



Restorative Practices and ICE Enforcement Contexts

Field Insights Series

NACRJ's Field Insights Series is designed to illuminate emerging perspectives, practices, and experiences relevant to community and restorative justice.

The series is intended to serve as accessible, field-informed resources that build awareness of developments across the field.

NACRJ Mission



The National Association of Community and Restorative Justice (NACRJ) advances community and restorative justice by supporting people and organizations working to build community and repair harm with fidelity to restorative principles. NACRJ works to support shared learning and connection across communities and systems committed to restorative practices.

Why This Topic?

In early 2026, members of the NACRJ community began reaching out with questions about whether restorative practices were being used in response to recent Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) actions occurring in communities across the country. NACRJ conducted this outreach to better understand if and how restorative practices were showing up in this context, and to learn from practitioners and communities already navigating these experiences.

Context

Immigration enforcement and related community impacts have been ongoing realities in the United States for many years. In early 2026, several ICE enforcement situations that received significant public attention, particularly in Minneapolis, Minnesota, led to increased national conversation and concern within many communities.

Methods

In February 2026, NACRJ distributed a short survey asking whether respondents were aware of restorative practices being used in relation to recent ICE enforcement actions. Responses described a range of examples occurring across community and grassroots spaces, faith communities, schools and youth-focused settings, higher education, nonprofit organizations, online spaces, and healthcare settings. The survey included open-ended questions about the restorative approaches being used, the intentions behind those practices, what stood out to participants, and lessons or insights for the broader field. This outreach was intended to serve as a starting point for initial learning rather than a comprehensive account of all restorative practices occurring in this context.

Important Note

Survey responses point to the complexity and sensitivity of what people and communities are navigating. Each situation is shaped by the specific context of the community, the individuals involved, and the details of what has occurred. Restorative practices focus on the harm experienced and can involve many different components, often requiring extensive preparation and pre-work to ensure safety and readiness as part of the restorative practices being used.

This report is intended to serve as a starting point for initial learning, rather than a comprehensive account of all practices taking place. Restorative practices exist along a continuum, ranging from proactive and preventative approaches to responsive processes. The examples shared by respondents reflect the responsive end of that continuum and represent only one aspect of how restorative practices are used in communities.

Responses indicate that restorative practices are being applied across many different contexts, reflecting both the **adaptability** of these approaches and their **relevance** across communities.

Comments from the Field

“The [restorative] process created enough trust for people to share openly about fear, grief, uncertainty, and support.”

“The intention [of the restorative practice] was to hold space for people to be heard and supported, to strengthen relationships, and to foster connection and belonging.”

Key Observations



Circle was the Most Commonly Referenced Process

Circle was referenced in **nearly every response** and was consistently identified as a **trusted process** that **offers both structure and flexibility** for important conversations.



Restorative Practices Were Used Across **Different Settings**

Settings included: **schools, community spaces, faith communities, nonprofit organizations, healthcare settings, higher education, and online gatherings.**



Restorative Practices Served **Multiple Purposes**

The examples shared were not focused solely on problem-solving. Responses described restorative practices being used to **support dialogue, emotional processing, resource-sharing, education, and mutual support.**



Participants Emphasized **Connection** and **Reduced Isolation**

Many responses highlighted the importance of creating spaces where **people could feel heard, supported, and less alone** during complex and emotionally charged situations.



Online and Community-Specific Spaces **Increased Accessibility**

Several respondents noted that **online** circles and **culturally or linguistically responsive** spaces helped **increase accessibility, participation, and feelings of safety** for participants.



Existing Relationships and **Familiarity** with Circle Mattered

Many of the examples came from communities or organizations **already using** restorative practices regularly. **Existing trust and familiarity** with circle appeared to support people's willingness to engage in these conversations.

Recommendations *for* Practitioners *from* Practitioners

○ **Prioritize Preparation and Pre-Work**

Several responses emphasized the importance of preparation before holding restorative spaces, particularly in situations involving trauma, fear, or direct community impact. Practitioners noted the value of pre-meetings and assessing readiness before restorative practices take place.

○ **Consider Accessibility and Language Inclusion**

Practitioners highlighted the importance of offering spaces that are accessible and culturally responsive, including online participation options and circles offered in multiple languages.

○ **Utilize Skilled and Trauma-Informed Facilitation**

Responses emphasized the importance of facilitators being prepared to navigate strong emotions, trauma, cultural dynamics, and differing perspectives while maintaining safety and process integrity.

○ **Build Familiarity with Restorative Practices Before Crisis Occurs**

Several examples suggested that communities already familiar with restorative practices were better positioned to utilize circle during difficult or sensitive situations. Ongoing use of restorative practices may help build trust and readiness over time.

○ **Maintain Integrity of the Process**

Respondents highlighted the importance of holding restorative processes in ways that remain grounded in restorative principles and responsive to the needs of the people involved.

○ **Avoid Doing the Work in Isolation**

Several responses emphasized the importance of collaboration, consultation, and existing relationships with schools, community organizations, and other partners.