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U.S. Department of Justice  
Community Relations Service

# CRS FACT SHEET

The Community Relations Service is the Department's "peacemaker" for community conflicts and tensions arising from differences of race, color, and national origin. Created by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, CRS is the only Federal agency dedicated to assist State and local units of government, private and public organizations, and community groups with preventing and resolving racial and ethnic tensions, incidents, and civil disorders, and in restoring racial stability and harmony.

With passage of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, CRS also works with communities to employ strategies to prevent and respond to alleged violent hate crimes committed on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion or disability. CRS facilitates the development of viable, mutual understandings and agreements as alternatives to coercion, violence, or litigation. It also assists communities in developing local mechanisms, conducting training, and other proactive measures to prevent tension and violent hate crimes. CRS does not take sides among disputing parties and applies skills that allow parties to come to their own agreement.

CRS is not a law enforcement agency and does not impose solutions, investigate, or prosecute cases. CRS mediators are required by law to conduct their activities in strict confidence and are prohibited from disclosing information about cases for which it has provided services.

## SERVICES AVAILABLE

Since 1965, CRS has provided experienced mediators to settle community conflicts and violence related to race, color, or national origin. CRS' highly skilled mediation professionals have helped resolve thousands of cases involving excessive use of force incidents, hate crimes, demonstrations, changing community demographics, and many other emotionally charged issues. CRS provides its services when requested or when it believes peaceful community relations may be threatened. CRS professionals identify the sources of violence or conflict, and apply specialized crisis management and violence reduction techniques to diffuse the situation. CRS conducts its work on-site with state and local officials, Police Chiefs, school and col-

lege administrators, civic leaders, and leaders of non-traditional organizations. The effectiveness of CRS services is based, in part, on voluntary cooperation by parties representing all sides of the conflict.

- CRS provides expertise and guidance regarding methods and policies that help calm racial tensions and resolve conflicts; CRS fosters collaborative approaches between state and local governments, and community groups, for preventing and responding to civil disorders;
- CRS improves lines of communication between federal, state, and local public officials, community leaders and residents;
- CRS helps schools, colleges, and universities to resolve conflicts and disputes through formal mediation or other conciliation approaches;
- CRS helps establish programs to eliminate racial misconceptions and build multiethnic coalitions.

*"...we may not look the same and we may not come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction – towards a better future for our children and grandchildren."*

— President Barack Obama

## SIGNIFICANT CRS ACCOMPLISHMENTS

During periods of heightened racial tension and conflict in our nation, CRS has helped thousands of communities. Examples of CRS assistance include:

- **Civil Disorders.** CRS helps mayors, law enforcement, and community leaders restore stability and order. The death of an African American motorcyclist in a high speed police chase led to rioting in one community. Citizens burned buildings and police cars in a violent protest that lasted for more than 48 hours. CRS staff was deployed to help police, local officials and civic leaders re-establish peace and begin constructive dialogues. Additionally, CRS provided training and technical assistance that focused on averting additional

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conflicts and improving the relationship between police and the community.

- **Church Burnings.** As part of a comprehensive response by federal agencies to address church burnings, CRS staff worked directly with more than 180 rural, suburban, and urban governments in 17 states to help eliminate racial distrust and polarization, promote multiracial efforts for the construction of new buildings, conduct race relations training for community leaders and law enforcement officers, and provide technical assistance bringing together law enforcement agencies and minority neighborhoods. CRS served as a principal partner on the National Church Arson Task Force.
- **Schools, Colleges, and Universities.** CRS services have been requested by hundreds of school districts and colleges. CRS is asked to help address existing racial conflicts and violence, to develop strategies for avoiding future race related conflicts, and to conduct training programs for students, school officials, and parents. CRS' SPIRIT, or Student Problem Identifying and Resolving Issues Together program, is available to help senior and junior high schools identify and defuse racial tensions. This program also engages local police and school stakeholders as key partners in the design of a peer mediation program.
- **Demonstrations, Marches, and Other Special Events.** CRS mediators work to help local officials effectively plan and communicate using methods that will reduce the prospect of racial misunderstandings, conflicts, and confrontations. Key planning and crisis response assistance has been provided in support of political conventions, spring break events, anti-Martin Luther King and Columbus Day demonstrations, and at numerous protests and rallies throughout the country.
- **Post 9/11 Hate Crimes.** Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, hate crimes against Muslims and people perceived to be Muslim increased dramatically. In response, CRS worked to reduce suspicions and inappropriate treatment of Arabs, Muslims, and Sikhs (AMS) by providing cultural awareness training to law enforcement using AMS community leaders. CRS also produced an accompanying video titled, "The First Three to Five Seconds." The video familiarizes law enforcement with aspects of the Arab, Muslim, and Sikh cultures in an effort to avoid misunderstandings that erode the level of mutual trust and respect between police and members of these cultures.
- **Traditional Hate Crimes.** CRS assists in ameliorating racial tensions sparked by hate crimes. CRS has supported state and local anti-hate crime working groups, developed

