A Guide
For Mayors

**For Preventing and Responding
to Hate, Extremism & Polarisation**

Guide

September 2023

Strong Cities
Network

Acknowledgements

Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD)

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) worked with mayors and government partners to launch Strong Cities at a meeting during the opening of the UN General Assembly in 2015. Since then, ISD has expanded and supported Strong Cities membership and has delivered its programming.

ISD continues to host the Management Unit and contributes its research and expertise to meet the policy and practice needs of cities and local governments around the world.

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Acronyms

CAP
County Action Plan

CSO
Civil Society Organisation

IDP
Internally Displaced People

LAP
Local Action Plan

LGBTQ+
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender

LPN
Local Prevention Network

MEL
Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning

MOPAC
Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (London)

NAP
National Action Plan

NLC
National-Local Cooperation

OPHC
Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes
(New York City)

P/CVE
Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

Glossary

Community: Individuals, social groups and institutions that are based in the same geographic area and/or have shared interests.

Civil society: The arena, outside of the family, the state and the market, that is created by individual and collective actions, organisations and institutions to advance shared interests.

Do no harm: Through an an understanding of the local context, relationships and dynamics more broadly, the principle of Do No Harm involves mitigating or avoiding negative, unintended consequences for the potential beneficiaries of and implementers of prevention and response that may result from such interventions and seeking to influence these dynamics in a positive way.

Mandate: An elected official's authority to enact and implement strategies, policies and programs, create and fill positions, and coordinate horizontally and vertically across different offices and sectors.

Mayor: The head of a town, city or municipality, elected or otherwise appointed, who has the power to lead local governance. As mentioned in the forward, while there are many forms of local leadership, throughout this Guide, mayor is used as a general term referring to the most senior elected or appointed official in cities, towns, villages, municipalities or other local areas of governance.

Primary prevention: Programmes and other measures designed to build community resilience against hate, extremism and polarisation and enhance social cohesion to resist these threats. These programmes target communities regardless of their vulnerabilities and come in a variety of forms.

Secondary prevention: Programmes and other measures that target individuals identified as being vulnerable to recruitment or radicalisation to hate- or extremist-motivated violence and seek to steer these individuals down a non-violent path. These interventions might include psychosocial support, mentoring, family counselling, cultural or recreational activities, theological debate, education and vocational training and/or support.

Tertiary prevention: Programmes and other measures designed to support hate- and extremist-motivated violent offenders in their efforts to leave their milieus, disengage from violence, decriminalise and reintegrate into society. This can also include families, as well as those who have not entered the prison system but who may demonstrate some level of support for violence, including those who have returned from territory once held by Islamic State, for example. These programmes, which can take place within or outside of a custodial setting, may offer educational and vocational training, psychosocial or ideological counselling, housing, and employment opportunities.

Whole-of-society approach: An approach to prevention and response that envisions a role for multiple sectors at the national and local levels, as well as civil society actors.

About
This Guide

The [Strong Cities Network](#) has been working closely with mayors[1] globally since its launch in 2015 to enhance local leadership in preventing and responding to hate, extremism and polarisation[2]. During this time, many local leaders have spoken about how unprepared and unsupported they felt to address these issues in their cities and respond in the event of an attack. They have also pointed to the limited opportunities to learn from other mayors who have led their cities through such incidents.

Mayors have shared a wide range of challenges. For some, they begin by acknowledging that addressing hate and extremism are (or were) not a priority for them, either because they were not regarded as immediate threats or the mayors were not aware of the role they can play when they are. Others face technical challenges, limited mandates and a lack of knowledge, experience and resources for dealing with these challenges.

Although the specific threats may differ from city to city, Strong Cities has heard from mayors globally that they need more guidance on the range of preventative measures that can minimise the likelihood of a hate or extremism-motivated attack or related incident from taking place and considerations for mitigating the damage (whether social, economic, or political) that it can inflict on a city. Mayors have also shared that they want more opportunities to learn from their counterparts, particularly those who have led their city through such crises.

This Guide captures these experiences and packages them in an accessible way for mayors and other local leaders working in all contexts, whether they are entering office for the first time or working to make addressing hate and extremism a greater priority in their city.

The **purpose of this Guide** is to help prepare mayors to address threats from hate, extremism and polarisation, and the misinformation, disinformation and conspiracy narratives that increasingly fuel them. It emphasises both the importance of being proactive by taking *preventative* measures to build socially cohesive and resilient cities and *responding* in a way that minimises the social, economic and other fallout that can result if and when these threats manifest in violence. This Guide does this by:

- Addressing key questions mayors might have about dealing with these challenges, whether while preparing to take office or performing their duties.

- Exploring key decision points for mayors in pursuit of prevention and response when these threats manifest in violence.

- Sharing relevant good practices and lessons learned from other mayors, including those related to building resilient and cohesive cities in various contexts.

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[1] Strong Cities recognises that there are many forms of local leadership. Throughout this Guide, 'mayor' is used as a general term referring to the most senior elected or appointed official in cities, towns, villages, municipalities or other local areas of governance.

[2] Preventing and responding to hate, extremism and polarisation will be referred to simply as 'prevention' and 'response' throughout this Guide.

By Mayors for Mayors

This Guide draws on the experiences and recommendations of mayors to reflect on their unique role in addressing an increasingly localised and interconnected set of threats. To develop this Guide, the Strong Cities Network Management Unit surveyed, interviewed and conducted panel and roundtable discussions with more than 75 mayors, deputy mayors and other local leaders, both current and former, from a range of contexts and geographies. The Management Unit also drew from several years of experience working directly with mayors from around the globe on preventing and responding to hate, extremism and polarisation.

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Foreword

Allison Silberberg, Former Mayor of Alexandria, Virginia, USA (2016 – 2019)

"It is not a matter of if something will happen, but when."

This provocative statement certainly got my attention as I sat with 15 other new mayors at New Mayors School at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government in late 2015 – only a month before my swearing-in as the 88th Mayor of Alexandria (Virginia). After each tragic incident of hate- or extremism-motivated violence, people often say: "I cannot believe this happened here in my town. I never expected this could happen here." The unfortunate reality, however, is that this can happen anywhere at any time.

Mayors, whether newly elected or long-serving, need to be prepared.

The mission of this Strong Cities Network Guide for Mayors for Preventing and Responding to Hate, Extremism & Polarisation is to help you as the mayors and local leaders of cities around the world to stem the rising tide of hate, disinformation, violent extremism and authoritarianism.

This Guide shares ways to help you shore up democratic institutions and civil society that are serving your communities. Not preparing is a plan and is a plan for failure. This Guide is proactive and practical, providing mayors with a roadmap for preparing their cities and communities: it is by *mayors and for mayors*.

This Guide is intended to be personal. Being mayor is personal. As a mayor, you know your community and care deeply about it. Residents turn to you to provide services and solve problems. Being focused on prevention and being prepared if a crisis unfolds is a crucial responsibility that we, as mayors, have. We are preparing our communities to be resilient. And we, as mayors, can help each other.

The Strong Cities Network met with current and former mayors and local leaders around the world, learning how they respond to threats. We also surveyed mayors, and this Guide reflects much of what we learned during this outreach: lessons and best practices from our fellow mayors.

I am passionate about sharing them because, on a quiet July morning in 2017, 18 months into my mayoral term, the when happened in my city. Without warning, a gunman, who had travelled to my city of Alexandria from another state hours away, opened fire on a baseball field where members of the US Congress, their aides, and others were practising for an annual charity baseball game.

Congressional members and others on the field were hitting and catching balls one minute and were shot the next. Two US Capitol Police officers, who were with the members of Congress, immediately engaged the gunman. Three officers from the Alexandria Police Department arrived within two minutes. Together, the five officers killed the gunman in a fierce gunfight. Five people on the field, including members of Congress and one officer, were seriously wounded by the gunman. Others suffered less severe injuries. Miraculously, all survived. All public safety teams acted swiftly and bravely. My city and our country were and are deeply grateful.

After the shooting, our Police Chief sent officers and other first responders to conduct a door-to-door welfare check in the adjoining neighbourhoods. That afternoon, the Police Chief, Fire Chief, Sheriff and I walked together in the neighbourhood closest to the shooting to assure residents they were safe. Several of our city's religious leaders organised candlelight vigils across our city.

That night, as a community, we marched down the main street of the neighbourhood where the shooting had occurred. Our community came together and stood strong.

I was so proud of our city and expressed the city's gratitude for our brave women and men who served so courageously that morning and that we, as a community, were praying for those injured. I said emphatically that this incident does not define us.

