Scale from individual item response options ranging from 1 (not a problem) to 5 (big problem).

^f Scale from individual item response options ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (daily).

^g Scale from individual item response options ranging from 1 (not concerned) to 5 (very concerned).

^h Share of respondents reporting "yes."

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

The evaluation findings show promise for the National Initiative model and suggest that the initiative was moderately successful in achieving its intended goals of training officers to be more equitable and respectful of community officers and improving police practices and police-community relations. However, we are unable to conclude that the National Initiative activities were the sole causes of the measured improvements in residents' perceptions. Changes in community conditions and incidents within the departments and in American policing more broadly could have influenced residents' perceptions of the police and their neighborhood conditions. Nevertheless, the results suggest key and notable improvements, particularly in the cities that implemented the training early on and engaged in comprehensive and extensive reconciliation conversations.

Key Takeaways

The National Initiative was an experiment in improving police-community relationships using a variety of approaches, methods, and messengers, and innovation occurred throughout the implementation

process. Our evaluation of this complex, multisite learning effort yielded several key lessons for effectively implementing police-community trust-building efforts and for future studies of similar efforts.

Perhaps the most important finding concerns the degree to which agencies implemented the various components of the initiative: although all six sites ultimately implemented the trainings, made changes to policies and practices, and engaged with community members in reconciliation conversations, some did so more thoroughly and robustly than others. This unevenness in implementation was fueled by the challenges agencies faced during the initiative, particularly with respect to leadership changes. **Police leadership is critical for successfully and thoroughly implementing this type of ambitious undertaking.** Yet turnover in chiefs is common in American policing, and four of the six National Initiative departments experienced a change in police leadership during the implementation period. Changes in police leadership particularly disrupted the reconciliation and policy change work, delaying progress even when the new chief supported the work.

Training was a significant accomplishment of the National Initiative. The procedural justice and implicit bias training for officers was the initiative's biggest component: surveys indicated that officers bought into what they were hearing and indicated that such training is a good method for translating evidence into practice. **Ensuring that procedural justice trainers were "credible messengers"**—seasoned officers who were well-respected by the rank and file—was instrumental to that success. This was necessary for overcoming officers' resistance to discussions about the racial history of policing, the perspectives of community members who distrusted the police, and implicit biases. However, delivering 24 hours of training to every sworn officer **placed a heavy resource burden on the trainers and the departments.** Finally, important innovations developed during training implementation, particularly **community-facing trainings** and **internal procedural justice** (applications of procedural justice principles within police departments).

The National Initiative **developed a reconciliation process for police and communities**, substantially advancing the practice of police-community trust building. The implementation evaluation found that successful reconciliation listening sessions required **police to be open to hearing community perspectives and to refrain from reacting defensively to critical or emotional statements.** Importantly, reconciliation listening sessions led directly to policy changes in several National Initiative sites, and they played a part in the **extensive policy change processes** in the participating cities.

The process that produced these changes and lessons was not seamless, easy, or consistent across sites. The National Initiative partners had to overcome officers' **skepticism that outside experts were sufficiently informed about local contexts and could provide new insights** to strengthen police-community relationships. **Community involvement in the National Initiative developed more slowly than police involvement**, in part because community-focused components like the reconciliation process and the community-facing trainings were implemented at later stages. Partners' and departments' communication with communities was not as strong as police and community stakeholders desired. **Local contexts affected the implementation process**, and factors such as police leadership stability and the dynamics underlying relations between police, political leadership, and the community could facilitate or impede progress.

Successfully implementing the National Initiative and addressing these and other challenges required **committed and skilled local site coordinators**. Pairing the six sites with peer communities was a key facilitator of success. **Sites benefitted from peer exchanges with other National Initiative cities**, which also helped improve site partner morale, made implementation more consistent, and allowed sites to share innovations.

The **observed improvement in community perceptions** on measures the National Initiative sought to affect, such as trust in police and police legitimacy, is a very promising finding. Though the citywide nature of the National Initiative interventions and the absence of survey data from comparable communities prevents us from making causal claims, the movement of community perceptions in the intended direction supports further applications, refinements, and evaluations of the interventions. That improvements in community perceptions were not observed in every site suggests that local contexts and implementation fidelity are important. Finally, it is crucial to note that although community perceptions improved in the aggregate, **views of police and police legitimacy remain largely negative in the neighborhoods most affected by crime and disadvantage**. In short, even where perceptions improved, there remains ample room for improvement.

