

City of Knoxville Community-Based Violence Reduction Plan



CITY OF KNOXVILLE
INDYA KINCANNON, MAYOR

PREPARED BY THE OFFICE OF COMMUNITY SAFETY
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STATEMENT FROM THE MAYOR

Over the past few years, too many Knoxvilleians have experienced loss of family, friends, and neighbors, as a result of violence. While violence impacts our entire community, we acknowledge that the weight of violence disproportionately impacts already underserved and underrepresented communities.

As a city—as a community—we all have a role to play in creating safe, healthy, thriving communities.



As Mayor, I am committed to using proven strategies to reduce community-based violence. I am thankful for the partnership of so many in our community to address this critical issue. No single individual or entity can effectively solve this crisis. I am eager to work with stakeholders from a range of disciplines and experiences, including those most directly impacted by violence, to implement solutions that will save lives.

The plan detailed in this report represents a commitment to engaging the people, places, and behaviors most likely to be impacted by community-based violence, using strategies that prioritize strengthening and supporting individuals and neighbors, building community trust, and focusing resources towards the highest risks. I am confident that using coordinated, evidence-based, community-informed approaches, adopted and implemented across disciplines, we will save lives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Indya Kincannon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Indya Kincannon,
Knoxville Mayor

The Challenge



The City of Knoxville is a mid-sized city in East Tennessee, located at the foot of the Great Smoky Mountains. It is the third largest city in the State of Tennessee, the largest city in the state's eastern division, and the county seat of Knox County. According to most recent census data, Knox County has a population of approximately 478,971, with approximately 190,740 people living in the City of Knoxville. Like many other cities in the United States, Knoxville experienced dramatic increases in violent crime in 2020 and 2021. Between 2010 and 2014, Knoxville averaged 17.2 homicides per year; between 2015 and 2019, the city averaged 23.2 homicides per year. In 2020 and 2021, the city experienced 37 and 41 homicides respectively.

In 2020, while the nation experienced 7.8 homicides per 100,000 people, Knoxville experienced 19.7 per 100,000 people. In 2021, that number rose to 21.4 per 100,000 residents. In 2021, 93% of homicides in Knoxville involved a firearm. In 2022, 35 lives were lost to violence.

Homicides in Knoxville disproportionately impact Black Knoxvillians. Black residents represent about 17% of Knoxville's population, but represent about 75% of persons involved in shooting incidents between 2019 and 2021. Violence in Knoxville is disproportionately concentrated in areas with high concentrations of black or poor residents. Black Knoxvillians not only bear an outsized share of the burden of community-based violence,

they are also overrepresented in the number of Knoxvillians living in poverty. Black residents represent about 9% of the population of Knox County; however, almost 30% of black Knox County residents live below the poverty line, compared to 12.2% of white residents. As of 2019, the poverty rate among black residents in the City of Knoxville is approximately 34%. Black residents experience the highest poverty rate of any racial demographic in Knox County.



The Process

On December 6th, 2022, a diverse collection of leaders met in Knoxville for four days to discuss, deliberate, and decide on new ways to address Knoxville's elevated rates of gun violence. These leaders included Mayor Indya Kincannon, Councilwoman Gwen McKenzie, District Attorney Charme Allen, Police Chief Paul Noel, Denzel Grant from Turn Up Knox, Reverend Dr. Jacquelyn Bragg from Justice Knox, Chris Martin from the Knoxville Leadership Foundation, Candace Allen from the McNabb Center, Randy Nichols from Knox County Sheriff's Office, and many others.

Supported by the University of Maryland's Center for the Study and Practice of Violence Reduction (also known as the Violence Reduction Center or VRC), these leaders participated in a series of briefings by leading anti-violence researchers and practitioners on the most effective local anti-violence strategies currently available.

Following the briefings, participants produced a draft "plan to plan" to help guide Knoxville's future anti-violence efforts. This "plan to plan" included key definitions and values to frame the understanding of the issue and how Knoxville will approach identifying and implementing strategies, identified a framework for implementation, and proposed key strategies to be further developed and finalized after consulting with and receiving feedback from additional Knoxville stakeholders.

On March 1, 2023, Mayor Kincannon convened a team of more than twenty-five leaders representing city government, law enforcement, criminal law systems participants, medical systems representatives, service providers, faith leaders, and violence impacted persons to review and provide feedback on the proposed plan. Following feedback from the team, the following plan was developed.



Key Definitions and Values

What is Community Gun Violence? Community gun violence is the lethal or potentially lethal violence that happens in community settings and is perpetrated with firearms, the vast majority of which are illegally possessed and carried. It is also known as urban or street violence. From 2019-2021, approximately 87% of all shootings in Knoxville where the cause of the incident was known were associated with community gun violence (Knoxville Gun Violence Problem Analysis, 2022).



“Knoxville will save lives by reducing community gun violence, cutting the numbers of fatal and non-fatal shootings by 10% each year starting in 2023.”

