

Albuquerque Community Safety

THE RIGHT RESPONSE AT THE RIGHT TIME



Community Engagement Report

January 2021

ACS Community Engagement Report 2021 In a Nutshell

In the summer of 2020, Mayor Tim Keller's administration made the decision to create the Albuquerque Community Safety department (ACS), a third branch of the City of Albuquerque's first responder system: Police, Fire, and Community Safety. It was important to hear from communities across Albuquerque so that we could understand their immediate and long-term needs and wants. This document is what we heard from you in a nutshell!

What we heard...

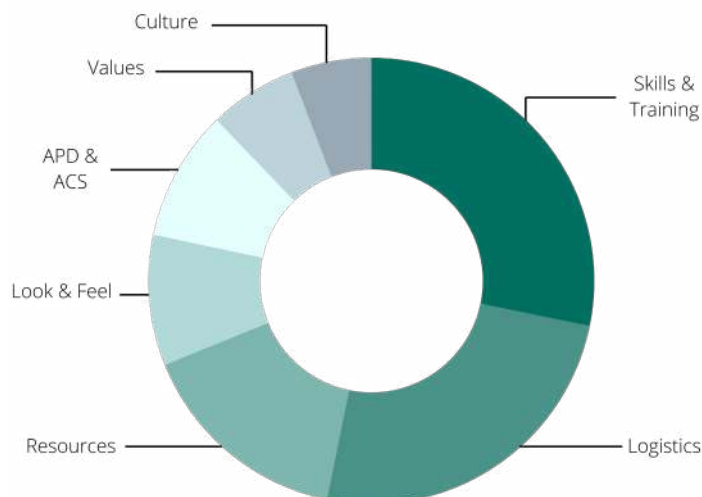
We heard suggestions ranging from hiring and proper training to the importance of partnerships and collaboration. We received ideas about what the department should look and feel like as well as the types of systemic issues that may create challenges.

Despite some hesitation due to concern for responder safety, the feedback we received was mostly supportive of the development and implementation of ACS. All of this feedback will be used to inform our strategic planning moving forward.

This department is sorely needed in our city and across America. Looking forward to a safer, healthier and more equitable Albuquerque.

It will undoubtedly reduce violence in our city and injuries to both our law enforcement and the public.

What people are talking about...



What we did...

Our goal was to build awareness around ACS, identify issues that people are concerned about, highlight key themes, and collect feedback from as many community experts as possible. We achieved this by:

Survey

- Receiving 2,858 responses to the ACS Community Input survey
- Receiving over 1,000 public comments

Partnerships & Events

- Hosting seven virtual facilitated engagement events with over 400 individuals in attendance
- Meeting with over 100 individuals/organizations in-person and via zoom
- Providing information at 20 public meetings or events statewide
- Attending 10 national invitations to present or listen to other cities interested in the ACS model
- Partnering with five local organizations to host lectures and panel discussions to highlight issues and invite discussion
- Prioritizing listening sessions that raised the voices of underrepresented communities and individuals
- Promoting virtual events and survey through the Office of Equity and Inclusion social media, as well as other city department's websites

Contents

In a Nutshell	2
Background	4
What We Did	5
What We Heard	6
Thank you!	9
Appendices	
A - Survey Results	
B - Survey Public Comment Log	
C - Facilitation Model	
D - Community Engagement Miro Board (Public View)	

Background

In June 2020, Mayor Tim Keller's administration made the decision to create the Albuquerque Community Safety (ACS) department, a third branch of the City of Albuquerque's (the City) first responder system: Police, Fire, and Community Safety. Currently, Police and Fire respond to calls for non-life-threatening crisis-related scenarios, such as behavioral health issues. Now, ACS will dispatch an unarmed, first responder team trained in behavioral health and on-scene assistance.

Over the past two years, the City has convened a public safety team consisting of experts from APD, AFR, our social service departments, code enforcement, transit and our offices of Civil Rights and Equity & Inclusion. This group has been working hard to improve outcomes for the community and reduce the need for police response.

