



PROJECT: YOUNG AMERICANS FOR A SAFER COMMUNITY

LOCAL ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

**Actionable steps for staying
engaged in your own city.**

**Because change happens at the
local level.**



engage.
public safety

ABOUT THE TOOLKIT

The *NextGen Talks: The Future of Policing* video podcast series (available on Youtube and Spotify), is part of PROJECT: *Young Americans for a Safer Community*. It provides a compelling look at the top issues in policing, from vastly different angles and perspectives. Check it out for information, education and perspective.



View Video Podcast Series



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IF AFTER WATCHING THE PODCAST SERIES, YOU'RE ASKING: WHAT NOW? WHAT'S NEXT?

This Local Engagement Toolkit will help you answer that question. Real, visible change happens at the local level. This Toolkit provides ideas and actionable steps you can take in your local community to help improve public safety and have your voices heard.

OUR APPROACH:

- (1) They say you can't really change what you don't understand -- so check out the video podcast series first. It's chock full of good information to get you up to speed on the complex issues being debated nationally.
- (2) Then, engage directly. Go "inside" to make changes. This Toolkit guides you through how to engage with your local police department as a way to help drive change.

*Please Note: If you're looking for a Toolkit to offer guidance on how to advocate for **policy** changes, there are excellent, comprehensive Toolkits offered online by activist groups, civil rights groups, and other nonprofits. This Toolkit will focus on engagement options that take the approach of engaging **with** police departments directly, in order to affect change.*

INTRO MESSAGES FROM FELLOW GENZ'ERS



Mya Jacobs

NextGen Talks: The Future of Policing

Co-Chair, Podcast Committee

Graduate, Xavier University (Louisiana), Class of 2020

The *NextGen Talks: The Future of Policing* Video Podcast project changed everything about my fight against police brutality and for police reform. This project challenged us to be different for a purpose...to work harder and longer than most ever do to create something real in this fight for humanity. With over six months of real conversations and discussing serious solutions through our video podcast series, we created a platform and a community where everyone is challenged to check themselves, listen, learn, and think about the complexities behind the issues we see in policing today --- all through different perspectives.

SO, IF YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE STUCK IN SOCIAL MEDIA EXPECTATIONS, THAT THE ONLY WAY YOU CAN PROVE YOU CARE IS BY DOING EXACTLY WHAT EVERYONE ELSE IS DOING, I BELIEVE THIS TOOLKIT IS FOR YOU.

We're showing the realities behind making a difference, like checking your internal biases at the door.

Reality check: we can't advocate for real change in policing if we won't even talk to the police. Instead of creating even more discrimination and separation, let's all dare to be different...to be better.

This Toolkit shows us how to get involved in our own cities, and it all starts by just talking to people about the issues that matter to you. We hope you'll take that first step and join us in engaging.

INTRO MESSAGES FROM FELLOW GENZ'ERS



James Combs

NextGen Talks: The Future of Policing | Video Podcast Host
Graduate, University of Akron (Ohio), Class of 2021

I knew I wanted to make change. I was determined, but didn't have the first clue on how to do it. This project/toolkit really allowed me to take those first steps and see what the next steps would be. Most importantly, it gave me a full view of the depth and complexity of the topic. The one thing I want to leave with you is that whether you take 1 step or 10,000, you're making a difference. Don't let the most frustrating or hardest step be your last.



Victoria Hicks

NextGen Talks: The Future of Policing | Video Podcast Host
Student, College of Charleston (South Carolina), Class of 2021

The diversity involved in bringing this project to fruition absolutely blew me away. With issues that predominantly affect Black and/or Latinx folks, the racial makeup of the people involved in response efforts often makes me feel as though we're "preaching to the choir." However, from start to finish, this project brought together college students, community activists, business professionals and police chiefs across every race and different regions of the country. I am proud to share this Toolkit as a resource because no one was left out of the conversation. All perspectives had a seat at the table, which is why the finished product is so holistic and relatable.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

This Toolkit is part of **PROJECT: Young Americans for a Safer Community**, a project of Engage Public Safety, in partnership with the National Millennial and Gen Z Community (NMC).



