

Violence Prevention in Memphis and Shelby County

Contents

Collaboration Overview	1
Collaboration Purpose	2
About the Collaboration	2
Collaboration Structure	3
Promising Practices	6
Lessons Learned	9
Accomplishments	10
Resources	11

Collaboration Overview

The City of Memphis and Shelby County, Tennessee, have developed three interwoven violence prevention initiatives—Operation: Safe Community, the Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan, and the Defending Childhood Initiative.

Key components that support the structure of these initiatives include:

- Developing a strong, representative board of directors and diverse community partners to support implementation
- Involving an independent intermediary to coordinate plan implementation
- Establishing multiple layers of leadership to manage plan implementation
- Outlining clear strategies and objectives in a strategic plan to guide and structure implementation
- Integrating violence prevention and crime reduction approaches within policies to support buy-in and sustainability
- Limiting overhead costs to provide majority of funding to partners implementing the strategic plans

The best practices include:

- Collaborating across initiatives in order to minimize duplication of effort and maximize results
- Involving the highest levels of government and law enforcement
- Developing a message that connects violence prevention and economic growth
- Creating a unifying mission for collaborations and coalitions that were already in place
- Creating transparency and eliciting feedback from the community

- Developing data-driven initiatives by using data to develop strategic plans, share information with the public, and support implementation
- Coordinating with other initiatives to support sharing data across agencies
- Conducting both national and local evaluations

To work collaboratively and minimize violence, Memphis and Shelby County have discovered it is important to:

- Incorporate an additional layer of leadership to translate the board's vision to ground-level implementation
- Utilize strategies to keep a large group of stakeholders continuously engaged
- Continuously inventory community assets
- Have a clear message about the coordinated initiatives to share with the public and stakeholders

Collaboration Purpose

The City of Memphis and Shelby County, Tennessee, have developed three interwoven collaborative initiatives—Operation: Safe Community, the Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan, and the Defending Childhood Initiative—which focus on reducing crime, preventing youth violence, and minimizing violence experienced by children and youth, all with the goal of increasing the prosperity of their community and the quality of life of their residents.

About the Collaboration

Former Shelby County Mayor (and current City of Memphis Mayor) A. C. Wharton, Jr., former Memphis Mayor Dr. W. W. Herenton, Memphis Tomorrow (an association of chief executive officers of Memphis' largest enterprises), the Greater Memphis Chamber of Commerce, and a diverse array of public and private partners began [Memphis Fast Forward](#) in 2005 as a plan to accelerate economic growth and improve quality of life in Memphis and Shelby County. Decreasing crime and violence was one of the key goals of that plan. From that initial groundwork, Memphis and Shelby County have taken a multipronged and overlapping approach to addressing violence within their community, including preventing youth violence, reducing crime, and minimizing the effects of children's and youths' exposure to violence. Three initiatives that resulted from this collaboration are Operation: Safe Community, the Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan, and the Defending Childhood Initiative.

Operation: Safe Community

Established in 2005, Operation: Safe Community is a collaborative five-year strategic initiative (2006–2011) focused on reducing crime and increasing public safety. The [strategic plan](#) is based on 15 research-based strategies and is coordinated by the Memphis Shelby Crime Commission (Crime Commission), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization focused on bringing agencies together to focus on crime prevention using innovative methods. A second phase of

Operation: Safe Community is in development. This plan will go into effect in January 2012 and span from 2012–2016.

Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan

The Crime Commission was selected by the City of Memphis to develop and support the [Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan](#) (PDF, 149 pages). The Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan is an extension of the work done through Operation: Safe Community and makes up part of Phase II of Operation: Safe Community—2012–2016. The leadership involved in Operation: Safe Community recognized that, despite declines in crime in Memphis and Shelby County, data continued to show that a high proportion of violent crimes were being perpetuated by young people and that young people in Memphis and Shelby County continued to face multiple risk factors associated with youth violence. The Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan, finalized in April 2011, is focused on preventing youth violence, intervening with youth at high risk for offending, implementing enforcement strategies, and assisting youth returning from incarceration. The plan is also supported by technical assistance from the National Forum on Youth Violence and experts within multiple federal agencies, including the Departments of Justice, Education, Health and Human Services, Housing, and Labor.