It is essential in any comprehensive or strategic planning effort to consider the perspectives of those most affected by any proposed changes. This is especially true in the public sector, as the views of residents are often ignored in favor of speed or practicality. The City, in launching this new department, recognized the value in building consensus around both a preferred future as well as the strategic direction required to reach it.

Key Audiences

In order to be inclusive of all community we identified specific audiences that we needed to reach. These include people who are already engaged in the process, providers and non-profit organizations that work with impacted individuals, and those directly impacted. These audiences are further described in the section below.

Engaged Audiences

These are individuals who have been involved in the planning process that include City and county staff, elected officials, and boards and commissions within the city.



Health Care Providers and Non-Profits

The City depends on and works closely with our non-profit partners and health care providers. Accordingly, it was vital to target this audience as

they have the most expertise in working with our under-represented populations and have a strong understanding of the systemic barriers and larger system of care.

Impacted Individuals

These are audiences that traditionally are under-represented. These include low-income, minority, homeless, and immigrant and refugee communities.



Who We Talked To

We reached out to a variety of community organizations, interest groups, elected officials, and the general public. A few of the organizations who worked closely with us include:

- APD Forward
- Albuquerque Bernalillo County Government Committee (ABCGC)
- Bernalillo County Community Health Council
- Casa de Salud
- Coalition for a Safer ABQ Meeting
- Community Policing Councils (Foothills, NE, NW, SE, SW, Valley)
- Criminal Justice Coordinating Council
- Department of Health (DOH)
- City of Abq. Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Taskforce
- First Nations and Friends
- Heading Home
- HopeWorks
- City of Albuquerque Human Rights Board
- LOPD Metro Mental Health Attorneys
- Mental Health Advisory Committee (MHRAC)
- New Mexico Coalition to End Homelessness
- New Mexico Highlands University
- NM Crisis and Access Line (NMCAL)
- NM Transgender Resource Center
- City of Abq. Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs Board
- Presbyterian Behavioral Health
- Sierra Club and members of NAACP
- Together for Brothers
- Vizionz Sankofa

What We Did

Our goal has been to engage community members and ensure that they inform the creation of ACS from the onset of the department's development. This community engagement fosters awareness of the project, helps identify issues, highlights policy choices, and encourages feedback. Traditionally, we would use "in-person" methods such as open houses and large community gatherings. However, with 2020 being the year of COVID-19, we utilized technology for distributing and promoting information and we hosted all meetings and webinars virtually. Below is a summary of the activities and tools we used during the community engagement process.

Survey

- To be inclusive of all communities in the Albuquerque metro area the City created a perception survey with the option for additional comments at the end (Appendix A). The survey was distributed in English and Spanish throughout City websites, social media, and partner organizations. We received 2,858 responses to the survey and public comment.