Engage Public Safety is a nonprofit organization with a mission to engage everyday people in the public safety challenges in our cities.



The National Millennial and Gen Z Community (NMC) is a national volunteer organization with more than 500 members representing college students and young professionals across 44 campuses in 40+ states. NMC is proud to reflect the diversity of the country when it comes to ethnicity, geographic location (rural, urban, suburban), sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion and politics --- and is nonpartisan.

This Toolkit is the last part of a 3-part project that includes:

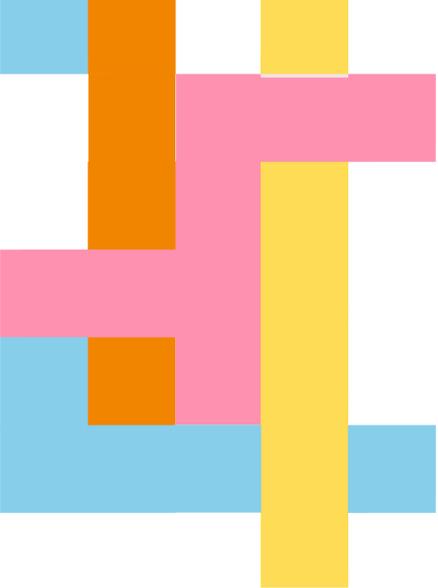
1. *NextGenTalks: The Future of Policing* - a 10 episode video podcast series
2. A national listening session and virtual forum between GenZ and law enforcement leaders, held April 8, 2021.
3. Local Engagement Toolkit

For more information:

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www.EngagePublicSafety.org





ENGAGING MY OWN COMMUNITY

HOW? AND WHERE DO I START?

STEP #1 RESEARCH AND BE IN THE KNOW.

Here are a few starting points to help you research and prepare, before you get engaged in your local community.

01 CHECK OUT YOUR CITY'S POLICE DEPARTMENT

- Check out the police department's website to see what they say about themselves.
 - Who is your police chief? Read his/her message on the website.
 - If the police department has any community or neighborhood outreach initiatives, they will be listed on the department website for you to review. Each police department has their own set of community or neighborhood outreach initiatives you'll want to know about. How is the department engaging the public/the community?
 - Check out news articles by Googling your police department name, to see what others are saying about your police department. This is where you'll see if there have been any recent officer involved shootings, any political issues, any misconduct cases, any reform measures the police department is undertaking, any criticisms the department has received, etc. What does public opinion say about your department? You will want to get up to speed on any recent news about your police department.
- 

02 LEARN ABOUT RELEVANT ISSUES IN YOUR CITY

You'll want to discover what public safety and police reform issues are relevant to YOUR city. Not all cities will have a defund movement. Some cities struggle with recruiting a racially diverse police force. Some cities don't have that problem. Some cities are reviewing their use of force policies. Some cities already have a citizen review board installed. Some don't. Do some research to understand what reform issues from the video podcast series are relevant in YOUR particular city.

03 DISCOVER THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS OR GROUPS ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES IN YOUR CITY

An effective way to help you identify which groups are actively engaged in public safety within your local community is to Google your city police department's name and click on the NEWS tab in your Google search bar. News articles will often quote or mention community organizations, activists, advocates, nonprofits, civil rights groups, or other community leaders that are active in this space. Examples of groups are below:

- Police Foundations (check if your police department has a police foundation)
- Black Lives Matter (Does a BLM chapter exist in your city?)
- Public Safety Councils or Boards within city or county
- Student organizations on campus related to safety, social justice, equity, BLM
- Chamber of Commerce committee focused on public safety
- Local nonprofit organizations focused on public safety, criminal justice, social justice
- ACLU, NAACP or other civil rights organization