The Problem: Knoxville is losing too many lives to community gun violence. In 2020, 37 Knoxville residents were murdered. In 2021, 41 more were killed and in 2022, an additional 35 people died violently. Knoxville’s homicide rates are rising over time and are significantly higher than state and national averages (Knoxville Gun Violence Problem Analysis, 2022). Too many of our residents are dying – we must act now.

The Solution: Knoxville will save lives by reducing community gun violence, cutting the numbers of fatal and non-fatal shootings by 10% each year starting in 2023. At the same time, we will improve trust between government agencies and our most impacted communities, as measured by new tools such as surveys as well as individual and

group consultation.

Key Values: Knoxville will save lives and improve trust by staying true to its values, using strategies that are partnership-based, solution-focused, evidence-informed, community-engaged, and humanity-centered.

- Being **solution-focused** means staying focused on providing Knoxville residents with concrete relief from community gun violence as measured by reductions in fatal and non-fatal shootings.
- Being **partnership-based** means understanding that building trust requires working together, communicating and coordinating across stakeholders that may not have worked together before.
- Being **evidence-informed** means that all decisions concerning community gun violence are informed by sound evidence and reliable data, including community generated evidence.
- Being **community-engaged** means recognizing the importance of engaging with impacted communities generally, but particularly with those who are most frequently and directly exposed to crime and violence.
- Being **humanity-centered** means reaffirming the humanity of those impacted by crime and violence, as maintaining peace requires acknowledging difficult truths, building trust, and promoting reconciliation.

Implementation

Translating a city's anti-violence vision into action requires clear and consistent leadership. In order to achieve a 10% reduction in fatal and non-fatal shootings, as well as build community trust in government, a clear accountability structure must be put into place to drive strategy implementation. Resources are also required, including, but not limited to, staff, funding, training, and equipment.

Knoxville leaders agreed on five accountability measures to keep the city's anti-violence work on track and moving forward.

1. **Increase the capacity of the Knoxville Office of Community Safety.**

OCS staff are responsible for day-to-day implementation of this plan, but current capacity is not sufficient to handle the workload associated with this effort. The OCS should hire additional staff, including at least one with project management experience and expertise, and make funds immediately available to engage outside experts to help the OCS guide implementation.

In the 2023-24 fiscal year, Mayor Kincannon proposed additional staff for the Office of Community Safety to support the management and implementation of additional programs, services and partnerships related to reducing violence. Additionally, Mayor Kincannon consolidated the Office of Community Safety and the Office of Community Empowerment to better align City efforts able to impact the people, places and behaviors at highest risk for being affected by violence.

2. **Establish a leadership committee.** The city needs a leadership committee to set the direction of the city's anti-violence effort and monitor progress towards its goals. This committee should be chaired by the city Mayor. Other committee members would include law enforcement leaders such as the Knoxville Chief of Police, District Attorney General, Knox County Sheriff, and the U.S. Attorney; non-enforcement leaders, such as nonprofit, business, and public health executives; and importantly leaders from impacted communities - especially leaders of faith-based organizations.

In March 2023, Mayor Kincannon convened a team of more than twenty-five leaders representing city government, law enforcement, criminal law systems participants, medical systems representatives, service providers, faith leaders, and violence impacted persons. The Leadership Team meets monthly, engaging in shared learning and discussing how to effectively implement violence reduction strategies in Knoxville.

3. **Establish a management team.** In addition to convening high-level leaders, regular meetings among managers with day-to-day responsibility for implementation is necessary. This team should be chaired by the Mayor's Director of Community Safety and include representatives from the same stakeholder groups identified above. That said, membership should be limited to those directly responsible for implementing one or more of the strategies below.

Implementation (continued)

In March 2023, the Management Team began meeting to work toward implementation of the identified key strategies. The Management Team has developed a regular, weekly meeting schedule, continues to develop partnerships, identify opportunities for collaboration, and prepare recommendations to present to the Leadership Team.

4. **Establish a place-based violence prevention team.** Participants agreed that a separate team was necessary in order to manage the development of the place-based police/community partnerships strategy. Chaired by the Mayor's Director of Community Safety, this group should include representatives from relevant city and county departments, neighborhood associations, business owners, KPD representatives, and community and faith-based leaders.
5. **Establish a service development and delivery team.** Participants recognized that perhaps the greatest gap in current capacity was for the services necessary to support individuals at the highest risk for community gun violence. In order to rapidly bring those services online, participants agreed a separate team was necessary. Chaired by the Mayor's Director of Community Safety, membership in this group should include representatives from relevant city and county departments, representatives from nongovernmental agencies who can deliver needed services, and community and faith-based leaders.



Five Key Strategies

Based on Knoxville's recent [Gun Violence Problem Analysis](#) and consistent with [national best practices](#) on evidence-informed anti-violence strategies, the following five strategies should be implemented simultaneously and as soon as reasonably possible.

1. **Engage high-risk people by implementing the Group Violence Initiative.** [Rigorous research](#) indicates that the Group Violence Initiative (GVI), also known as the Group Violence Reduction Strategy, Ceasefire, or focused deterrence, has a reasonably strong track record of success in reduced gun and group-oriented violence. In addition, Knoxville's problem analysis suggests that the majority of gun violence in the city involves group-affiliated individuals.