Virtual Engagement

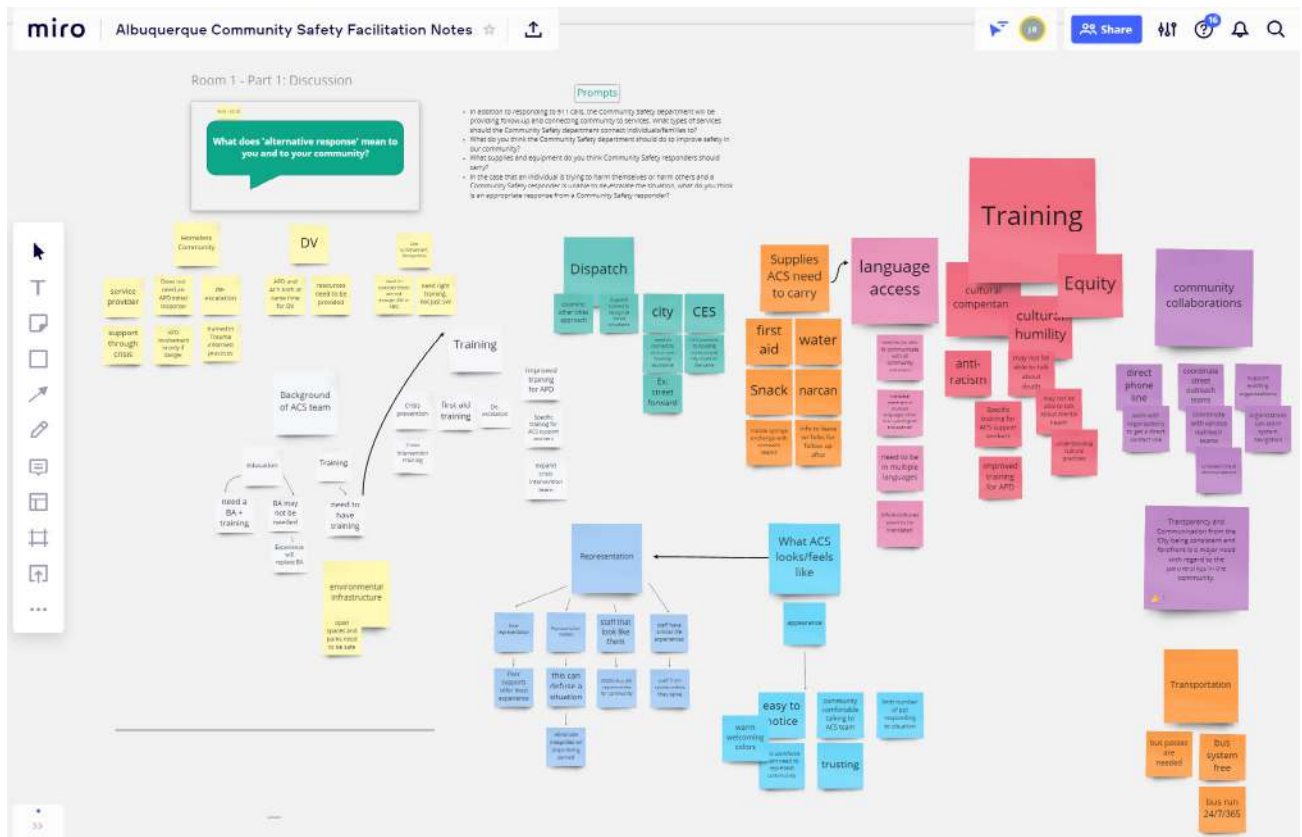
- In September 2020, the City hosted seven virtual, facilitated engagement events with 45 individuals at each session. During the 2-hour session, we broke out into three small groups. In the first hour, each group discussed their general thoughts on the department as well as how it should be established. The second hour

was dedicated to evaluating three real life scenarios to determine how ACS could approach these situations differently than current practices. We used Miro, an online software, as a note-taking tool that all participants could see in real time (Appendix B).

- We partnered with other organizations to host lectures and panel discussions to highlight issues and invite discussion. This was a great way to include those populations that are not normally engaged in City activities or who have built trust with those partners.
- We held numerous listening sessions and meetings with a variety of stakeholders throughout the city. We prioritized listening sessions that raised the voices of homeless individuals, LGBTQ, people of color, and immigrants and refugees that are among the most impacted in our current first response system.

Outreach

- We created a webpage for ACS with its own OneAlbuquerque logo. The site is meant to contain information about the project, a comment tool, links to surveys, and ways to connect for future employment.
- We promoted virtual events and the survey through the Office of Equity and Inclusion's social media, as well as other City department's websites.
- Community partners reposted and promoted ACS events.



What We Heard

The feedback we received from our facilitated events and survey addressed multiple components of ACS, the greater system, and players in that system. Below is a summary of key themes from public feedback, organized by topic. Examples of feedback are quoted throughout this document.