There were many heroes. The gate where the shooter had begun shooting was locked. That locked gate saved lives because it prevented the shooter from entering the field at that spot. I learned a week later that a Parks Department staffer checks each night (of his own volition well after his workday!) to ensure this gate is locked. This was a stunning reminder that the city staff needs to know that their role at any level matters and that our city is counting on them and is grateful. Our city staff's sense of mission is crucial.

Here are my five takeaways for any mayor:

First, prepare your team. I began my term with a tabletop[3] exercise, which I requested immediately upon taking office. I led a meeting of our city's senior staff and all the public safety team leadership to ensure that key personnel knew their role in case of an emergency and that they had the current contact information for each other because, in the event of a crisis, people in these roles must know what to do and how to reach each other instantly. There is no time to go to your office and grab a binder off the shelf to figure out what to do or whom to call. Seconds matter. Regardless of level, all city staff must know that their role matters, and it is the mayor's responsibility to ensure they do.

Second, engage with communities across the city proactively. Don't wait until a crisis to do so. As then-Mayor Marty Walsh of Boston suggested at the seminar, I created a Clergy Council early in my term with the faith leaders of our community. Within hours of the shooting, many clergy organised candlelight vigils across the city that night to help residents gather and find the strength to deal with the shock of such violence. A council that brings together religious leaders from across communities helps build resilience.

Third, be inclusive. Early in my term, I drafted our city's Statement on Inclusiveness, which the City Council approved. That statement was posted across the city. Inclusiveness builds resilience. The time to define who you are as a community is not after an incident.

It is important to speak out swiftly against disinformation and hate in all forms, regardless of its target. When racist flyers were posted in the middle of the night in Alexandria,

I immediately condemned the act, stating that it did not reflect our city's values, which are grounded in inclusiveness.

Fourth, be an active listener. I held monthly, open-to-all coffees in the community, where we sat in a circle, and the residents shared their concerns and ideas with me. I was accessible and here to help.

Fifth, communicate and be transparent. After the shooting, I emailed an official statement and other updates and authored a column in the local papers. As mayor, I prioritised a staunch commitment to prompt communication, transparency and civic engagement.

I recognise that every city and every incident is different. However, having shared experiences with other mayors who were thrust into crises that bear some similarity to the one I had faced, I believe that there are decision points that every local leader will confront and questions that they will need to ask to be as prepared as possible to prevent an incident from occurring and respond effectively should it unfold.

This Strong Cities' Guide for Mayors – the first of its kind – is here to help you and your community be more prepared, more responsive and more resilient. Together, we can help each other become stronger and safer.

This is part of our core mission as leaders and the foundation of the Strong Cities mission.

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[3] Tabletop exercises are discussion-based sessions, often conducted in an informal, classroom setting, during which team members discuss their roles and responses to a particular emergency situation. A facilitator guides participants through a discussion of one or more scenarios.

Introduction

Hate and extremism, particularly when they manifest in violence, have typically been viewed as national security issues. National leaders and central governments have driven conversations about how best to prevent and respond to these threats, often emphasising leveraging law enforcement, intelligence and military tools to address violent manifestations. Not surprisingly, mayors have rarely been seen as relevant to and thus included in these discussions. It is often only in the aftermath of an attack that local leaders have become actively involved, including advocating for the needs and priorities of their communities affected by the violence.

Yet, lessons learned point to the growing relevance of mayors in addressing these threats, extending well beyond the consoler of survivors and their families. These threats are becoming increasingly localised: extremist groups are using local political, social and economic grievances to recruit and mobilise others, and the line between online threats and offline harm is becoming more blurred than ever. The evolution of the threat necessitates a more decentralised approach to address it. This should include the direct involvement of local leaders who understand and can represent their cities on a level that national policy-makers cannot.

A mayor's proximity to the people in their city enables them to understand residents' concerns. At the same time, their access and accountability as a locally-elected official gives them unique influence and insight – and perhaps even an implicit mandate – to create an inclusive city identity through which all residents can feel connected. As such, mayors have a unique opportunity to not only contribute in the aftermath of an attack but to drive efforts to build a resilient and socially cohesive city in which it is more difficult for hate and extremism to take root and limit the fallout should they become prescient concerns.

Guide Overview

A mayor's role in addressing hate, extremism and polarisation can extend from proactively pursuing prevention efforts. This can involve, for example, engaging with communities or individual residents that make it more difficult for these threats to emerge in their city and heighten their city's resilience, ensuring the city is ready to respond if an incident occurs, and/or leading the response in the aftermath if violence does occur. Although the scope of a mayor's mandate and authority will likely vary depending on the local context, in general terms, the mayor's role can involve, *inter alia*:

• Leveraging their communication skills and their office's platform to reach all parts of the city.

• Overseeing and coordinating different local government departments and services.

• Tapping into relationships with constituents and local organisations around the city.

• Driving city-level priorities, policies, programmes and resource allocation.

There are several ingredients required for a mayor to fulfil this role effectively.

• This starts with a commitment to prioritise prevention alongside (or as part of) their more traditional mayoral priorities, for example, whether related to public safety, social well-being, urban planning and education.

• To deliver on this priority, a mayor will typically need to oversee a tailored mix of policies and strategic frameworks; a coordination or other mechanism for aligning the activities of different local government agencies, community-based partners and, where necessary, the central government; and a sustained commitment to building the capacities of local government actors and a range of community-based stakeholders who can act as partners in making their city safer, more peaceful and more resilient to hate, extremism and polarisation.

It is a multidimensional and often difficult role, but one that a growing number of local leaders around the world are assuming every day. This Guide aims to support mayors in this effort and enable more to join them. It gathers the experiences of more than 75 local leaders from different contexts and geographies to present good practices, lessons learned, examples and recommendations to help guide and inspire mayors to prepare for and face a variety of challenges.

The Guide is divided into three sections to support mayors at different stages of their term:

• **Preparation:** considerations for prevention and response when entering office

• **Prevention:** building resilient communities

• **Response:** coordinating a response in the immediate aftermath of a violent extremist incident and managing fallout in the medium- and long-term.

The Guide is intended to aid mayors as they examine the pressing challenges to peace and inclusion in their cities and inspire them to explore new solutions in response to evolving trends and the priorities of their residents. The following examples and recommendations should be considered in light of the unique context in which a mayor leads and adapted to meet their city's priorities, needs, opportunities and limitations.

The quotes, guidance and recommendations throughout this Guide have all been provided by mayors and other local officials, reflecting on the role of a mayor in addressing hate, extremism and polarisation. Many have asked that their contribution be attributed to their city rather than themselves, a request Strong Cities has respected.

What do we mean by hate, extremism and polarisation?

There is no universal definition for each of these concepts and each city's approach needs to be tailored to the local legal context and grounded in human rights and the rule of law. Hate, extremism and polarisation are – at their most basic – social challenges that undermine social cohesion, which can lead to violence and have long-term impacts on a city's socio-economic fabric. Whether it is inter-community intolerance and 'othering', feelings of non-belonging, an overall growing divide between a city's different communities or – at its most explicit – hate- or extremism-motivated violence, these threats have multiple manifestations and multiple causes.

Strong Cities refers to these issues together in recognition that all three are both drivers and consequences of social, economic and political disparities and marginalisation, instability and violence, and that all three necessarily require a localised response that addresses the contextual grievances that may fuel them.

Overview

What is the role of a mayor in prevention and response?

Proactive prevention

A mayor's proximity to the people in their city enables them to understand residents' concerns. At the same time, their access and accountability as a locally-elected official gives them unique influence and insight, and perhaps even an implicit mandate, to proactively shape and lead prevention efforts and help their city to become more resilient, including to the threats that hate, extremism and polarisation pose.

For the purposes of this Guide, prevention has three primary features:

Identifying the underlying conditions, such as a lack of belonging or feelings of marginalisation, exclusion or injustice, that can make individuals susceptible to hate and extremist narratives and exacerbate existing or generate new intercommunal tensions that can result in violence.

Addressing these underlying conditions, including by designing and implementing programmes aimed at targeting relevant individual needs and vulnerabilities and promoting inclusive, transparent and accountable governance, digital literacy, civility, respect for the 'other', and intercommunal dialogue.

Protecting 'soft' targets such as public spaces and religious, cultural or sports venues, thus making it more difficult for those who want to terrorise civilians to do so.

Mayors have a role to play in each of these prevention-related areas and more – including by championing appropriate strategies, policies and programmes, directing relevant local government components, engaging directly with local communities and mobilising resources and political will across their cities, as they work to make them more resilient and cohesive.