The GVI reduces gun violence by identifying high-risk people and social networks, communicating directly to them the commitment of the police and community members to stop such violence, providing special supports and services, and deploying targeted law enforcement sanctions as a last resort.

The supports and services necessary to engage high-risk individuals and groups may not be currently available in the city, thus developing that capacity must be a top priority for city and community leaders. In particular, the capacity to provide high-quality cognitive behavioral interventions (CBI), a leading crime prevention intervention backed by [rigorous research](#), must be put into place quickly.

Project deadlines: By September 2023, the city will launch a pilot version of the GVI. By September 2024, ensure that GVI is fully operational along with all necessary supports and services, including CBI.

Project lead: Knoxville Office of Community Safety.

The City of Knoxville Office of Community Safety, in partnership with the Violence Reduction Center, continues to engage national experts in Group Violence Intervention to provide technical assistance, training and thought partnership in developing evidence-based strategies in Knoxville.



Five Key Strategies (continued)

2. Address high-risk places with localized police/community partnerships.

[Rigorous research](#) indicates that problem-solving law enforcement strategies that increase police presence in locations where crime concentrates can be successful, provided that they positively engage with impacted community members and avoid indiscriminate stops, searches, and arrests.

But policing is not enough. Research also indicates that investments in crime-prone locations, particularly efforts to remake the physical makeup of such spaces, can yield crime reductions.

To leverage both place-based policing and investment, the city will form a series of police/community partnerships in and around the places where crime and violence concentrates. Along with law enforcement, these partnerships should include local residents, nonprofits, businesses, and especially faith-based leaders. Together these partnership councils can work to remake public spaces in crime-prone locations so that a significant police presence is no longer needed over time.

Project deadlines: By September 2023, KPD will identify Knoxville’s most violent “hot spots” and the city will pilot partnership councils in several of them. Each of these locations will benefit from increased police presence but also from additional investment. By September 2024, every “hot spot” in Knoxville will have an active partnership council.

Project leads: Knoxville Office of Community Safety and the Knoxville Police Department.



Five Key Strategies (continued)

3. **Scale up community outreach to support Knoxville’s people- and place-based efforts.** The evidence concerning community outreach is [promising but mixed](#). When done well, community outreach is a powerful anti-violence tool. Also described as violence intervention or interruption, these programs recruit frontline workers with credible ties to impacted communities in order to mediate disputes and help those most at risk manage provocations and conflicts without resorting to violence. Importantly, outreach workers also connect individuals to social support and services.

Knoxville needs broader community outreach efforts, both independently and to support its other anti-violence strategies. Careful attention must be paid, however, to properly implementing these efforts and ensuring strong management and oversight.

Project deadlines: By September 2023, the city will identify opportunities to scale up current community outreach efforts in order to properly engage and support the strategies described in this plan. By September 2024, outreach efforts will be expanded further to fully engage the the city’s highest-risk people and places.

Project lead: Knoxville Office of Community Safety.

The City of Knoxville Office of Community Safety continues to provide funding and programming support for violence interruption street outreach. Funding to continue support of street outreach is included in the FY2023-2024 City budget proposal. The Office of Community Safety, in partnership with the Violence Reduction Center, will continue to engage national experts and local partners to support training and network development for effective engagement with high risk individuals.



4. **Continue to identify the key people and places that drive community gun violence by enhancing Knoxville’s capacity for problem analysis.** In the Summer of 2022, a problem analysis was conducted to identify the precise drivers of firearm violence in Knoxville. That analysis, publicly released on November 2, 2022, found that a large share of gun violence in the city was perpetrated by relatively small numbers of individuals and groups, in a relatively small number of micro-locations or “hot spots.” Further analysis is needed to identify these high-risk people and places on an ongoing basis. In addition, since this analysis is based on police data, enhancing the analysis with input from select representatives of impacted communities from outside law enforcement will strengthen the analysis further.



Project deadline: By September 2023, KPD will put ongoing problem analysis into place, along with a new component that provides for input from key community members and organizations.

Project lead: Knoxville Police Department.

The Knoxville Police Department is participating in training and expanding data collection and management capacity to increase its ability to access and provide continuously relevant analysis necessary for effective implementation of group violence reduction strategies.

5. **Create new tools for measuring community trust in government.** We measure what matters. If improving trust in government agencies among Knoxville residents most impacted by community gun violence is important, concrete measurements must be taken to ensure progress is made. In order to see whether these strategies are increasing community confidence, baseline measurements should be taken before implementation begins. There are a variety of ways in which to measure community trust, including the use of surveys and other tools.

Project deadlines: By September 2023, the city will take baseline measurements of trust in government agencies among residents impacted most by community gun violence. By September 2024, it will repeat the process annually in order to measure progress.

Project lead: Knoxville Office of Community Safety.

The City of Knoxville’s leaders and citizens are committed to a collective future where every member of our collective community can thrive, free from the threat of deadly violence. This plan memorializes that commitment and will guide our action.

Together, we can and will save lives.