Highlights from Survey

Much of what we heard was obtained through a perception survey instrument designed by City staff. The survey questions were meant to find out how people feel about ACS. We wanted to collect information that addressed community needs and wants, establish baselines, and determine goals and objectives. All questions were worded in an unbiased fashion as to not sway answers one way or another. We also wanted to collect demographics of those who completed the survey to understand where to solicit future information.

The City of Albuquerque strives to be inclusive and equitable in our engagement. The survey was open throughout the public engagement process and was publicized through a variety of means, ranging from postings on the City website to social media posts, partner agencies, and spots on local news stations.

Given that New Mexico is a majority minority state, we made sure to translate the survey into Spanish and distribute it among partners who work with Spanish speaking communities. Additionally, we distributed paper surveys to communities who may not have access to technology.

The survey was made available July 2020 through the end of the year. The survey resulted in 2,859 responses from across the city. Figure 1 below is a cloud that visually represents the data collected for zip code; larger the text, the more responses we had from that zip code.

Overwhelmingly, respondents indicated that they would feel most comfortable with ACS responding to homelessness issues, needle pickup, welfare checks, and suicide threats or attempts (see Figure 2). Finally, respondents were given the option to provide additional comment to expand upon their answers to a number of questions (see Appendix B for complete comment log).

Figure 1: Zip Code Word Cloud

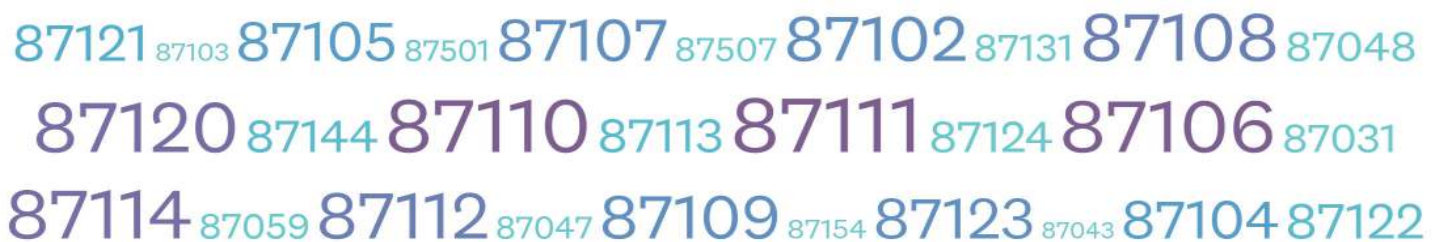


Figure 2: Top 5 Issues for ACS to Address



Community Engagement Event Themes

Skills Required and Training

- **Education and Experience.** Individuals who have backgrounds in crisis prevention, de-escalation, and trauma-informed care should be recruited. Professional backgrounds included social workers, certified peer support workers, community advocates, psych nurses, and behavioral and mental health specialists. In addition to having post-secondary and graduate education, it was recommended we prioritize practice and applicants' own lived experience.

“Should be licensed social workers and peer support workers who have a foundational understanding of trauma-informed care, providing in-home and community support, and crisis intervention. Just as not everyone licensed social worker is meant to provide psychotherapy, not all social workers are able to provide community crisis intervention in a manner that feels supportive to the individual.”

- **Values of Responders.** Individuals working in ACS should have a certain type of value system and should understand how to work with community, not just those in crisis. Qualities include being empathetic, active listening, nonjudgmental, and strong communication skills.

“We need compassionate, unarmed, community workers who are seen as true public servants.”

- **Training.** Creating a strong training plan that includes anti-racism, implicit bias, de-escalation, cultural competency and humility, crisis intervention, ethics, mediation, strengths-based intervention, and trauma-informed trainings. It was suggested that some of these trainings should be community-based. Given that there will be coordination with APD and AFR, it will also be important for ACS responders to receive safety training from police and fire fighters. Equally, the police and fire departments will need to be trained on ACS protocols and procedures.