Defending Childhood Initiative (DCI)

DCI, funded by the Department of Justice, is a site-based initiative focused on addressing children's exposure to violence as victims and witnesses. The goals of the initiative are to prevent exposure to violence, alleviate the negative impacts of exposure when it does occur, and develop knowledge and spread awareness about this issue. In Memphis and Shelby County, DCI is coordinated by the Shelby County Office for Early Childhood and Youth.

The initial phase of Operation: Safe Community provided a strong foundation for the work being done through the Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan and DCI. The Crime Commission and the Shelby County Office for Early Childhood and Youth work closely to ensure coordination and minimize any duplication of effort among the three initiatives. Both the Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan and the DCI will be incorporated into the second phase of the Operation: Safe Community plan, allowing for continued coordination and collaboration around these initiatives.

Collaboration Structure

Operation: Safe Communities, the Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan, and the Defending Childhood Initiative (DCI) have distinct structures but also many similarities. Most importantly, all three initiatives were designed to be multifaceted and collaborative entities that bring a diverse group of stakeholders together to support their purpose. Some of the key elements within their structures are:

Developing a strong, representative board of directors and diverse community partners to support implementation

- The Memphis Shelby Crime Commission (Crime Commission) includes a 50-member board of directors representing public and private community leaders. This includes

representatives of law enforcement, businesses, schools, local and state government, nonprofit organizations, university faculty, and more. View a [full list](#) of the board of director's members. This board of directors supports the work of Operation: Safe Community, the Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan, and DCI.

- Memphis Fast Forward provided the catalyst to bring together initial leadership and support on the board of directors. Additional partners were recruited and targeted based on their expertise.
- As the Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan was developed, it became apparent that there was a need to expand the group of stakeholders to support this work. To meet the need, the group was expanded to 75 people.
- Expanding the scope of the board to embrace oversight and governance of DCI helped to limit the challenge and redundancy of trying to bring the same people together multiple times for multiple grants and initiatives focused on a similar topic.
- In addition to the board of directors, the Crime Commission partners with neighborhood associations, businesses, faith-based organizations, social service agencies, and universities to develop strategies to support the five-year plan and clearly identify objectives and expectations for each strategy within the Operation: Safe Community plan. View a list of their [Community Partners](#). As the plan has been implemented, new partners have been recruited to support the evolving work. The community was also instrumental in supporting the development of the Youth Violence Prevention Plan.
- DCI partners with a number of service providers in the Memphis and Shelby County to support their work. Their partners include: Family Safety Center, Child Advocacy Center, Juvenile Court, Exchange Club Family Center, Agape Child & Family Services/Powerline Community Network, Victims to Victory, University of Memphis School of Social Work, Le Bonheur Center for Children and Parents, Memphis Area Women's Council/Erase Domestic Violence Collaborative, and Southeast Memphis CDC.

Involving an independent intermediary to coordinate plan implementation

Staff members from the Crime Commission act as intermediaries to coordinate and oversee the implementation of the Operation: Safe Community strategic plan and the Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan. While not an outside intermediary, the Shelby County Office for Early Childhood and Youth has a similar role of coordination for DCI.

Establishing multiple layers of leadership to manage plan implementation

The work being accomplished through the three initiatives takes coordination and multiple layers of leadership and organization. The board of directors provides the overarching leadership for all of the initiatives. The board has a president who oversees the work of the board as a whole. Specific to the effort of Operation: Safe Community, and separate from the board president, there is a chair of Operation: Safe Community strategies. This chair provides oversight for the 15 strategies outlined in the plan. Within each of the strategies, there are one to two strategy leaders or chairs who coordinate the objectives outlined within the strategy and the effort to accomplish the work. These leaders report their work to the board of directors. Subcommittees or task groups have also been utilized based on the complexity of the work

being done to support the strategies. Similarly, the Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan is structured with core teams based on the strategies outlined in the plan. As the plan is in its initial stages, work is currently being done to populate these teams and their leadership. The leaders of these teams will also report their work to the board of directors. Rather than utilizing strategic teams, the work of DCI is structured under a steering committee, which coordinates its efforts and reports its work to the board of directors.

Outlining clear strategies and objectives in a strategic plan to guide and structure implementation

While the strategic plans are structured differently for each of the initiatives, they were all developed with clear and measurable objectives. The strategic plans establish the structure and accountability for the initiative.