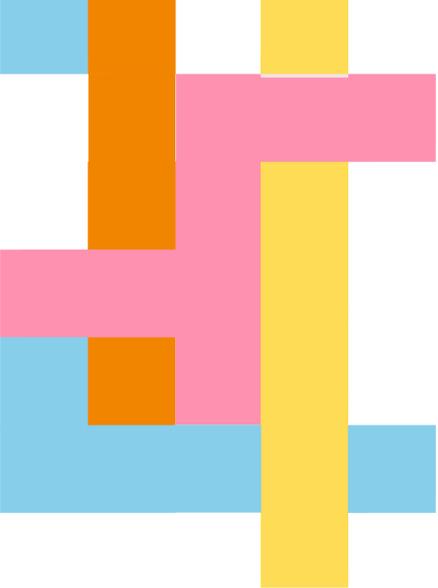
04 COLLEGE / UNIVERSITY PUBLIC SAFETY

If you're currently a student and you'd like to start with your campus, first see if your college/university has a campus police department **OR** a campus public safety department. Not all campuses have a police department with sworn police officers. Some campuses have a public safety department with civilian security officers / public safety officers, which are different from sworn police officers. Some campus officers carry guns, some don't. If you're curious how your campus public safety system is set up, spend some time Googling and reading about your campus public safety department.



**CALLING ALL YOUNG PEOPLE:
STAY INVOLVED. LOCALLY.**





ENGAGING MY OWN COMMUNITY

HOW? AND WHERE DO I START?

STEP #2

SET YOUR INTENTION.

GET CLEAR ON WHAT YOU WANT TO DO.

Once you do some research to get a better understanding of the issues in your particular community, the next step is to define what you want to do.

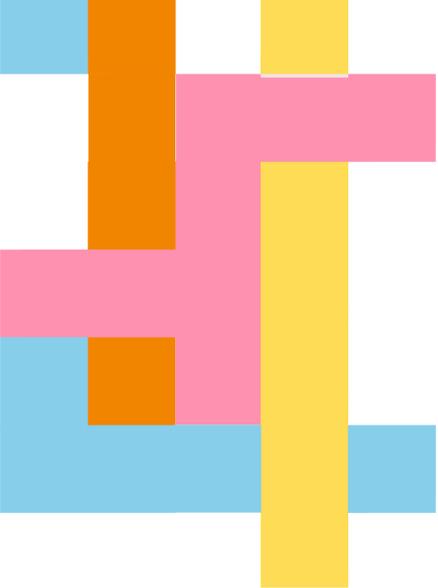
WHICH IS YOU?

“
I just want to understand what's going on locally in my city. That's all I have time and energy for right now.”

If this is you, start with Step #1 -- Research. It's better to be well-informed about what's going on in your city, than not. The more people we have that are taking steps to get informed, the better our society will be. Have you viewed all 10 episodes of our video podcast series? The episodes will help provide direction for researching your local issues.

“
I want to get engaged and DO something. Where do I start?”

If this is you, keep reading... You can select some options from a menu of actionable steps.



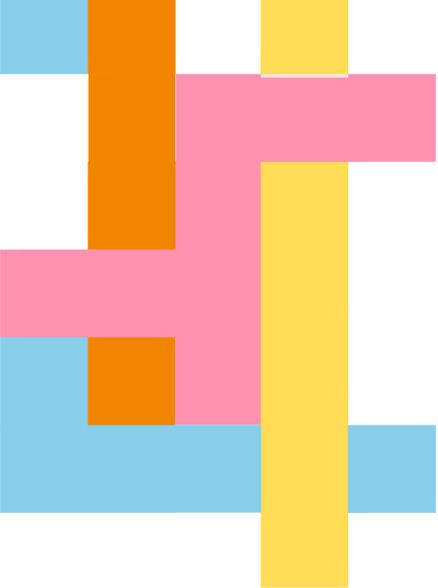
ENGAGING MY OWN COMMUNITY

HOW? AND WHERE DO I START?

STEP #3 COLLABORATE.

Do you feel comfortable meeting with your local police department or other decision makers on your own? If so, do it! Skip this section and go on to Step #4. For others that would rather collaborate with others, here's where you can start.

- Start with your own friends. Ask them to join you in meeting with your local police department.
- In your research, you probably identified groups, community organizations, nonprofits, or individuals that are already actively engaged in the public safety discussion and police reform movement in your city. Reach out and see how you can participate with, or add to, what they already have in motion.
- If you're a student, you can talk to classmates, professors and relevant campus groups / clubs / associations to identify people with similar interests.