“ACS and public safety staff need to be trained consistently and continuously on mental health, de-escalation, trauma informed practices, cultural awareness, anti-bias etc. training should occur at the academy level and before they interact with anyone in the public. Measures need to also include simulated drills, how to communicate, and the use of empathy.”

demand. It is important that appropriate specialists are staffed during those shifts.

- **Co-response.** Although there was consensus that ACS should work as much as possible without police, it was understood there will be a need to partner with APD either before or after a call. The recommendation was to get as much background as possible before arriving to scene, assess the situation at the scene, and then determine if ACS or APD approaches individuals first or if it will be both responders at the same time.

“I feel like a lot of scenarios where police are called are overwhelming for officers. They're not mental health professionals. They don't have the wherewithal to assess every angle calmly (not their fault, it's just not in their training). Police also can be very intimidating and increase the magnitude of a crisis.”

- **Dispatch and Transportation.** There will be a need to develop a process for how dispatch will qualify and dispatch ACS responders, especially if specialized teams go out to specific types of crises. It will also be necessary to have the right types of transportation services for the teams to be effective.

“I would rely heavily on information given to the dispatcher and the dispatcher well trained in effective questioning techniques.”

underrepresented communities, and others to set an expectation about the services ACS will provide.

- **Partnerships.** It will be critical that ACS not only connect with partners and existing resources so that individuals get the correct type of services but that we are efficient and responsible with the current infrastructure of services. This could also mean that if there are services that need to be strengthened, ACS can help support that contractual work.

“As a university teacher I am very supportive of extensive education and training programs for alternative first responders. I would like to see UNM and CNM very involved in that work.”

- **Coordinated Services.** There are many types of services and outreach provided across the city. It was recommended that ACS coordinate services with providers for a better continuum of care, such as intensive case management, long-term follow up, and connection to pathway navigators.

“As a community mental health provider I look forward to seeing how this department shapes up and am hopeful that the city collaborates and integrates behavioral health care providers into the system at large.”

- **Larger System of Care.** There was concern that the larger system of care will create barriers for ACS' success. Issues that were voiced included not having a triage center, not having enough sobering beds or a large enough sobering center, restrictions on who qualifies for certain programs, and hospital limitations.

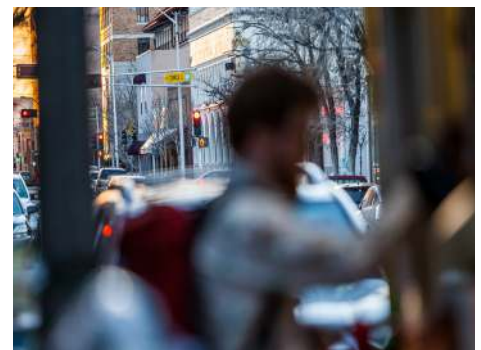
Logistics

- **24/7 Response.** It was stressed that ACS must be a 24/7 service. Heat maps and a thorough understanding of current services being provided in the community create a picture of when there will be highest



Resources

- **Public Education.** Many individuals stressed the importance of outreach and education. They encouraged greater effort to reach neighborhood organizations, immigrants, youth, schools,



ACS Look and Feel

- **Uniform.** There was a lot of discussion that ACS should be recognizable and distinct from other first responders but should not be in clothing that mimics other safety responders such as police or fire fighters. Suggestions included semi casual attire such as a polo shirt, comfortable shoes, employee badge as a form of ID, and warm colors that might make someone more approachable.

“

This might be dangerous work, but if ACS wears bulletproof vests or carries batons, it is reiterating the same narrative that ACS doesn't trust our community members, and there will immediately be a power disparity that leads to mistrust.

”

- **Supplies.** There will be a need for ACS responders to carry the right types of supplies when working in the field. Recommendations were made such as food, water, hygiene products and safety supplies such as naloxone and first aid kit. Community was adamant that ACS responders should not be armed with any type of weapon.
- **Hiring.** Although community want ACS responders to have the right type of education and experience, it was also important that we consider hiring of those individuals who represent marginalized communities, under represented communities, people of color, multilingual and individuals from the LGTBQ community. Hiring in an equitable fashion will ensure that ACS responders have a strong understanding of Albuquerque and how to best work within those communities. This will also help create a culture that is respectful to community and caters to their unique needs.