- Operation: Safe Community is based on [15 research-based strategies](#) categorized under smart policing, aggressive prosecution, and law enforcement/community partnership.
- The [Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan](#) is based on the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) model, which includes a prevention goal, an intervention goal, an enforcement goal, and a reentry goal. Each of these goals is supported by specific strategies and action items. Each plan also outlines an implementation approach. The plan has been updated over time and an updated version was released in 2012. The updated [Operation: Safe Communities plan](#) (PDF, 149 pages) spans from 2012–2016.
- DCI is a place-based model that includes multiple layers of support (universal prevention, targeted outreach and support, and intensive interventions). The plan is based on four overarching goals. Similar to the Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan, each of the goals is supported by three to four strategies.

For both Operation: Safe Community and the Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan, the strategies were used to create a structure of separate core teams that work to address each strategy and report to the board of directors on their work. These teams are led by one to two strategy leaders.

Integrating violence prevention and crime reduction approaches within policies to support buy-in and sustainability

The Crime Commission has worked with policymakers and government representatives to see how pieces of the Operation: Safe Community strategic plan can be integrated into ongoing work in the different bureaus of government. For example, they discussed how parks and recreation can support ongoing efforts to prevent crime based on their resources and the capacity that they have to deliver necessary services to the community. Creating these connections and showing how crime prevention can be integrated into the work of government agencies ensures more long-term programming rather than grant-based work that often has a time limit attached.

Limiting overhead costs to provide majority of funding to partners implementing the strategic plans

While the funding sources and program coordination for the initiatives are different, all are focused on limiting overhead costs. These are costs associated with managing the work and acting as a go-between to target funds to partners at the community level that are working to implement the strategic plans. For example:

- The Crime Commission and its work on Operation: Safe Community is mainly funded through the private sector. Its focus is on using funding to convene others and leverage existing dollars within the community or to apply for and attract additional funds to the community so that they can carry out the implementation of the strategies outlined within the plan. Foundation funding and grants have been secured to help support implementation of the strategies. The Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan is not funded currently, though it was developed based on some existing resources. The Crime Commission is currently working to bring stakeholders together to identify, reallocate, and leverage resources to implement the plan.
- Most of the funding for DCI, which is funded through a grant from the Department of Justice, is allocated by the Shelby County Early Childhood and Youth office to the community level partners providing services.

Promising Practices

The following practices have helped Memphis and Shelby County promote collaborative violence prevention efforts.

Collaborating across initiatives in order to minimize duplication of effort and maximize results

Operation: Safe Community laid a foundation that both the Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan and the Defending Childhood Initiative (DCI) have been able to grow from. They have been able to utilize the relationships and trust that had been built through the work of Operation: Safe Community and align aspects of implementation where feasible. For example, the initiatives were able to support:

- **Shared leadership.** As mentioned in the collaboration structure, there is overlap in the leadership of all three initiatives. The Memphis Shelby Crime Commission (Crime Commission) board of directors oversees all three initiatives. By utilizing the same group of people to support all three initiatives, they are able to minimize the burden on their leadership and limit redundancy.
- **Shared data and crime trend analysis.** In addition to their leadership, all three initiatives have relied on a partnership with the University of Memphis's Center for Community Criminology and Research (C3R) to provide crime trend analysis, research, federal grant writing, and management. The data analysis provided through the university has allowed the initiatives to develop their strategic plans and monitor their progress.

- **Shared targeted sites.** DCI was able to establish its place-based initiative in areas that had previously been supported by the work that the Crime Commission had done through Operation: Safe Community. Because of the transparency of the work that Operation: Safe Community had done, DCI was able to use information, data, relationships, and programs that were already underway as it aimed to expand the work to encompass combating exposure to violence for children and youth.

Involving the highest levels of government and law enforcement

Through their coordinated leadership, all three initiatives have been able to involve high levels of government and law enforcement. This includes the mayors of Shelby County and the City of Memphis, U.S. attorneys, the director of the Memphis Police Department, the superintendent of Shelby County Schools, and more. The bipartisan leadership support has lent credibility to the work and has been instrumental in attracting additional partners.

Developing a message that connects violence prevention and economic growth

By shaping the message of violence prevention in economic terms, Memphis and Shelby County were able to engage and recruit business and economic development leaders who might not previously have seen how they were involved in violence prevention and crime reduction.