Interview with Mayor Gledian Llatja, City of Elbasan, Albania

Engaging their city's communities in prevention efforts

A mayor's position gives them a unique opportunity to build strong, trusting relationships with the residents of their city, including historically marginalised or 'hard to reach' groups, which may include religious and/or ethnic and other minorities.

By making a concerted effort to engage with different communities personally, a mayor can enhance trust and – where necessary – repair relationships between a city's government and its residents.

This can also enable their city to pursue more inclusive and participatory approaches to prevention in which communities can help define their challenges and take ownership of the solutions.

To make this engagement sustainable, mayors should work to establish productive, mutually-beneficial relationships that empower different communities and give them ownership to strive toward a more peaceful and inclusive city.

> **"Everything is based on mutual trust; we cannot fight extremism, hatred, violence and polarisation without building trust between leaders and citizens on the one hand and between the population itself on the other."**
>
> Mayor Sindayihebura Rénovat, Mukaza Commune of Bujumbura Province, Burundi

> **"By empowering the community, [mayors] can create the critical mass for change."**
>
> Representative, City of Prishtina, Kosovo
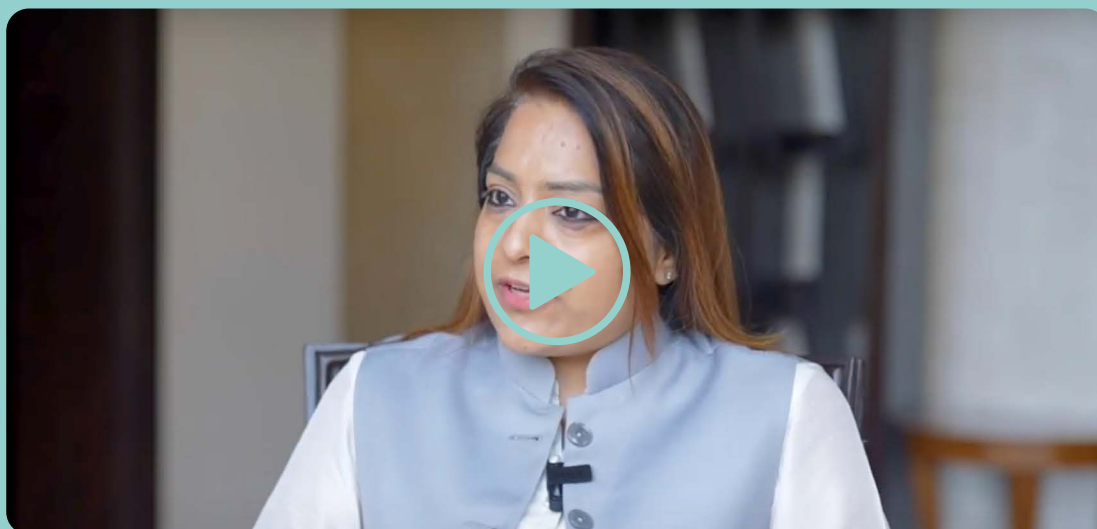
✦ **Interview with Shelly Oberoi, City of Delhi, India**

Directing local frameworks and activities for prevention

A mayor is uniquely placed to devise, shape and drive local strategies that serve the needs of their city while supporting national strategies for prevention and response. In developing local strategies, a mayor should ensure the city has a local action plan that represents the city's diverse needs and challenges and reflects the existing threat environment. This could require creating a new strategy or updating an existing one. Either way, the strategy should be inclusive and sustainable, both in the process of its development and in its delivery.

A mayor should utilise their position within the city to mobilise community and religious leaders, frontline service providers, civil society, the private sector and other actors in pursuit of a whole-of-society approach to prevention.

> "Being a mayor means knowing the state, needs and behaviour of the local community. By being involved in all areas of citizens' lives, space is created for good relations, friendly treatment and thus influence and proof that you are one of them."
>
> Representative, City of Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia

Coordinating with national prevention actors

Mayors are a critical node for national-local cooperation (NLC). They are well-placed to identify and understand how global, regional and national extremism trends manifest locally and impact their communities. This, along with a detailed understanding of their city, can both inform national approaches to help ensure they serve their city better and inform and then interpret national policies to enable localised implementation. Advocating for the needs of their city and citizens to national policy-makers also presents opportunities for a mayor to demonstrate to their constituents their commitment to promoting inclusivity and civility, including by prioritising efforts to prevent hate, extremism and, more broadly, intolerance from taking root in their city. This, in turn, can generate greater trust in the mayor and support from the city's residents.

Communicating clearly about the city's policies and wider efforts to address hate and extremism

Ensuring access to unbiased information and mitigating against misinformation and disinformation that can be used to radicalise to violence is vital. Communication is crucial for coordination between different prevention actors, both at the local and national levels, and for enhancing trust, engagement and buy-in from a city's residents for prevention efforts. A mayor is well placed to oversee and coordinate internal and external communication that supports a shared understanding across the city, which emphasises the importance of prevention to solidify support and resourcing and counteracts potentially harmful disinformation. A mayor should also clearly communicate their priorities and the positive values they – and the local government – stand for.

Response

As a growing number of mayors know all too well, it is, unfortunately, more a matter of when rather than if their city will experience a hate- or extremism-motivated incident during their tenure. In addition to having a plan in place to prevent such an occurrence, every mayor should have an emergency response plan that prepares them to manage the fallout of an incident, including for the safety, social and psychosocial well-being of their residents and the city's economic vitality.

Interview with Mayor Wilson Sanya, City of Koboko, Uganda

Managing security fallout

A mayor must work closely with the police, whether national and/or local, to secure the city in the immediate aftermath of an attack and address public safety concerns in the medium-to-long-term to help ensure the city is less vulnerable to future attacks.

A critical part of mitigating the fallout from an incident is setting the narrative about the situation and countering those shaped by misinformation, disinformation and/or conspiracy narratives that maligned groups might use to recruit and radicalise followers to (retaliatory) violence. In the immediate aftermath, false or misleading information about the incident can exacerbate intercommunal tensions and, more broadly, further undermine public safety, including by fuelling panic in an environment where anxiety levels are likely to be heightened due to the incident.

Further, within hours of an attack or other incident, a city can also experience a rise in hate crimes against the community whose members are suspected of being perpetrators. In the medium- to long-term, misinformation and disinformation can spur conspiracy narratives about the incident that damage trust in the city's leadership or, if targeted toward a particular religious, ethnic or other group, produce a discriminatory backlash that undermines social cohesion and/or amplify the threat of future violence.

A mayor can help prevent this by communicating clearly and frequently, addressing misinformation and disinformation, emphasising their commitment to safeguarding local communities regardless of their composition and promoting the values of inclusivity, tolerance and civility.

📢 **Interview with Nancy Rotering, Mayor of Highland Park USA**

"Public safety is one of the top priorities of mayors. Addressing and managing further fall out and security in the immediate aftermath is critical ... Once the safety risks are eliminated, and the situation is stabilised, the deep work of uplifting unity and healing is a critical next of medium- and long-term actions."

Joumana Silyan-Saba, Director of Policy and Discrimination Enforcement, City of Los Angeles, California, USA

Managing psychological and social fallout

Public safety is not a mayor's only concern following a hate- or extremism-motivated incident; they must also help provide for a city's psychological and social well-being. For example, in the immediate aftermath, a mayor will often become a city's 'chief consoler', providing support and comfort to a city's residents, including those directly impacted by the incident: survivors and the families and friends of victims. A mayor should consider ways the city can provide psychological care and resources such as trauma counselling for all residents, with dedicated resources available for survivors.

Depending on a city's resources, it may be necessary to advocate for such support at the national (or even global) level to ensure survivors get the support they need in the immediate-, medium- and long-term following an attack.

In addition to its physical impact, a violent incident, particularly one involving terrorist tactics, can also cause significant harm to a city's social fabric, sewing or exacerbating intercommunal tensions. To help address this, a mayor will need to consider ways to protect and, in some cases, rebuild a city's inclusive identity to maintain social cohesion.

> **"The mayor is the figurative (and literal) leader of the city, and residents naturally look to him in times of crisis (and joy) to help motivate and heal."**
>
> Representative, City of Columbus, Ohio, USA

> **"[The] local mayor is the mother of the citizens. First comfort and secure, then long-term plans."**
>
> Mayor Ishaq Khattak, City of Nowshera, Pakistan

> **"Mayor's leadership in setting the narrative helps restore calm, fosters solidarity and guides the city towards healing and recovery."**
>
> Representative, City of Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina

> **"One of the many roles of a mayor is a communicator in crisis. Managing information, showing empathy – that leadership will be key in how a community gets through the issue."**
>
> Former Mayor Nan Whaley, City of Dayton, Ohio, USA

Common challenges

A mayor's role in prevention and response is varied and complex, and they will likely face many challenges in trying to fulfil it. These include ones related to coordination, cooperation and capacity.