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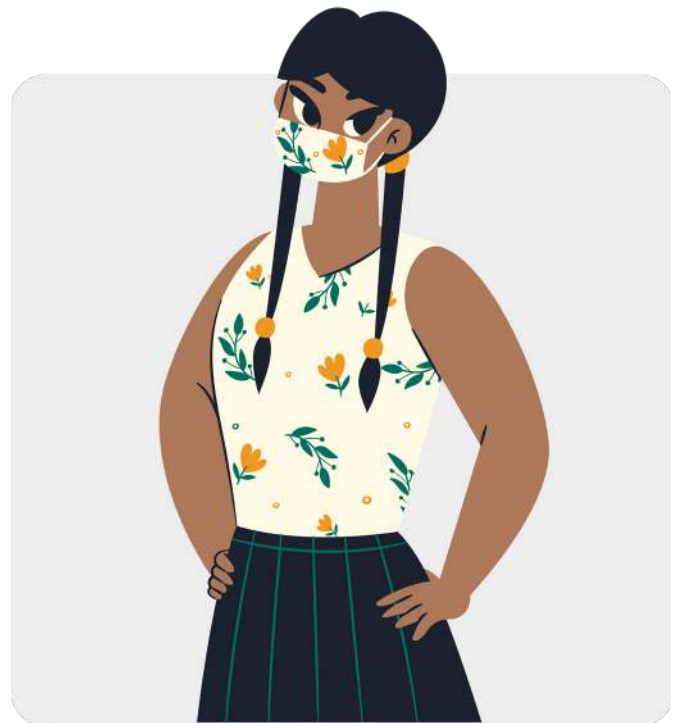
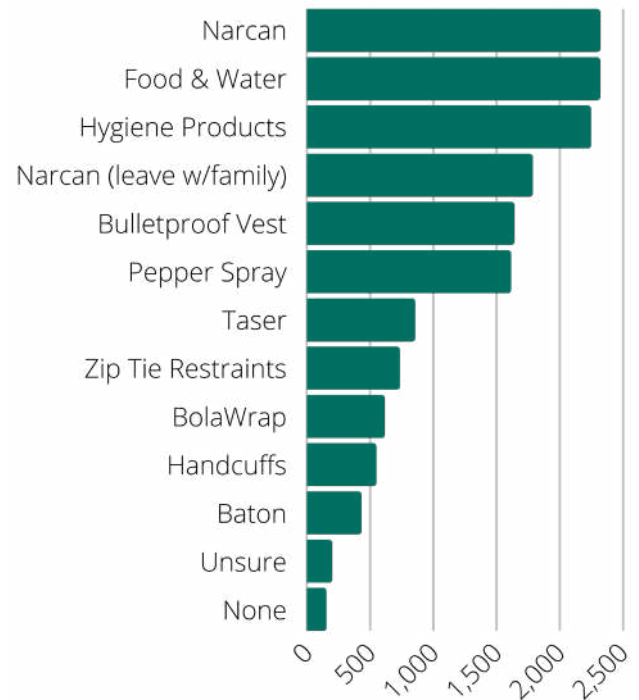
Please make sure you go into high impacted areas- listen to what the community wants and especially hire folks to work in their own community.

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Values

- Trustworthy
- Supportive
- Empathic
- Caring
- Genuine
- Equitable

Figure 3: Level of Support for Supplies from Survey





Thank you!

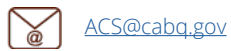
The Albuquerque Community Safety department had a citywide conversation. The thoughts and ideas of our residents had a dramatic effect on shaping the department's future. Thank you for your time and input.

What you can do to get involved

- Visit our website where you can sign up for our email list to get updates and hear about future events



- Tell us how you want to be involved!



- Host your own meeting



Contact

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