ENGAGING MY OWN COMMUNITY

HOW? AND WHERE DO I START?

STEP #4

ENGAGE YOUR LOCAL POLICE DEPARTMENT

Go straight to the organization we're talking about. Engage your police department. Below are some examples of how to get started.

MENU OF ENGAGEMENT OPTIONS:

- Meet with your local police department leadership
- Go on a "Ride-Along" with a police officer
- Join a Citizens Academy at your local police department
- Volunteer (be the change -- go inside)
- Join (or start) a public safety advisory board or committee
- Attend a public meeting hosted by the Police Department (i.e. a community meeting, a public forum, a precinct meeting, etc.)

01 MEET WITH POLICE DEPARTMENT LEADERSHIP

There are several public safety stakeholders you can meet with as you start getting involved in public safety and policing matters in your city --- from police department leadership to police union leadership to elected officials to district attorney offices, to community advocacy organizations and other public safety relevant nonprofits and groups.

To start, go out and meet with your local police department. Go straight to the organization we're all talking about.

Let's have GenZ'ers across the country request meetings with their local law enforcement agencies.

WHO SPECIFICALLY SHOULD I MEET WITH?

Below are the individuals you can meet with within the police department. Access to these officials will depend on the size of your police department. In small cities, there's a good chance you'll be able to meet with the police chief or the 2nd/3rd in command directly. In large cities that have multiple police stations AND a police headquarters, you can meet with the head of the police station (or precinct) you live in, or try the community affairs department at headquarters.

- Police Chief
- Police Department Leadership/Command Staff
(Assistant Chiefs, Deputy Chiefs, Captains, Commanders, etc.)
- Police Department Community Relations Officer

HOW DO I CONNECT WITH THEM?

- Find their emails on the police department website
- Call the police department's front desk number and ask for emails and phone numbers of the person you'd like to meet with.
- DM them on Twitter. Many police leaders will have their own Twitter accounts, apart from the police department's general account.

WHAT SHOULD I TALK ABOUT WHEN I MEET WITH THEM?

Share your intent:

Tell them you want to meet with them to better understand the challenges the police department faces and want to learn more about how you can get involved.

Most police department leadership officials will take a meeting with a citizen/community member --- most especially when your intent is to get more involved in your city.

Your Goal?

Get to know the department! You can't help improve what you don't know or understand.

But really...What do I talk about?

The ***Topics and Questions Bank*** below provide some starter questions you can work into the conversation to help you get to know your local police department and understand the issues they're challenged with.

The ***Solutions and Ideas Bank*** below provide some examples of policies, programs and initiatives that are working well in some police departments. You can ask YOUR police department what their stance is on these examples and what it might take to implement something similar in your city.

TOPICS & QUESTIONS BANK

You'll notice some of the questions below suggest you address the police department as "our" police department and "our" officers instead of "your" department and "your" officers. That's intentional. As a resident and a local tax payer, your city police department should be YOUR police department. Taking ownership and addressing the officers as "our officers" in "our city" demonstrates your interest and commitment to being part of the solution and to help improve things.

Remember: Police officers are in public service, and you are part of the public.

- What is the state of our police department these days?
How's the morale amongst officers?
- What are the most challenging parts of your job as a Police Chief?
(or police captain, or police officer -- whoever you're talking to)
- How does the police department keep a pulse on how the community feels about the public safety service it's providing? Do you do an annual community survey? Do you host regular community meetings? Do you actively monitor social media?
- Does the Police Chief have a citizens advisory panel or group he or she works with, to keep a pulse on community sentiment? If yes, is this something I can join? If no, is this something I can help start?
- What happens in our city when an officer is involved in a controversial shooting of an unarmed person? Who investigates such cases? Our District Attorney? Or is there a more independent entity that investigates? What do you think about the need for an independent investigation process?
- Do our officers have bodyworn cameras? What is your policy on releasing officer bodyworn camera footage after an officer-involved shooting?