A mayor needs to cooperate and coordinate with what will inevitably be a wide range of actors across sectors and levels.

This includes community leaders and grassroots actors, civil society and community-based organisations, the private sector, local service providers and frontline practitioners (such as social workers and educators), law enforcement, local government colleagues, and national government officials. Each of these sectors and the individuals within them bring different perspectives, priorities and capabilities, which may not align with those of the mayor's office but are necessary for an effective, whole-of-society approach to preventing and responding to hate- and extremism-motivated incidents.

Often, a mayor has many other priorities and limited human and financial resources – and capacities more broadly – to draw on when they do choose to assert leadership in prevention and response.

Some mayors face harassment as they speak out against hate and extremism.

Standing in defiance of hate and extremism can bring some degree of personal risk, both for a mayor's (and even sometimes their family's) physical safety and their psychological well-being. There has been a surge of extremist threats targeting locally elected officials and other public workers.

For example, some Polish mayors who have advocated for the country to open its borders to and support migrants and refugees have received fabricated death certificates in the mail, while in the United States, mayors who call for greater LGBTQ+ rights and/or gun control can be subject to online abuse and intimidation. Mayors have lamented the lack of guidance and other support available to help them navigate these threats and voiced concern about the long-term impact that this continued targeting of local leaders could have on the political landscape, especially given that it may cause good candidates to hesitate to run for elected office and withdraw from politics.

Mayors also face the reality that speaking out against hate and extremism may not be in their short-term political interests. In fact, in the aftermath of an incident, they may be tempted to capitalise on ingrained fears within the general population – often fuelled by misinformation, disinformation and conspiracy theories – by employing populist narratives; a tactic that can garner short-term approval. Thus, those mayors who have courageously chosen the often more challenging route, working steadfastly towards harmony, understanding and true community well-being, serve as a model for others to follow.

Mayors can also face specific challenges based on aspects of their identity. For example, less than a quarter of mayors worldwide are female. Although female leadership is on the rise, with many large cities seeing their first female leaders within the last two decades or, in some cases ever, women still face particular challenges as they rise to local leadership.

Strong Cities spoke with two former city leaders – Rosy Senanayake of Columbo, Sri Lanka, and Fozia Khalid Chaudhary of Toba Tek Singh, Pakistan – to discuss their experiences as their cities' first female leaders and the challenges that women, in particular, face. Both noted they had to work much harder than their male counterparts to be taken seriously at the start of their terms. Mayor Chaudhary noted that among her staff of 300 "the predominant mindset was that I am a woman and won't be able to do anything … I had to get strict to show them that I can administer as good as any other person. They soon realised that I could deliver." Women should continue to strive for political leadership within their cities, in no small part because female representation in local government makes cities more inclusive and equitable for both women and men.

📣 **Interview with former Mayor Rosy Senanayake, City of Colombo, Sri Lanka**

"You need to work double hard, especially when you are a woman to prove your worth."

Former Mayor Rosy Senanayake, City of Columbo, Sri Lanka

A way forward: 10 steps for mayors

This Guide includes a range of recommendations for mayors to consider and practical examples from which to draw should they choose to become (more) involved in prevention and response. These have been distilled into the following 10 steps; each expanded upon in this Guide.

Build your understanding of the hate and extremist threats facing your city: which communities are most vulnerable, and why?

Assess the level of priority you want to attach to addressing these threats and your mandate for doing so.

Identify which existing policies, programmes, resources and partners could be leveraged to address these threats.

Develop a strategy for preventing and responding to hate, extremism and polarisation that outlines key priorities and sets out roles and responsibilities across the government and non-governmental partners. Decide whether this strategy will be integrated into existing frameworks, such as those related to public safety, violence reduction or community well-being or will be a standalone dedicated framework.

Meet regularly with relevant actors and partners, including community-based leaders and organisations, to establish shared priorities, enhance understanding about their role and build strong relationships that you can leverage throughout your tenure, not just during crises.

Pursue proactive, primary prevention through programmes and activities that leverage the city's traditional service delivery role – reaching all communities across the city, particularly historically marginalised ones – and urban planning approaches that promote an inclusive city identity that celebrates diversity.

Leverage communications to help the public understand your prevention priorities and strategies, drive engagement with city-sponsored activities and programmes, and respond to trends or incidents as needed to reinforce your and the city's commitment to inclusion and peace.
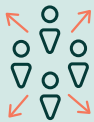
In the case of hate- or extremism-motivated attacks, be prepared to lead from the ground where you can monitor the situation as it evolves, coordinate local and national response efforts, and maintain contact with the city's residents to provide comfort, reassurance and strong leadership.

In the aftermath of an attack, work with survivors and affected communities to ensure they have ongoing support and the resources they need to heal. Consider what support will be required in the long term. Be mindful of protecting vulnerable communities at risk of backlash.

In the months following an attack, prioritise opportunities to (re)build social cohesion. Emphasise the city's commitment to inclusion, re-double your commitment to prevention activities and target interventions where mistrust or anger threatens to undermine social cohesion.

Chapter 1
Preparation

Upon entering office, a new mayor faces countless competing and overlapping responsibilities. Particularly for those who have been elected, these often include many 'quality of life' commitments that have been made to voters throughout the election period. In this inaugural flurry, the need to tackle hate and extremism can easily be eclipsed by seemingly more urgent priorities. This is especially true in places that do not feel or perceive the threat as acutely. Unfortunately, as recent history demonstrates with incidents such as the school shootings in Kasese District, Uganda, and Belgrade, Serbia, no city is immune to a threat that has become increasingly mainstreamed and has far-reaching consequences.

Aided by advances in technology, hate and extremism have become globalised, spreading easily beyond the borders of specific regions, countries, cities or communities, and defying traditional profiling. In addition to dangers from terrorist organisations, the threats from hate, extremism and polarisation are mounting in the face of global crises. The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly impacted disinformation, conspiracy narratives, social polarisation and governance, far outlasting the public health emergency.

At the same time, tensions surrounding refugee crises continue to fan xenophobic and nationalistic rhetoric, and identity-based hate crimes are on the rise. While offline interactions continue to be a successful path for recruitment, extremist ideologies and narratives have spread globally through social and other online media, ultimately decentralising the threat and providing new opportunities for terrorist groups to modernise their recruitment tactics. Individuals that have no clear ties to established groups can access harmful content more readily.

In some cases, they can become radicalised and commit violence with no apparent ties to established groups. Local leaders face a growing and increasingly complex challenge in keeping their cities safe from hate, polarisation and extremism.

No matter where a mayor is, they will need to contend with the potential that their city could be next. A plan to prevent the spread of these threats and prepare should they result in violence should therefore be among a mayor's priorities; every mayor needs to determine what steps they should take to help keep their city safe.

"It is essential to establish a prevention system at the local level. Mayors should recognise that their mandate extends beyond infrastructure and core municipal services; prioritising prevention is crucial as it is the bedrock of social cohesion and the prosperity of a community."

Mayor Maksim Dimitrievski, Municipality of Kumanovo, North Macedonia

This chapter outlines important factors that a mayor should consider as they prepare to address threats of hate and extremism in their city, including:

- Understanding their mandate as a local leader.

- Enhancing their – and the local government's – understanding of hate and extremism-related threats.

- Setting priorities and crafting strategies.

- Mapping relevant stakeholders across the city and enhancing their preparedness.

- Building trust-based relationships with relevant parts of the local government and community-based leaders and organisations.

A mayor's mandate

What is a mayor's mandate in preventing and responding to hate and extremism?

The breadth and depth of a mayor's role in prevention and response depend largely on the extent of their authority to act. This includes their scope to enact and implement policies and programmes, whether directed by or independent from the central government, propose a city budget, create and fill positions in the city administration and coordinate across different offices and sectors in the local government. A mayor's authority will vary depending on the country, the topic and sometimes the public's prevailing priorities at a given moment.

A mayor's mandate on issues related to traditional local service delivery, such as housing, sanitation and even public safety, is often straightforward. However, a mayor rarely has explicit authority to engage in the prevention of and response to hate and extremism. There are several reasons for this. For example, hate- and extremism-motivated violence have historically been framed as national security issues, in which central governments (particularly the security sector) have the primary responsibility to act. Even as the need for whole-of-society approaches to address these threats is gaining acceptance globally, many countries have been slow to recognise the role that mayors and the local governments they lead can play and to include them in discussions about how best to address these threats.

