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Executive Summary

A structured listening restorative-
based process, in three communities.



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NAFCM AND RJCA

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In 2018, the National Association for Community Mediation (NAFCM) and Restorative Justice Community Action (RJCA) brought together their unique and complementary approaches to community-based problem solving at the request of the AAA-ICDR. The AAA-ICDR encouraged NAFCM and RJCA to collaborate and create a shared project from our separate efforts that have focused on facilitated community and individual listening processes.

The result is a restorative listening project design that is both nimble and flexible in helping community members discover their shared values and their shared vision for their community. This project design allows each local partner and their community to start from their place of ability and readiness to address a challenge that continues racial, ethnic, or economic marginalization in their community.

This partnership, with AAA-ICDR support, then tested this design in three communities. The local community mediation center served as the lead for this community implementation. Though 65 % of the NAFCM member community mediation centers utilize restorative practices, for many their restorative practices are offered in isolated settings such as schools, prisons, or the criminal justice system. This project design provided the local community mediation center the opportunity to engage in restorative practices through the lens of a systems change approach. This approach would help the community dig deeper into their racial, gender or economic harms and to articulate their vision and rediscovered values in a manageable and tangible way. This meant recognizing their shared values and the shared drivers of commonality to work together.

NAFCM issued a Request for Partnership to participate in the final development and implementation of the structured listening restorative-based project design. Three local partners with their own unique community challenges were selected. [Midlands Mediation Center](#) in Columbia, South Carolina, asked us to help them use restorative and dialogue practices so that those gathered could focus on the historical institutional racial oppression of nonwhites in their community. [Our Family Services](#) in Tucson, Arizona, asked us to help them use restorative and dialogue practices so that those gathered could focus on the institutional structures currently in place to address the concerns of the homeless population. [Orange County Human Relations](#) in Santa Ana, California, asked us to help them use restorative and dialogue practices so that those gathered could focus on the unseen hand that hampers addressing the rise of hate.

Prior to being on-site with each community, time was set aside to review the draft 2-day agenda and support materials with each of the community mediation centers' teams that would be used on each day. NAFCM met with the three local teams individually in order to provide space to ensure that the outcomes they desired would be achieved. With regard to the 2-day agenda, Day 1 was designed so that the restorative practice would elicit the participants' truths. Day 2 was designed so that the dialogue practice would facilitate the creation of a work plan through the emergence of their shared values. All participants who attended Day 2 needed to have attended Day 1. This was necessary because the Day 2 process built on the transparency of Day 1 and served as the shared experience from which they would now discuss their values, their needs and plan for their next steps together.

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Following the on-site process each local partner began implementing their plans through a self-selected core team. During the first 5 months of implementation, NAFCM and RJCA provided mentoring with the core teams. The mentorship provided to each core team was a critical part of the process being successful. Even though the on-site process helped those gathered to create a unique plan that was specific to their needs, values, and goals, the on-going mentoring was needed to help to address the normative pull to resume previous behavior and attitudes while relegating the plan as a nice idea for others to do. The mentoring sessions provided accountability, clarity, and encouragement that helped each core team to feel empowered by the plan and make concrete steps toward their goals. This became even more essential when all three communities went into shut-down in March in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and then the protests and movement that followed the murder of George Floyd in May.

We are thankful to the AAA-ICDR for recognizing and encouraging us to develop this shared project design. Not only has this project been empowering for the three local partners and the communities they serve but it has also provided us an opportunity to have this experience inform our current individual efforts to meet the needs of many communities who are seeking new solutions during this critical time in our country.

Please contact D.G. Mawn at admin@nafcm.org if you have any follow-up questions or desire additional information.