Creating a unifying mission for collaborations and coalitions that were already in place

Prior to the beginning of Operation: Safe Community and the work of the Crime Commission, there were already a number of collaborations and coalitions that were taking place in Memphis. By bringing together these groups under a common mission, the Crime Commission was able to utilize the strengths of these collaborative relationships that had already been established.

Creating transparency and eliciting feedback from the community

The collaborations have recognized the importance of making their work transparent and accessible to the community and other agencies in order to attract new partners and ensure that the community feels ownership for the work that is being done. All three have worked carefully to develop strategic plans that provide clear goals and metrics, are supported by data, include evidence-based practices, include accountability measures, and were supported by community feedback.

The Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan provides a good example of a diverse range of methods used to get representative community feedback before and during plan development. These include the following:

- Listening sessions with community members and youth prior to plan development. The listening sessions attracted 351 community members, including over 100 youth.

- A community-visioning survey was conducted with community members, attracting 394 respondents.
- A practitioner-focused survey was targeted at a diverse group of 28 agencies to determine agency philosophy and practice relating to youth violence prevention.
- A minister-focused discussion session, with 40 ministers across various denominations, focused on youth violence prevention.
- Review of initial drafts of the plan by two groups of youth. One group of youth represented youth leaders from the Youth United Way, and the other former and current gang members.

Developing data-driven initiatives by using data to develop strategic plans, share information with the public, and support implementation

All three plans are data-driven. They have or plan to use data to support the planning process and to hold implementation efforts accountable.

The partnership with the University of Memphis’s Center for Community Criminology and Research (C3R) has provided data analysis and research support across the initiatives. Data has been used to illustrate the need for violence prevention efforts, understand risk factors and areas of exposure, identify community sites to target work, monitor implementation, show accountability, and illustrate accomplishments to partners and community members. For example:

DCI used data and its partnership with the University of Memphis’s Center for Community Building and Neighborhood Action (CBANA) to conduct a needs assessment in order to

- Define the scope of the problem of children’s exposure to violence in Memphis and Shelby County
- Identify geographic concentrations of exposure
- Document risk factors and their geographic location to better understand the challenges to reducing, mitigating, and preventing children’s exposure to violence (and to inform the choice of a place-based demonstration)
- Identify assets that might be mobilized to reduce, mitigate, and prevent children’s exposure to violence, especially in high-risk areas through a place-based demonstration
- Identify overall gaps in “the system” and the “pipeline” from exposure to accessing and sustaining supportive interventions

Coordinating with other initiatives to support data-sharing across agencies

Data-sharing across agencies as a method for evaluation is a key long-term goal of DCI. As DCI collects information about data-sharing from the Department of Justice and other sources, it is also working with a grant on teen parenting that has pledged to pay for the first platform of data sharing. The goal is to have a data-sharing system that extends beyond preventing teen pregnancy to also include limiting exposure to violence.

Operation: Safe Community has had experience with sharing data through a gang prevention pilot program based on the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)

comprehensive gang model it has implemented for the past two years. Within that model, a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) based on the template from OJJDP has been used for the sharing of data between law enforcement, schools, youth services, and the courts.

As the data system is rolled out, the intent is to use a similar MOA template for the DCI work. The hope is that the successful history and example of the MOA being used for sharing data between agencies will ensure that partners are more comfortable with the idea of data sharing.

Conducting both national and local evaluations

Both DCI and the Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan are conducting local process evaluations to assess their work, as well as national evaluations through the Department of Justice. The DCI plan will be evaluated at the national level through the Center for Court Innovations. DCI also wrote into its grant a local evaluation in order to ensure it is prepared for the national evaluation. The Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan has a similar multileveled structure for evaluation. At the national level, it is being evaluated through Jay University, which is providing ongoing evaluation and feedback to all National Youth Violence Prevention Forum member cities. At the local level, the Crime Commission is working through a university research partnership each year to identify the strategies, including youth violence prevention, that need the most support.

Lessons Learned

Memphis and Shelby County has learned the following lessons through the collaborative work they have done to prevent violence.

