

## **Actions Speak Louder:**

### *Solutions Born out of Violence*

From the first zip of the assassin's SKS semi-automatic rifle, the evening's calm was shattered as multiple rounds rang out in erratic syncopation, scattering peaceful marchers in all directions and reigning chaos down on the city of Dallas.

In the quieted reckoning of that Thursday, July 7 eve, four Dallas Police officers and one DART officer would lay dead, seven others wounded and the city would be thrust into a seismic shift that would disrupt the quiet solemnity that it once enjoyed.

It would also harken a remembrance of another day 50 years earlier, when the sound of another rifle just blocks away forever changed a city and a nation.

The senseless act of violence left a sense of extended dismay with many wondering "why?"

Why had a misguided African American executioner who sought to kill "white people," cops in particular, visited this violence on this city?

Why had he chosen this manner to show solidarity to Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, two unarmed black men killed in officer-involved shootings in Louisiana and Minnesota respectively, in the days prior?

With its benign reputation as neither racially tinged nor violently predisposed, there was no overt rationale to proffer a justification for this new inflection point in the city's history – one that would mark this date as the deadliest day for law enforcement since 9/11.

And as the new normal began to set in, it became abundantly clear that *status quo* was unacceptable as a go-forward plan.

[The Dallas Festival of Ideas](#) (DFOI), a three-year collaboration of [The Dallas Morning News](#) and [The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture](#) and produced by [CrowdSource](#), arose as the coalescing force seeking to move beyond vitriol and ire. DFOI knew that words – no matter how well intentioned -- would fall flat at a time that emotions ran high and raw, fear heightened, and anger and confusion unabated. Only action would do.

Borrowing from the 17<sup>th</sup> century proverb, the DFOI seized the moment and became the voice and hands for a city unable to speak for itself. Out of the mourning, a forum called "Actions Speak Louder" (ASL) was birthed.

### **Actions Speak Louder – (ASL)**

At El Centro College, the site of the peaceful protest march and ground zero for the July 7 shootings, DFOI assembled a diverse group who responded to the clarion call to action. Under the banner, "*Actions Speak Louder*," a series of action-oriented sessions with a mandate to define outcomes launched before an audience of more than 150 participants.

Friends of the forums included: El Centro College and President Adames, Bank of America, Communities Foundation of Texas, Downtown Dallas, Inc., KERA, NBC5, The Dallas Convention and Visitor's Bureau, The Dallas Foundation, The Dallas Regional Chamber, The United Way and Social Venture Partners.

### **ASL 1: Friday, July 29, 2016 (7 p.m. to 9 p.m.)**

- Marking one of the first forums following the July 7 tragedies, Dr. Larry Allums, Tom Huang and Byron Sanders opened the evening by introducing the purpose of the gathering and setting the agenda for the first of three forums

- Alvin Hearing, a professional facilitator from PICO, a national network of faith-based community action organizations and new director of racial equity and community engagement with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, began the evening with a series of exercises designed to break down the ideological, sociological, gender and race walls between participants to begin the uncomfortable process of rebuilding trust in a city ripped apart by racial violence
- Many in attendance wanted to be a part of the healing conversation and to take direct action
- Following the opening session, attendees were invited to breakout sessions to talk solutions
- The forum gave the opportunity to talk openly about the divide in the city of Dallas and to begin to take the early steps to begin the healing process as outcomes of the breakouts were shared
- At the close, participants were invited to future sessions
- Represented at the forum were individuals from organizations including: Dallas Faces Race, Council on American-Islamic Relations, Nurture Respect Movement, Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, the Junior League of Dallas, Bank of America, Communities Foundation of Texas, Downtown Dallas, Inc., KERA, NBC5, The Dallas Convention and Visitor's Bureau, The Dallas Foundation, The Dallas Regional Chamber, The United Way and Social Venture Partners
- Coverage of this forum is found [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

### **ASL2: Saturday, September 17, 2016 (9 a.m. to noon)**

- The second of three sessions drew about 75 of the committed with a clear mission to continue the dialog begun in late July
- Dr. Larry Allums, Tom Huang, Byron Sanders and Alison Draper, all DFOI Steering Committee members, opened the second conversation by setting expectations for the follow up forum
- Rev. Edwin Robinson and Dr. Lydia Bean of [Faith in Texas](#), a multi-racial faith movement for social justice, jumped into training techniques for engaging others in social discourse
- Most participants wanted to move past the tragedies by continuing to seek solutions to heal a city divided against itself
- More levels of unrest and ill-at-ease were uncovered and addressed
- Intimate, unfiltered conversations were unveiled in the series of one-on-one breakouts to examine policy changes to prevent future violence
- At the close, participants were invited to the final session
- Coverage of this forum is found [here](#) and [here](#).

### **ASL3: Saturday, October 8, 2016 (9 a.m. to noon)**

- The final session focused on Criminal Justice Reform
- Closing out the trio of dialogs, Faith in Texas led the session with the end goal of constructing and presenting an action plan for change within the penal system which affects black and brown citizens disproportionately
- Breaking into small groups based on self-interest, several presentations were made to draw participation in existing movements; each group then mobilized and moved into action to determine how to best maximize the opportunity at hand
- Faith in Texas closed out the session by outlining a series of proposed reforms entitled "[Live Free DFW.](#)" This set of policy changes aim to make policing more effective, reduce incarceration, and create opportunities for formerly incarcerated people. The campaign is led by formerly incarcerated people from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and their allies. Attendees were invited to join the Actions Speak Louder "Justice Team."
- Dallas County Judge, Clay Jenkins was on hand to review and provide feedback on the manifesto

- Coverage of this forum is found [here](#) and [here](#).

The Actions Speak Louder Justice Team is meeting monthly from October 2016 through April 2017 with Faith in Texas' leadership as they conduct trainings. This team development is intended to guide the Justice Team's work around criminal justice policy reform. The ultimate goal is to develop leaders who will advocate for a set of criminal justice reforms and ultimately report out on the progress at the 2017 DFOI April 29, 2017. Periodic updates on the Justice Team's work is found on the [DFOI website](#).

**Outcomes:**

Overall, feedback has been powerful, validating the timeliness and necessity for the efforts pulled together at a critical time in the city's history. Trust is being rebuilt as new relationships are formed across social, racial, political and geographic (zip code) lines. Participants continue to learn new skills and in forum small groups, experienced open communications that challenged existing thinking. Undoubtedly, the desire to move forward with the ultimate goal of enhanced understanding and emphasis on solutions with action continues.

The 2017 Dallas Festival of Ideas is moving ahead with practical programming to address inequalities and to help make the city of Dallas a safe and more equitable place to live.