Although the number of examples of mayoral leadership in this area continues to grow, this has typically stemmed from an individual mayor's personality and drive rather than an explicit mandate to address hate and extremism.

In short, upon entering office, a mayor will need to understand the extent of their mandate – for example, through their responsibility for public safety or social well-being – and how they can work within it to maximise their impact as a local leader against hate and extremism.

How does a mayor address hate and extremism without an explicit or limited mandate?

A mayor can engage in the prevention of hate and extremism even if they lack a clear mandate. In fact, most of what a mayor (and, by extension, a local government) can contribute to prevention can be done within their traditional responsibilities. It does not require a dedicated local – or national – hate or extremism prevention framework to articulate a specific role for them.

Instead, mayors should examine how the bodies, structures and resources that do fall within their mandate – including those related to public safety, education, sports, culture and/or social well-being – can be utilised to advance prevention objectives and enhance the resilience of their city to these threats.

In **India**, many agencies dealing with extremism issues are based at the provincial and national levels, leaving the local government with very little say in how they are conducted. But, as Tikender Singh Panwar, former deputy mayor of **Shimla, India**, told Strong Cities, there are structures under his authority that he could utilise, such as the Social Justice Committee. Through this committee, he found he had a mandate to engage with the social welfare and law enforcement agencies at the provincial level to discuss and advocate for the issues facing his city. So, Deputy Mayor Panwar increased the frequency with which this body met and utilised it to address segregation and social disharmony.

As the leader of the local government, a mayor can explore ways to support prevention by prioritising diversity, equity and inclusion across all city policies and programmes and developing a city identity to which all communities can relate. Emphasising the concept of city connectedness and demonstrating that its leader is personally committed to ensuring that both long-time residents and new arrivals feel welcome and included can serve as a foundation for mayoral action against hate and extremism.

A mayor could also consider spearheading more targeted initiatives. For example, depending on a mayor's authority over and relationship with local schools, they could call for in-school and/or extra-curricular programmes that promote active citizenship, digital and media literacy and critical thinking. They could work with teachers to provide additional training to teach tolerance and respect for the 'other' to enhance young people's resilience to 'black and white' thinking and prepare them to be productive members of their communities. Such programmes can also be run outside of formal education through youth and community centres.

A mayor should also remember that they, and their city, are not alone. Where a mayor has a limited mandate or is facing a challenge they cannot manage alone, they may draw strength from cooperating with their counterparts in other cities to amplify their voice, presence and impact.

Priorities and strategies

Where do I start?

Hate and extremism are complex issues; they are impacted by a wide range of political, economic and other factors that vary from city to city and can manifest in countless ways. Moreover, one of the lessons learned from previous prevention work is the need to ensure that policies, programmes and activities are based on the actual threat (i.e., evidence/data-based) rather than politically-motivated or driven by assumptions. Overly broad approaches or ones that unjustly target specific groups or communities can backfire, including by exacerbating the very tensions that need to be reduced.

This is why local leaders must ensure the approach they take is informed by the realities of their city and tailored to address not only the threats as they exist but also consider the existing policies, programmes, expertise and resources available across the local government and the city more broadly.

How do I know which threats are facing my city?

To be effective in prevention, a mayor should be acutely aware of the primary threats and vulnerabilities that affect their city and its protective factors and remain vigilant to how these elements may change over time. Before delving into the specific policies, programmes, initiatives and resources that might be required, a mayor should begin by building their own understanding – and that of those in their government – on a range of topics, including:

- The nature of the hate and extremist threats – both online and offline – facing their city and the connection, if any, between these threats and those manifesting at the national, regional or international levels. This should include information about specific vulnerabilities, grievances and dynamics, how they affect different groups and individuals within them and their relationship with governmental actors.

- The actors, mechanisms, infrastructure and resources that could support prevention and response: many of these may be found in other sectors, including public safety, education, housing, culture, sports and youth engagement.

- The barriers and gaps that hinder efforts to address these threats, which commonly include capacity limitations within the government or among local stakeholders and engagement challenges, which often stem from low levels of trust between communities and/or between communities and law enforcement and local government.

- Past and present programmes in the city that serve prevention objectives and their impact. This list should include those delivered by governmental and non-governmental actors, for example, local and national government, civil society, community-based organisations, charities and foundations, and, where relevant, international organisations. It should take stock of both successes and failures to learn lessons and scale relevant initiatives where possible.

This information may not be readily available, or the information at hand may be outdated. If there are cirtical information gaps, a mayor should consider leading or calling for a listening exercise that incorporates the expertise, perspectives and experiences of a wide range of actors, involving, for example:

- Local practitioners and experts specialising in hate, extremism or related issues who have conducted relevant research and/or programming locally or nationally.

- Frontline actors such as police, social workers, (mental) health professionals, youth workers and teachers who have regular contact with different communities across the city.

- Community leaders, including religious leaders, to understand the challenges facing their communities, as well as potential grievances and needs.

- A broad and representative selection of city residents.

> "[As deputy mayor,] I was answerable to the people. That gave me a larger ambit for understanding things, understanding social issues, and the social tensions that exist."
>
> Former Deputy Mayor Tikender Singh Panwar, City of Shimla, India

London's comprehensive listening exercise

When Mayor Sadiq Khan led the development of London's local P/CVE action plan, the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) began with a comprehensive listening exercise with thousands of community members, stakeholders and experts across the city. The exercise sought to "hear the voices of those who, in the past, have not been heard but who are the most important to listen to" and prioritised input from "minority and marginalised communities, women and young people".

Under Mayor Khan's leadership, MOPAC worked closely with local grassroots organisations and organised stakeholder meetings, roundtables and workshops with law enforcement, local authorities, civil society groups, charities, think tanks, regulatory bodies and members of different communities to better understand how to enable a truly whole-of-society approach to addressing hate and extremism in the city. The mapping resulted in a series of recommendations for both the city government and cenral government, which are captured in a public report available on MOPAC's website and include, among others, the need for a small grants programme to support hyper-local grassroots responses to the threat and to pursue more opportunities for city-to-city learning and collaboration.

Rather than a one-off mapping exercise, the mayor should, where their authority allows, direct the local government to conduct this information-gathering on an ongoing basis to maintain a living directory and mapping of needs and vulnerabilities that can help shape priorities, inform programming and allow a city to anticipate tensions and unrest that could lead to violence.

"[Mayors] gather and seek their opinions on important topics concerning the town's residents because we need the unity of the entire town, not just the municipal council."

Mayor Mohamad Khalil, City of Akkar al-Atika, Lebanon

Do I need a dedicated action plan to prevent hate and extremism in my city?

Mayors from several cities have led or otherwise been involved in efforts to develop a dedicated Local Action Plan (LAP) for preventing and responding to hate and extremism.   However, a stand-alone framework dedicated to these specific issues may not always be necessary. In some cases, developing a separate framework may be counterproductive as it can lead to parallel structures and redundancies and complicate efforts to leverage existing city resources.

Instead, a mayor may find they can pursue their priorities more effectively through an integrated approach incorporating prevention and response into relevant existing frameworks, such as those for public safety or social well-being.

Mayoral leadership will be crucial in determining how a city approaches preventing and responding to hate and extremism. Early in their administration (or during the transition period between their election and taking office), they should lead a process to determine which approach (stand-alone or integrated) is most appropriate for their city. The answer to this question will depend on several factors, *inter alia*:

- The nature and extent of the threats facing their city.

- A mayor's mandate to explicitly address hate and extremism.

- The scope of existing, relevant city-led public safety and social well-being policies and programmes.

- The structure and resourcing of relevant local government departments and offices, including those related to schools, housing, health, transportation, sanitation, public safety, youth engagement, parks and recreation, and culture.

- The city's size and allocation of the city's budget.

The process should also consider the relative benefits and drawbacks of integrated and stand-alone approaches.

Stand-alone frameworks allow a city to elevate preventing and responding to hate and extremism as a key priority, which may be necessary in cities that face a clear and present danger from extremism and related violence.

It provides a single place to articulate a shared understanding of threats, delineate and define the roles of each stakeholder, establish coordination and information-sharing mechanisms, and set specific targets.