TOPICS & QUESTIONS BANK

- What are the various accountability measures currently in place in our police department? Is there an office of Internal Affairs? What are some of the barriers to exercising accountability in the police department, if any? The culture? The police union? The community review board? The elected officials? Laws or department policies? The district attorney's office?
- How has the defund movement impacted this police department, if at all? What do you think about the defund movement in general?
- How are calls for service dealing with mental health crises or homelessness handled in our city? Do you think our officers are adequately trained to handle those types of calls? If not, what can we do to remedy this?
- Are there any challenges to recruiting new officers and diverse candidates to our police department? What do you look for in candidates?
- Have there been any NEW policy changes or practices or training protocols put into place since the summer of 2020 in response to national protests?
- What other reform measures or changes is our police department working on these days?
- What do you think are the most misunderstood parts of our local police department?
- What are some ways the young people in this city can get involved to improve policing, improve police--community relations, and help advance equitable experiences of public safety?

SOLUTIONS & IDEAS BANK

Ultimately, you want to be part of the solution. Below are some examples of solutions and ideas that can help improve policing and build stronger relationships between cops and communities. Bring up these solutions and ideas when you meet with your police department and see how you can help bring some of these to fruition.

TRAINING

- Offer historical education instead of implicit bias training, to focus on the history of policing and racial bias. Give police officers insightful context and improve their understanding of the struggles of communities of color. Many don't receive this education in schools.
- Offer historical education about the department to new recruits during their academy training, including tough issues, past conflicts and critical incidents, the department's learnings, and historical issues relevant to your police department. Equip them with context to set them up for success as new officers. [\(implemented by the Los Angeles Police Department\)](#)
- Don't just have police train police. Bring in community leaders and advocates to talk to and educate new officers on how communities of color experience policing. [\(implemented by the Dallas County Sheriff's Office\)](#)

SOLUTIONS & IDEAS BANK

RECRUITMENT

- Go beyond traditional and standard criteria when recruiting new police officers. Be creative and diversify the criteria to attract different perspectives to the profession.
Examples:
 - Require that all new officers have a record of volunteering in the community before joining the force
 - Recruit from other professions like psychology, social work, mental health workers, nurses, teachers, and community organizers
- Drop the recruitment age of new officers to 18 years old, in order to begin grooming them from a young age. (implemented by the [DeKalb County Sheriff's Office](#))
- Raise the recruitment age to mid-twenties, to recruit more emotionally mature young adults into police work
- Create new roles within the police department (not just beat cops/sworn personnel)

SOLUTIONS & IDEAS BANK

MENTAL WELLNESS FOR OFFICERS

- Provide every officer with mental wellness training and visits every year. (implemented by the Sidney Police Department (OH) and found to decrease use of force incidents and complaints against officers).
- Provide in-house psychologists, counselors and peer support teams to support all police personnel. (implemented by Harris County Sheriff's Office)

HANDLING MENTAL HEALTH CRISES CALLS

- STAR PROGRAM
Have specially trained mental health workers respond to 911 calls instead of police officers, such as the STAR PROGRAM implemented in Denver, CO.
- MET (Mental Health Evaluation Team) PROGRAM
Have specially trained police officers respond to mental health crisis calls *while paired* with a mental health professional. Both respond together. (implemented across multiple cities in Los Angeles County)

BUILDING TRUST WITH COMMUNITIES

- Encourage and allow police officers to volunteer within the community while ON DUTY (not using their off time). Make it part of the job. (implemented by Sidney Police Department in OH)

02 GO ON A 'RIDE-ALONG'

Call your local police department and ask if you can go on a “Ride-Along”. Most police departments offer civilians an opportunity to ride alongside a police officer in a police car for part of a shift so you can observe a day in the life of an officer. You will be able to experience real life calls-for-service, ask questions, observe, exchange ideas, and get an up-close-and-personal look at what it’s like being a police officer. Curious? It’ll definitely be a one-of-a-kind experience and will give you perspective on what kinds of changes and solutions make sense for your community.



03 JOIN A CITIZENS ACADEMY

Find out if your local police department offers a Citizens Academy. A Citizens Academy is a formal program many police departments offer to civilians / residents of a city, inviting them to learn about the inner workings of a police department. There is typically an application process to participate, and the program offers an opportunity to meet various members of the department and experience the different units (homicide unit, K-9 unit, narcotics unit, detectives unit, community relations unit, patrol, administration, etc.)