curricula and conducted training programs for law enforcement, and helped communities by fostering constructive civic involvement in response to hate crimes. In Jasper, Texas, CRS assisted officials with contingency planning for demonstrations and marches in the aftermath of the dragging murder of James Byrd, Jr. CRS helped the city prepare for the national attention surrounding the funeral and burial, and then worked with a broad coalition of leaders to plan for racial reconciliation.

- **Housing.** When a Vietnamese youth was shot by three African American teenagers in a low income housing project, CRS facilitated communication between the police department, housing authority, and community leaders in an effort to quell volatile racial tensions. In addition, CRS assists community and housing officials by coordinating community dialogues when residents are displaced due to property redevelopment that is perceived as disparate racial treatment.
- **Environmental Justice.** CRS addresses racial conflicts based on environmental issues. When a local airport expanded and new flight patterns were established over a minority community, residents alleged disparate treatment upon learning that a neighboring and primarily White community received noise abatement funds as mitigation. In response, CRS worked closely with the residents, city, airport, and Federal Aviation Administration officials to address the conflict.
- **Tribal.** CRS provides conflict resolution assistance on issues and disputes involving tribes and communities bordering tribal territories. CRS assistance has resolved issues such as using tribal lands for sanitary and hazardous waste landfills, tax disputes between tribal and state governments, jurisdictional conflicts and operational agreements between tribal and non-tribal law enforcement agencies, state and local government disputes with tribes over gaming activities, and the protection and disposition of Native American remains and artifacts unearthed as a result of land development projects. CRS fostered enhanced cooperation between tribes on border reservations and the Department of Homeland Security to ensure increased protection along the northern and southern U.S. borders. CRS has also facilitated dialogues between tribal and state governments related to equitable education funding.
- **Community, Law Enforcement, Government Agency Partnerships.** CRS staff has worked directly with local governments and law enforcement agencies in more than 10 states to address polarization between communities and police based on issues related to race, color and national

origin. CRS conducts race relations training for civic leaders and law enforcement officers, and provides technical assistance intended to increase the level of mutual trust and respect between police and residents of minority communities. CRS also offers programs that enhance the capacity of law enforcement to effectively mediate conflict and avoid racial profiling practices, or the perception of such practices.

*"Perhaps the greatest strength of the United States is the diversity of its people."*

— Eric H. Holder, Attorney General

### CRS PROGRAM GOALS

- To create opportunities and mechanisms for constructive civic discourse on issues of race and ethnicity. CRS helps give national leadership and assistance to efforts to establish "places and spaces" for effective race relations discussions.
- To provide a high caliber of conflict resolution and prevention services to those communities most vulnerable to significant race relation tensions, conflicts, and violence.
- To build enhanced dispute resolution capabilities in local communities, including high schools, colleges and universities, so that local institutions will be able to resolve their own conflicts without external assistance.
- To establish bridges between minority groups and law enforcement organizations in order to improve relations, community safety, and to reduce the potential for disruptive conflict.
- To improve the preparedness of communities to respond to civil unrest through the provision of training, contingency planning, and technical assistance.

### CRS CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS

CRS understands that our work is often practiced during trying times for people and communities, can often address sensitive, emotionally charged, and potentially volatile issues. Therefore, it is important that you know what to expect when you engage us in resolving the concerns of your community. You can expect CRS to meet the following standards when we work with you:

1. We will clearly explain the process that CRS uses to address racial and ethnic conflicts and our role in that process.

2. We will provide opportunities for all parties involved to contribute to and work toward a solution to the racial or ethnic conflict.

3. If you are a participant in a CRS training session or conference, you will receive timely and useful information and materials that will assist you in preventing or minimizing racial and ethnic tensions. If you would like more information, we will work with you to identify additional materials and resources to meet your needs within three weeks of learning your need.

4. We will be prepared to provide on-site services in major racial or ethnic crisis situations within 24 hours from the time when your community notifies CRS or CRS becomes aware of the crisis.

5. In non-crisis situations, we will contact you within three days of when your community notifies CRS or when CRS becomes aware of the situation to discuss your request for CRS services.

6. We will handle your community's challenges in strict confidence. CRS mediators are prohibited, by law, from disclosing information about cases for which they have provided services.

### CRS OFFICES

#### CRS Headquarters

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