- Across **Kenya**, cities have developed County Action Plans (CAP) – stand-alone frameworks that articulate the county's approach to prevention and response, spelling out key objectives, actors, and coordination mechanisms with Kenya's National Action Plan. Each CAP includes a range of activities organised into thematic pillars and overseen by a pillar head responsible for coordinating with relevant stakeholders and departments. By incorporating specific leads and coordination mechanisms, Kenyan counties can help ensure their stand-alone strategy is still integrated with the rest of the county's functions.

- Similarly, with support from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), seven governorates across **Iraq** have developed local plans for implementing the country's national strategy for countering violent extremism.

- Other examples of stand-alone local government prevention frameworks include Copenhagen, **Denmark**; Brussels, **Belgium**; and Strasbourg, **France**.

While a dedicated framework enables a city to direct its prevention and response efforts in a focused way, it presents some challenges. Such frameworks are likely to demand dedicated lines of effort and funding. This can limit a strategy's sustainability and raise barriers to cooperation and engagement, especially where stakeholders and communities are wary of security-focused approaches. Moreover, a stand-alone approach risks creating parallel and potentially redundant structures within the city, which may unnecessarily complicate coordination efforts, sow confusion with the wider public and be difficult to sustain. Some cities have overcome these challenges and created a dedicated framework that serves their needs. Others, however, have pursued an integrated approach.

Integrated frameworks incorporate hate and extremism priorities into existing strategies and work plans of relevant city departments. This approach can help mainstream prevention into a city's other functions and services. This can minimise the risk of stigmatisation that comes with explicit hate and extremism prevention that might be seen as unjustly targeting a particular religious, ethnic or other minority group and enhancing sustainability by providing for prevention and response through established teams and budgets. However, an integrated approach can lead to perceptions that addressing hate and extremism is not a priority for the local leadership.

One such example of an integrated approach can be found in **Norway**. Oslo's SaLTo ("Together We Create a Safe Oslo") model for crime prevention. The cross-sectoral collaborative model incorporates the prevention of extremist violence and hate into its crime prevention efforts. SaLTo enables the city to coordinate law enforcement functions with other local and national government functions, civil society and the private sector to create a safe city and ease collaboration in sharing information and resources.

Whichever approach a mayor pursues, they should try to utilise existing departments, policies, positions and programmes wherever possible, rather than disregarding the creations of their predecessors. Prevention should be pursued over the long term. Disrupting or ending programmes prematurely can undercut a city's progress and cause a backlash among those directly affected, potentially undermining future efforts. Instead, a newly elected mayor should find ways to build on what has been done already – when those efforts have proven effective – and minimise disruptions within beneficiary communities.

Building relationships

On almost any issue on which they engage, a mayor works with a large number and diversity of stakeholders. This includes people within their own team, across different local government agencies, law enforcement and social services, as well as religious, youth and other community leaders and community-based organisations. Among the many functions these relationships will play in a mayor's tenure, productive, trusting relationships with all these actors will prove critical for both prevention and in response to an attack.

In all cases, a mayor should be mindful of establishing mutually beneficial relationships built on trust and common understanding.

Community actors and civil society

The city's engagement with community-based actors and civil society should be inclusive and diverse, driven by the makeup and organisation of a city. It can include, inter alia: religious, tribal or other community leaders; community-based organisations; advocates for youth, women and minority groups; educators and coaches; parents' associations; and more. These actors are often a mayor's lifeline to the residents of their city and are invaluable partners for engaging different groups. In addition to providing critical lines of communication, their cooperation can make it possible to provide an individualised approach to prevention at scale across the city. A mayor is well-placed to form a personal relationship with these critical actors.

> **"It is critical to establish those roles and develop those relationships during peacetime so everyone can play their part effectively in the event of an incident."**
>
> Former Mayor Allison Silberberg, City of Alexandria, Virginia, USA

🖱 **Interview with Mayor Amarjeet Sohi, Mayor, City of Edmonton, Canada**

In **London, the United Kingdom**, following the listening exercise described above, Mayor Sadiq Khan and MOPAC engaged directly with CSOs and community groups to develop and deliver prevention activities as part of the [Shared Endeavor Fund](#) (SEF). Through this programme, local organisations can apply for funding and receive training and support to deliver community-based activities that support London's prevention strategy. In 2023, Mayor Khan announced the fourth round of the SEF, committing a further [£875,000](#) of funding to support London's communities in tackling extremism. Strong Cities is serving as the SEF's independent evaluator.

In **Durban, South Africa**, the Mayor's [Office](#) has several 'desks', staffed by team members who are responsible for engaging different parts of the community – including women and youth. These, in turn, relay the needs of community members to the mayor.
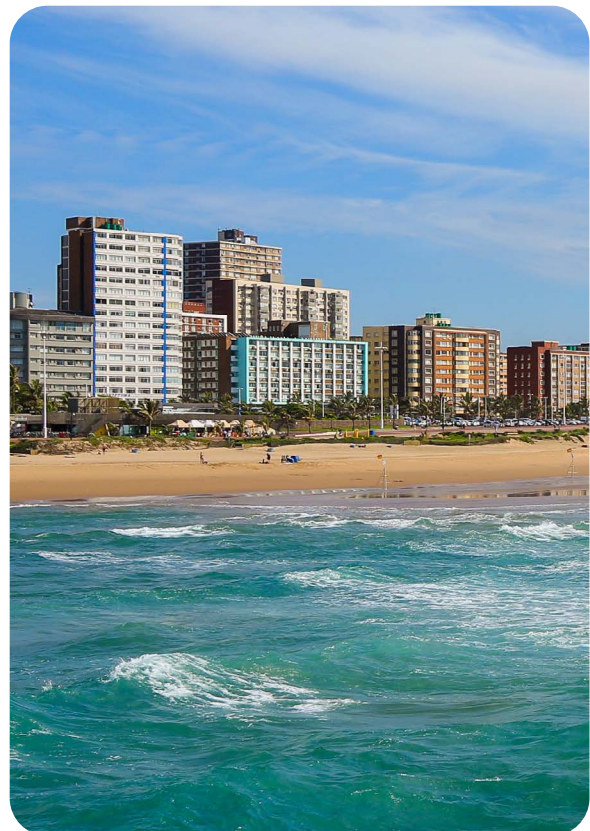
Local government and service providers

Effective prevention and response require a coordinated, whole-of-government approach in which each relevant department performs its own role in concert with others. By forming relationships with actors within their government and among frontline actors – including law enforcement where appropriate – a mayor can communicate priorities and help ensure everyone understands and embraces their roles. Building cooperative relationships with frontline actors like law enforcement and educators can be challenging, but it is especially important where the national government centrally controls those functions. Where the mayor lacks a mandate to direct services being provided to city residents, they should nevertheless look to collaborate with the service providers based in their city to establish and meet shared objectives.

It is also advisable to meet with local officials to discuss the city's readiness for responding to attacks. For example, when Allison Silberberg, former mayor of **Alexandria, Virginia, USA**, first entered office, she met with the city's senior staff and leadership from the public safety team to run through response plans through a tabletop exercise. They discussed roles and responsibilities to ensure all key personnel knew what to do and whom to call in case of emergency. This preparation proved critical when the city faced a hate-motivated shooting in 2019.

Counterparts in other cities

Being mayor – with responsibility for addressing the myriad challenges their city and its residents face – is a unique position best understood by other mayors.

By forming relationships with counterparts in neighbouring cities, a mayor can develop a network of support that they can call upon for advice, to bolster their position in a national setting, or to come to their aid in times of need, like in the aftermath of a violent incident.

Nationally, regionally, and internationally, a mayor can learn from other mayors' experiences and exchange good practices and lessons learned. Mayors can draw strength from other mayors to address the challenges facing their cities.

For example, in the **US**; the US Conference of Mayors and the ADL created a platform through which American mayors can learn from one another and strengthen their commitment to combating hate and extremism in their cities.

> **"Mayors must cooperate with their neighbours to address common challenges, regardless of conflicts happening at national or international levels."**
>
> Mayor Márta Váradiné Naszályi, Budavár, City of Budapest District I, Hungary

🚀 **Interview Mayor Jacek Jaśkowiak, City of Poznań, Poland**

Governor George Natembeya of **Trans Nzoia, Kenya**, is leading an effort to unite county assemblies around the North Rift region (comprising eight counties in the Northern Rift Valley in Kenya) to come together around a road map for sustainable peace and development. At a Peace Summit for the North Rift Economic Bloc (NOREB), Governor Natembeya urged his fellow governors to come together as a bloc to confront its challenges together: "I believe that we have a responsibility of calling this insecurity menace to a stop if we unite as NOREB and [have] support from the national government."