Joining this type of program will give you a fuller understanding of the needs of a police department, their strengths as well as their challenges, and will likely inform your future engagement.

04 VOLUNTEER

Go inside the department and volunteer. Some of you may feel comfortable with police officers, and some of you may not. Most people are not. That's ok!

If you want to make change, consider going inside the department and volunteering with them. It's a big step, but it can be highly insightful and go far in informing your perspective and giving you ideas for what can and should change.

Examples of Volunteering Opportunities:

- Police Activities League / Police Athletic League (PAL Program)**
Many police departments operate a PAL Program, which is a police sponsored community youth program that often involves sports, youth leadership activities, homework help, mentorship, etc. PAL programs connect police officers to youth in positive ways and builds stronger police - community relations. Volunteering with this program will be an enriching experience and will have you participate in ONE aspect of policing that will help you develop additional relationships with police officers and police leadership in ways that can open doors for you to continue to make a difference, get involved, and advocate for change from the inside.

- National Night Out (NNO) (natw.org)**
Every August, most police departments across the country will participate in a national community outreach event called NNO. Talk to your police department and see if there's a way you can volunteer with this event, OR...accompany these series of events in your city with the police chief. Ask if you can shadow the police chief and attend the events WITH him/her. Shadowing the police chief will give you a special perspective as you witness the interactions between the chief and community members. You'll be able to listen in on the questions, concerns, complaints and compliments from the community as it relates to public safety, and gain a better grasp of what the public safety challenges are in YOUR city.

05 JOIN (OR START) A PUBLIC SAFETY ADVISORY BOARD OR COMMITTEE

The police chief in your city may have a public safety advisory board or committee, comprised of various members of the community. They will likely include business leaders, civic-minded community leaders, and community advocates. However, they will likely NOT have GenZ representation. It's not often that young people get involved in this way.

But police departments need to hear from the young people in their cities. Ask the police department what the process would be to join the Chief's advisory board or committee.

By stepping up in leadership in this way, YOU can carry the GenZ perspective and make a big difference.

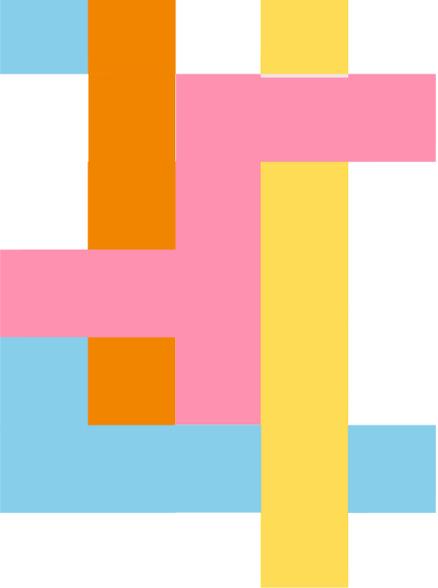
06 ATTEND A PUBLIC MEETING HOSTED BY THE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Many police departments will hold open meetings for the public on a regular basis. They will come in the form of a town hall, a public safety forum, a community forum, a quarterly public safety meeting, a police commission meeting, etc.

Attend!

Check out dates/locations via the police department or city government website. Sign up/Subscribe to their newsletter. Be in the know and get involved.

Simply attending and speaking up will make a difference. Share some of the ideas from the Solutions & Ideas Bank from this Toolkit.



FINAL THOUGHTS

THE FIRST STEP IS TO ENGAGE. GET INVOLVED.

Then, once you decide you want to pursue advocating for a specific piece of policy change or a new set of practices or new approaches, or new initiatives in your police department, it will be a lot easier for you to help drive that change, once you're already engaged, informed and involved.

We hope this Toolkit provides you with guidance and ideas to motivate you to take that first step.

Was this Toolkit helpful? Let us know by commenting on our social media, or email us at info@engagepublicsafety.org.

Young people own the future. We at Engage Public Safety look forward to hearing about and seeing the change the next generation of leaders will bring.

Follow the Project



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