The National Initiative was an ambitious and complex undertaking, consisting of multiple trainings, policy changes, and community engagement activities. Evaluations of such initiatives are always challenging because it is difficult to discern which components yielded impacts, and because historical, social, and political contexts substantially limit researchers' ability to make causal claims about the impacts of any one activity or factor. The **alarming dearth of reliable administrative data with which to conduct the impact analysis** exacerbated those challenges during the National Initiative evaluation. Detailed, accurate measurements of police administrative data are crucial for assessing the impacts of such complex program implementations. The sites had varying degrees of unavailable or inconsistent data, complicating data analyses and interpretations across sites. For example, the only measures that all five data-providing sites were able to provide pertained to violent and property crimes. Although changes in crime rates are of interest, they are not the most appropriate metric for assessing the changes in police officer behaviors that the National Initiative aspired to improve.

Agencies committed to enhancing police-community relationships should prioritize **collecting data on outcomes such as arrests and use of force by race and ethnicity**. Doing so will not only help them track improvements in those metrics, but could also enable the routine public release of such data as a trust-building measure, as two National Initiative sites began doing. Moreover, this evaluation suggests collecting data from community members on their perceptions of the police is critical for assessing the impact of efforts to make policing more equitable and respectful. Cities and others undertaking or supporting such efforts should consider investing in that kind of community data collection. Future evaluations could also work to **connect training more directly to behavior change**, and **track residents' perceptions over longer periods and compare them with those in matched comparison areas**. The National Initiative provided an opportunity to meaningfully expand knowledge on police-community trust building. Though much was accomplished and learned through the initiative, much remains to be

done. The history of policing in the United States and the immediate needs of communities most impacted by crime, violence, and policing demand it.

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Errata

This brief was revised November 11, 2019, to correct an error in the statistical code used to create the concept scales.

Studies using survey data generally collect responses across numerous segments of a concept and average those responses to assess the concept as a whole. For example, responses to five survey items may be averaged to measure someone's attitudes toward a government entity. In this study, the scales summed item responses and divided by the number of items for the concept, independent of how many items respondents answered. For example, the "perceptions of police legitimacy" scale had 12 items, so the code divided the sum of the responses by 12. This method underestimated scale values for respondents who answered 11 or fewer items. It was especially problematic when a respondent did not answer any of the 12 items: the summated value and the scale value were zero, which is outside the possible range of response options.

To correct this problem, we have recalculated all the scales. We created a scale for a respondent only when they answered *more than half the items* about that concept. Then, we used the average of the *valid* responses rather than the average of the summated responses. For example, we would create a scale for a respondent who answered four questions on a six-item scale, but not for a respondent who answered three or fewer items. The scale would average the values of the four responses, rather than sum the four items and divide by six. These steps better ensure the scale for each respondent is measuring the intended concept.

These changes altered several values in table 3 (Scale Differences by Wave, page 9). One value changed significance: the decrease in the personal victimization experience scale is *not significant*. In a previous version, it was reported as $p < 0.01$.

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Acknowledgments

This brief was supported by cooperative agreement number 2014-MU-MU-K051 awarded by the US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. We are grateful to them and to all our funders, who make it possible for Urban to advance its mission. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.

The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Funders do not determine research findings or the insights and recommendations of Urban experts. Further information on the Urban Institute's funding principles is available at urban.org/fundingprinciples.

The multiyear evaluation of the National Initiative benefited tremendously from the talents and contributions of many Urban Institute colleagues past and present, and we want to particularly thank Isela Bañuelos, Anamika Dwivedi, Joshua Eisenstat, Laura Golian, Erica Kouka, Emma Kurs, Mathew Lynch, Hanna Love, Dean Obermark, Cameron Okeke, Ellen Paddock, and Carla Vásquez-Noriega. We also appreciate the assistance we received from the police department, residents, and community organizations in each National Initiative city, which was invaluable to collecting the information necessary for this report. We also wish to thank the National Initiative partners: the National Network for Safe Communities at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, the Justice Collaboratory at Yale Law School, and the Center for Policing Equity.



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