Mayors in Uganda have found strength in working together to overcome a limited mandate for engaging in prevention. Regina Bakitte is the Mayor of **Nansana Municipality, Uganda**, and Chairperson of the Alliance of Mayors Initiative for Community Local Action, which convenes regional meetings of Ugandan mayors to discuss their shared challenges and work together to find solutions. "As Chairperson, I am able to mobilise all mayors to share experiences and elevate our common advocacy voice."

"As mayors of strong cities, we need to come together and send a joint message. We need to keep interacting and share challenges as someone can maybe help with their experience."

Mayor Florence Namayanja, Maska City, Uganda

Chapter 2
Prevention

The most impactful role a mayor can play in addressing hate and extremism in their city is through prevention – pursuing actions, policies and programmes that make a city and its residents – both long-time ones and new arrivals – more resilient and socially cohesive.

Prevention requires a mayor to understand the vulnerabilities affecting their city, its different communities and the conditions that leave individuals or groups more susceptible to narratives of hate and extremism. This can include individual grievances or insecurities based on their own experiences or those of others in their community, as well as external pressure from hate- or extremist-driven narratives and individuals or groups that exploit these personal vulnerabilities to recruit individuals or radicalise them to violence.

While a mayor alone cannot quell all the insecurities a person is facing, a mayor can take steps to address grievances they may be experiencing due to marginalisation, exclusion, discrimination or other injustice or structural inequalities. This can help make their city a place where everyone can find belonging.

This chapter outlines strategies a mayor can pursue for preventing the spread of hate and extremism in their city and, more broadly, increasing their community's resilience by *inter alia*:

- Developing and promoting an inclusive identity in their city.

- Communicating strategically and consistently to counter hate and extremism. Including by making it consistently clear what they and their administration *stand* for.

- Shaping their city's prevention objectives.

- Building the capacities of critical prevention stakeholders.

What is prevention?

The prevention of hate and extremism includes the core elements elaborated on page 15 of this Guide: identifying and then addressing the underlying conditions and protecting 'soft' targets.

Mayors have a role in each of these prevention-related areas and more. This includes:

- Championing appropriate strategies, policies and programmes.

- Directing relevant local government components.

- Engaging directly with local communities.

- Mobilising resources and political will as they work to make their cities more resilient and cohesive.

Prevention measures should be considered complementary to security and criminal justice efforts and are typically led by civilian governmental departments and agencies, such as education, social services and public health, civil society, youth, the private sector and, in some cases, local police. The specific stakeholders and city departments involved will depend on the services and departments that fall under the jurisdiction of the given city, bearing in mind the multiple potential contextual differences that exist from one city to the next. It will also depend on the identified needs and vulnerabilities, the level of intervention required, and the methodological approach decided upon.

Prevention

Prevention measures typically operate at three levels:

1. Primary (community)

2. Secondary (individuals identified as particularly vulnerable to becoming radicalised to hate- or extremism-motivated violence)

3. Tertiary (individuals who have already committed to violence, including ones seeking to disengage from it)

For many mayors, primary prevention, which allows them to leverage existing city service provision mandates, programmes and resources aimed at making communities more cohesive and resilient to hate and extremism (for example, ones related to education, housing, psychosocial care, recreation, culture and youth engagement), is likely to be the area in which they feel able to make the most difference. Through primary prevention, they can address the broader structural and societal issues that can create an enabling environment for extremism and hate to take root.

Considerations for prevention

Addressing issues such as systemic discrimination, marginalisation, corruption and intercommunal tensions, while also strengthening social cohesion, good governance, accountability, trust, representation and transparency, are considered key components of prevention and response. Promoting and protecting human rights, gender sensitivity and ensuring that measures do no harm should be fundamental principles for prevention interventions at any level. Considering the complex and multifaceted nature of how hate, extremism and polarisation affect a community, prevention measures should also aim to be multidisciplinary and whole-of-society in approach.

A city is unlikely to need to create new infrastructure, develop new policies or hire external professionals to be able to deliver prevention or response initiatives. Despite the sensitivities and in some cases the specificity of risks related to hate, extremism and polarisation, cities should not feel obliged to 'exceptionalise' prevention by setting it apart from the rest of what they do. In fact, prevention is in many cases more impactful, sustainable and participatory when it is considered a routine part of existing services in a way that encourages contribution and cooperation rather than fear and distrust. Finally, prevention should also be realistic and work for cities where resources are limited and there are daily competing priorities around basic service provision.

Building an inclusive identity in your city

A mayor alone will be unable to address the feelings of marginalisation, exclusion and injustice that can make individuals in their city vulnerable to hateful and extremist narratives. For example, eliminating, let alone reducing, systemic discrimination and unconscious bias towards a particular religious, ethnic or other minority group is a long-term endeavour. It not only requires a whole-of-society approach but should be a continued focus that outlasts the tenure of any one mayor.

However, every mayor can contribute to this by making clear the values that the city stands for, such as equality, diversity, inclusivity, equity and openness.

This includes committing to building an inclusive identity for the city to which all residents and communities feel a sense of connection. It involves creating opportunities for all to be active members of their communities and for grievances to be aired peacefully, while limiting the space for mistrust to manifest and, thus, for hate, extremism and polarisation to take root.

A mayor can lead the effort to build an inclusive city identity in many ways. Below are a few of the strategies that mayors shared with Strong Cities, which might have relevance to other local leaders.

"Inclusive and social cohesion policies promote a sense of value and belonging among city residents regardless of their social, economic or political status. Through [such] policies, every city resident feels respected that they are part and parcel of the development policies of the city."

Representative, City of Zomba, Malawi

"Defining that we are a 'welcoming city to everyone who calls Aurora home' is the clearest statement that reflects inclusivity."

Mayor Mike Coffman, City of Aurora, Colorado, USA
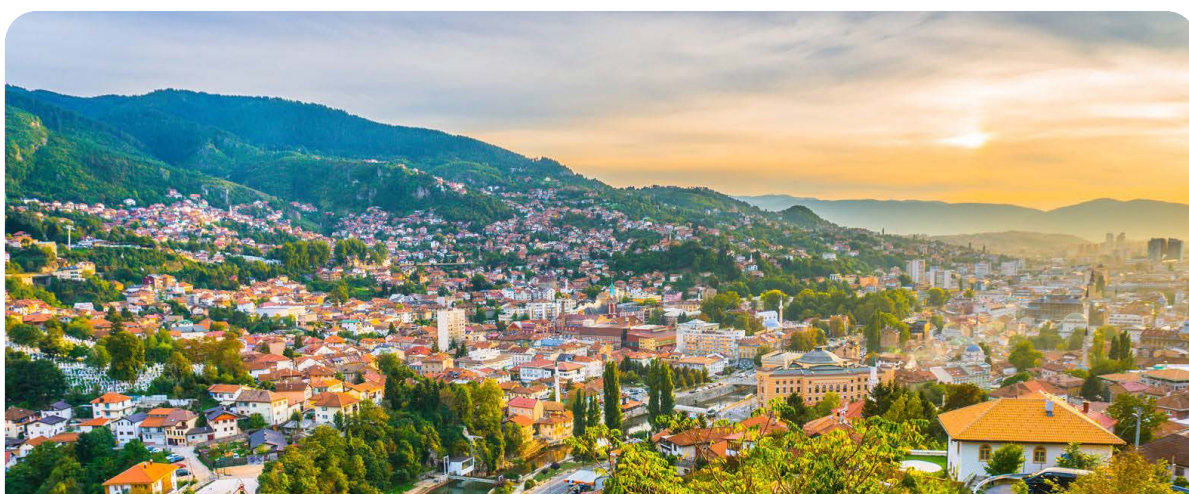
"By valuing diversity, promoting equal opportunities and ensuring participation from all groups, mayors create an environment where everyone feels valued and represented. This approach challenges divisive ideologies, fosters understanding and empathy, and creates a counter-narrative to extremism. By nurturing social resilience through dialogue and collaboration, mayors build networks of trust that can withstand and counteract extremist tactics. Ultimately, by embracing diversity and promoting inclusivity, mayors create cities united in shared values, preventing the spread of extremism and hate."