An additional layer of leadership is necessary to translate the board's vision to ground-level implementation

When Operation: Safe Community was first developed and implemented, there was a belief that the board of directors and a couple of key individuals would be able to implement the plan. In reality they found, within the first two years, that an additional layer of strategy leaders were needed to help implement each of the strategies. For each strategy, one or two strategy leaders were identified. These strategy leaders help to ensure open communication between what is being done at the ground level and the board of directors. Once strategy leaders were established, there was an effort to ensure that they sat on the board, which helped to expand the board's representation.

While engaging a range of stakeholders is good, it can be difficult to keep a large group continuously engaged

- **Recognize that all members will not be equally engaged.** The Memphis Shelby Crime Commission (Crime Commission) realized that engaging a large number of stakeholders can be difficult. For the work around the Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan, they have 75 stakeholders involved. In working with such a large group, they found it was important to recognize that everyone may not be involved at the same level or have the same level of commitment.

- **Share data and accomplishments to help sustain and engage partners.** The Crime Commission engages and sustains the large number of stakeholders they work with by sharing data with the community and partners. This illustrates the work that is being done and the accomplishments that are being made, helps to foster pride for those involved in the effort, and enhances community awareness and engagement.
- **Break the large group into smaller targeted teams.** To implement the strategies within Operation: Safe Community, strategic teams were developed with relevant partners. These teams work on one specific strategy and are led by one or two strategy leaders. Their work is then shared with the larger group through the oversight of the board of directors. Breaking the large group into targeted teams helps them to get things accomplished and maintain engagement.

It is important to continuously conduct an inventory of community assets

Conducting an inventory of the community allows you to identify and understand what resources the community has, what coalitions and collaboratives currently exist, and what activities are currently available. There is often a wealth of resources that already exist that can be used to support your effort; the challenge is bringing those various resources at various levels together based on your need and purpose. While conducting an inventory of the community assets is important, it must be an ongoing process. Conducting an inventory once is not sufficient, due to leadership turnover and program changes. Having a deliberate effort to keep information current allows you to engage people quickly when changes occur.

When conducting coordinated initiatives, it is important to have a clear message to share with the public and stakeholders

While coordinating and collaborating across the different initiatives can be beneficial, it can be difficult for the public and stakeholders to understand and parse out the different initiatives. It is therefore imperative for those working with the different plans to have a clear explanation of the plans, how they work together, and how they are unique. The quantity of information and timing can also cause challenges. In the spring of 2011, both the Youth Violence Prevention Plan (released April 4, 2011) and the DCI plan (released May 1, 2011) were released. Having both plans released in a short period of time seemed to cause information overload.

Accomplishments¹

Memphis has moved itself off the top of the list of cities with the highest crime rate and improved its climate for economic growth.

- From January 1 to July 31, 2011, major violent crime (i.e., murder, forcible rape, aggravated assault, and robbery) in Memphis has decreased 26.9 percent when compared to the same time period in 2006.

¹ Accomplishments reflect outcomes of Operation Safe Community. Both the Defending Childhood Initiative and Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan are in early stages of implementation.

- Major property crime in Memphis also declined over the past five years, down 32.4 percent across the city when compared to the first seven months of 2006.
- From January 1 to July 31, 2011, major violent crime was down 26.8 percent, including a drop in robbery by 45.3 percent and a drop in aggravated assault by 16.9 percent across all jurisdictions of Shelby County, when compared to the same time period in 2006.
- Major property crime has decreased by 32.4 percent with a 28.4 percent drop in burglaries and a 53.8 percent decline in motor vehicle theft throughout the county, when compared to the same time period in 2006 (The University of Memphis & Memphis Shelby Crime Commission, 2011).

Resources

Learn more about the work that Memphis and Shelby county are doing:

See the overarching work of [Memphis Fast Forward](#).

Learn more at the Memphis Crime Commission [website](#):

- Read the [Operation: Safe Community plan](#) (PDF, 149 pages)
- Read the [Memphis Youth Violence Prevention Plan](#) (PDF, 55 pages)
- See recent [data](#) and outcomes related to Operation: Safe Community

Learn more about the Defending Childhood Initiative [website](#):

- View the Department of Justice's Defending Childhood [website](#).

Learn more about the [National Forum on Youth Violence](#):

- See how the [federal government is collaborating around youth violence prevention](#)
- See other [communities' violence prevention plans](#)
- Learn how to [make a violence prevention plan](#) for your community