

- The prosecutor is operating on behalf of the state, not the victim. We need spaces for victim/survivor/community/perpetrator healing and repair that are separate from prosecution – and focused on prevention of further harm.
- We need to focus on people who create harm as human beings first - rather than prisoners or offenders - what are their needs while incarcerated in order to successfully return to the community? (look to approaches in Norway/Germany)
- **“If the first harm in an incident of violence is the loss of agency, the system inflicts the same harm when a person harmed is used as a tool or a cudgel in the punishment of the person responsible for harm.”**

2. How do we address the victim-offender overlap as a racial justice issue? How do we address it as a gender justice issue?

- The driver of mass incarceration is racialized. We have a racialized legal system designed to punish and we don't even have the legal language to be able to change those things. How do we dismantle this system when we lack the legal means? e.g. no retroactive changes.
- Defining harm requires that we go backwards (educate people about how we got here) - educate them about how the system is built to institutionalize harm to certain groups - social, cultural, economic – and that this structural violence plays a role in creating individual violence.
- **There are some tensions in advancing gender and racial equity.**
- There is a need to support equity-focused restorative justice programs in our communities, including programs rooted in fixing racial disparities, and assessing and addressing the needs of the people who have been harmed and the people who have committed the harm. Such programs recognize that the community has also been harmed, even if they are not the named victim.
- **We can't start down-stream with this type of harm and issue.** Community building needs to be a focus of this movement. We can't have equity in criminal justice if we don't have equity in the rest of our community, e.g., affordable housing, quality education, access to jobs that pay a living wage, etc.
- Accessing money from victim compensation funds is challenging. It is sometimes a confusing process, and monetary limits on claims do not always cover the survivor's costs associated with the crime.

- “The issue seems so big, we don’t know where to start locally.”
- There is a need for equity-focused diversion programs that offer a space that addresses the needs and issues of those who are harmed, and those who cause harm.
- **Offer victims and survivors more options.** Punishment is not the *only* option - the trial and court system are not always helpful to all victims.
- **Validate the harm and historical problems in the room,** then focus on their harm and what they did to cause harm to their communities to help them see what they’ve done in context. We have to validate ALL the harm. This helps meet the needs of everyone, including victims and survivors. This is what real restorative justice looks like.
- Both parties have to be willing participants. The perpetrator has to take accountability for the harm, seek opportunities to make amends to the survivor and to the community, and agree to never commit the same harm again.

3. In this era where there is a spike in crime and growing concern about violence, how do we focus the public conversation and political will on violence prevention and positive community development instead of falling back on old, failed strategies that fuel mass incarceration without improving public safety or ending the cycle of violence in this country?

- **If mass incarceration was the answer, we would be safe already and there would be no spike in crime.** We wouldn’t be having this conversation.
- Look at similar countries and see what they are doing differently; examine their “lessons learned” and “what works.”
- There is room for any entity that has the opportunity to do the work we are doing, to speak truth to power.
- Data and statistics are important, and so are stories: who is telling these personal stories is important. It is important to identify allies the folks whom we don’t always think of as allies. **Law enforcement needs to be part of this conversation.** When you find someone to whom law and order professionals listen, that can make a big impact. People who work on the ground *know* who those allies are. At the same time, we have to acknowledge that law enforcement sometimes perpetuates harm.
- Affected communities often are not aware of community alternatives to conflict resolution beyond the police, and that’s sometimes what they call for. In many cases, we also do not have other things to offer at the moment that satisfy the demand and need for

individual and community safety. Organizers are not always connected with their communities, or with allies who share their mission and goals.

- **Community building and healing are essential components of this work. Individual and collective healing *are* community building.** It is difficult to connect with people, and be there not just when they're hurt, because of limited resources.

4. What strategies and tactics do we need to implement in order to move away from purely punitive approaches towards violence prevention and positive community development?

- Survivor-centered restorative justice is foundational to *everything* we are doing.
- Just ask what victims and survivors need, and work with them to meet those needs.
- **Importance of victim safety.** Victims like law enforcement officials because they make them feel safe.
- Financial needs are important, but there are many other personal needs.
- The model of trauma recovery centers is a good one to examine and replicate.
- Allies - law enforcement, community advocates, victim service and mental health professionals. Good allies help with bridge building.
- Education about “what it means to be a good ally” is also important.
- **Bring down the ceiling of punishment.** The Council on Criminal Justice Task Force on Long Sentences is addressing long sentences, with a survivor-centric lens. Visit <https://counciloncj.org/> to sign up for their email updates, which cite evidence-based practices and policies.
- We need a complete rewrite of how survivors are involved in justice and related processes, and focus on accountability and repair of the harm caused.
- We need a mass narrative change – there are different types of stories out there that need to be heard.
- We need to enable conditions to dismantle systems of harm.
- Include impacted people in your conversation; who is at your table?
- Building community trust is always the way forward. We need strategies and research to build community trust in restorative practices and violence prevention programs.
- The Sentencing Project’s [media guide](#) for criminal justice coverage recommends reporting on the diversity of victim/survivor views.

5. What concrete projects can we prioritize together to implement these strategies/tactics?

- Victims and survivors have a special role in the criminal legal space. But the system needs to provide greater flexibility for victims of crime to define how and if they want to operate in the criminal legal space. Our traditional adversary system should *not* limit victim participation or healing.
- When victims are involved in justice reform initiatives and have a leadership role and voice in this work, the efforts are *always* successful.
- Expand opportunities for restorative justice at all points in the justice system, including as community-based diversion from the justice system, in prisons, jails, and in the community.
- Additional research is needed about programs that work to support victims and heal communities while reducing mass incarceration and preventing violence.
- For many victims, the current criminal legal system does not represent them or accommodate their needs adequately. Some participants noted that they did not want the government to define their needs or tell them that their pain is more important than healing. Some felt this reflects an operational approach to victims by prosecutors, due to the demands for criminal convictions. Participants noted the need for more culturally relevant, trauma-informed approaches to victims/survivors of crime. One program noted, entitled “I Am Enough,” is a therapeutic program for women of color who have lost a loved one to gun violence or incarceration.
- Victims with intersectionality on other issues need to be able to connect with one another in a safe space.
- Evidence-based approaches to violence reduction are needed to respond to “tough-on-crime” strategies.
- Define trauma and help people to understand what they are experiencing in mind and body.
- The public and politicians need to understand how we got to mass incarceration, rather than a system focused on individual and public safety and violence prevention – education is needed about the structural issues, as well as the cycle of unaddressed trauma that perpetuates violence.
- Educate the public and lawmakers about the unmet needs of communities and individuals victimized by violence – public health, mental health, education, economic - and how meeting these needs can improve individual and public safety.



RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY FOR REFORM

- **Make sure people working in this field (anti-violence workforce) are not struggling, pay them what they are worth, and elevate community organizers and organizations so that people can support their families.** The field should ensure that it benefits from the expertise of directly impacted people by ensuring that they are hired into permanent positions in the anti-violence work force rather than just paid honorariums or stipends.
- There is a need for continued dialogue and action plans among victim/survivor organizations/restorative justice practitioners/criminal/legal reform community. Constantly expand who is at the table of these ongoing conversations about violent crime, with a focus on diversity and inclusion.