Representative, City of Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina

Institutionalise inclusion

A mayor can lead the effort to demonstrate the city's commitment to inclusion by promoting policies that provide for all its residents, whether long-time ones or new arrivals, and shaping the city into a place where different groups feel at home together. To do this, a mayor should consider policies and programmes that, *inter alia*:

Provide for all residents, especially those who have been historically, especially those who have been historically excluded. This can ease social tensions and help address grievances, which can fuel hate and extremism and make those who had felt left out previously feel cared for and more connected to the city. One way to do this is through **inclusive urban planning** that provides for all residents without creating or furthering segregation, and accounts for challenges posed by gentrification. For example, a mayor should consider a housing policy that not only provides homes for vulnerable populations but also incorporates low-income housing throughout the city in a way that guards against segregation.
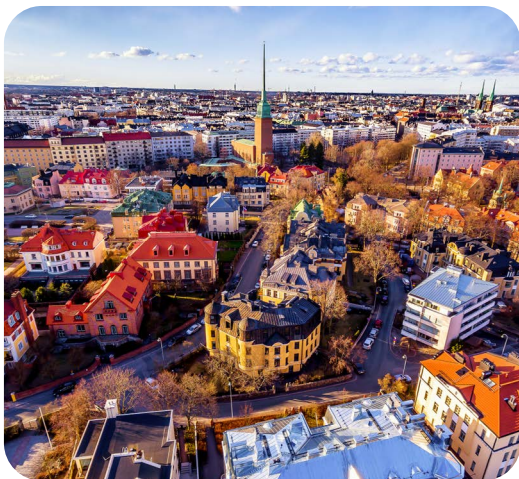
For example, Mayor Jan Vartiainen has led the city of **Helsinki, Finland** to assert its identity as an inclusive 'smart city', one that is sustainable, economically viable and where all its residents can be at ease. He is committed to making Helsinki a city "filled with places where people can be at ease, like parks or public libraries, where people can gather around whatever activities they want to have".

He is also working to make the city more inclusive through an intentional housing policy that not only helps people get housing who need it but is designed to reduce segregation and isolation.

Facilitate integration and welcome new residents into the city, including those coming from other countries. Resources that help new arrivals find housing, understand how to access services and get connected with community activities can make it easier for them to settle in. Mayors should also consider providing language classes for those who are coming from other countries.

In **Columbus, Ohio, USA**, Mayor Andrew Ginther launched the New American Initiative to provide refugees and immigrants who move to Columbus with immediate access to city services and programmes to help them settle into their new home faster and become productive and equitable residents. A representative from Columbus told Strong Cities that, "as a Welcoming City, our central tenet is to strengthen the social cohesion of our large and growing diverse population. Through a myriad of city efforts, the core of our work is dependent upon engagement of community, religious and grassroots leadership and in fact help to train future community leaders through our New American Initiative."

Communicate inclusion

Mayors should proatively use communications campaigns and activities to build and reinforce the narrative that the city is dedicated to inclusion. One way mayors have done so is by leading the development of a statement of inclusion for the city that asserts its values and commitment to not only including, but also celebrating, all residents in the city.

In **Highland Park, Illinois, USA**, under the leadership of Mayor Nancy Rotering, the city has underscored its commitment to inclusion though its Statement Against Hate, which "unequivocally condemns any racist, misogynistic, antisemitic, anti-LGBT, ableist, or otherwise hate-motived groups or individuals who are threatening any form of violent acts, bigoted harassment on, or discrimination against our residents, visitors, or city staff". The statement is a powerful tool for mayor and other city officials when responding to events that counter the city's values.

In **Podgorica, Montenegro**, under the leadership of Mayor Olivera Injac, the city is developing a Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights to solidify its commitment to protecting human rights. They informed Strong Cities that the strategy seeks to enhance the city's efforts to build an inclusive identity as it guides their continued efforts to further improve good practice, experiences and results in the field of human rights protection and the visibility of different social groups, especially those who face social marginalisation and discrimination.

A mayor should also consider how the city can prepare to communicate to reject antithetical ideas and condemn hateful incidents when necessary, making it clear those have no home in that city and cannot impact the city's core values. This can be done through official statements, online messaging through social media, or standing in solidarity with those who have been targeted by hate, or in support of those who have stood up against it.

When Ron DeSantis, Governor of **Florida, USA** introduced several bills targeting LGBTQ+ residents, eight Floridian mayors signed a pledge to support LGBTQ+ advocacy group GLSEN. Many have gone a step further, issuing city proclamations that promised to provide "safe learning environments that include and affirm all children". In an interview with ABC News (USA), Mayor Harvey Ward of **Gainesville, Florida** explained: "I was elected to be mayor for every resident of Gainesville, and it is important to me that all our neighbours, particularly the youngest and most vulnerable, feel welcome and safe in our community."

An innovative example of communication through actions can be found in **Dabrowa Gornicza, Poland**. Following a xenophobic march in his city, Mayor Marcin Bazylak attended the judicial hearings of anti-hate protesters who faced charges for their demonstrations against the march. In an interview with Strong Cities, Mayor Bazylak explained that because the xenophobic march had been organised legally, he was unable to prevent it from taking place. He could, however, make a statement by attending the judicial hearings and making it clear that he and the city reject such xenophobia and instead stand for inclusion.

🚀 **Interview with Clarence Anthony. CEO of the National League of Cities**

Demonstrate inclusion

Mayors should adopt policies that showcase the city's commitment to inclusion.

In addition to the strategies for institutionalising inclusion detailed above, mayors should seize upon opportunities to demonstrate the city's commitment to inclusion responsively in the face of emerging challenges.

Mayors leading the charge to welcome refugees

In response to refugee crises in which many places have closed their doors to refugees, some mayors have made a point of welcoming displaced people and asserting their cities commitment to inclusivity.

- In **New York City**, Mayor Adams released The Road Forward: Blueprint to Address New York City's Response to the Asylum Seeker Crisis in March 2023. The mayor's plan includes a series of measures to help the city manage an influx of refugees and support them as they settle into the city. It includes the formation of a new Office for Asylum Seeker Operations (OASO), focused on resettlement, advocacy and legal services, as well as a pilot program to provide job training as asylum seekers await work authorisation, and a 24/7 arrival centre to replace port authority operations.

- In **Poland**, several mayors have made a concerted effort to welcome Ukrainian refugees displaced by Russia's invasion of their cities. The mayors of Peremyshl, Rzeszow, Lublin and Chełm were recognised for their efforts with Ukrainian badges of honour, presented by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, designating them as 'rescue cities'.

- In **Zahony, Hungary**, Mayor László Helmeczi has been personally involved in settling Ukrainian refugees in his small city of 4,000 people, carefully balancing the needs of his residents and those of the newly displaced people. In an interview with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), he explained: "From coordination to connections and to putting in extra work hours, municipality workers play an essential role in making all this happen. And, in the meantime, we're also running a town."

- In **Koboko, Uganda**, as part of his commitment to making his city "a place for everyone", Mayor Sanya Wilson established the South Sudanese Refugee Association, mandated to collate and relay the needs of refugees arriving from South Sudan to ensure the local government provides appropriate support. This active engagement with the city's refugee population, driven by the mayor, has resulted in the development of a trauma centre to support their psychosocial recovery, and in trainings to empower them in the local job market. A similar community engagement forum is being established for the city's Congolese diaspora.

- In **Mardan, Pakistan**, Mayor Himayatullah Meyer led the effort to settle 432,000 internally displaced people (IDP), mindful to provide for the basic needs of so many people without exacerbating polarisation in the city. In addition to providing shelter and basic services for the IDPs, the mayor also organised activities between the city's new arrivals and its host population to promote mutual understanding and emphasise the ties between the two groups. He also continuously advocated for the IDP's needs and rights to make it clear to the broader community why the city was providing support.

🎯 **Interview 2 with Mayor Jacek Jaśkowiak, Poznań, Poland**

Celebrate inclusion

Mayors should organise or otherwise encourage public celebrations of holidays and events to bring people together. They should be sure to include a representative selection of holidays that represents the cultures of all residents to showcase the city's diversity and its commitment to inclusion, rather than obscuring it by only honouring those of the majority.

Bangladesh has institutionalised its commitment to celebrating religious diversity. Mayors are encouraged to take an inclusive approach to celebrating religious holidays and the national government provides each mayor a dedicated budget to organise public celebrations honouring their residents' religious holidays. The size of the budget and how it is used depends on the city's population and it gives mayors the opportunity to celebrate the diversity of their city and reinforce its identity as an inclusive place where people of all faiths are not only welcome but are celebrated. These celebrations create regular opportunities for a city's communities to come together, as residents will often join a wide range of celebrations, not only those honouring their own religion.

Engender shared pride

Mayors should invest in opportunities to promote a shared local identity and pride in the city. For example, sports teams provide a rallying point for diverse communities within a city to come together psychologically and physically and can create positive recognition among those outside the city in which residents can take pride.

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA succeeded in creating a new source of pride and connection when they brought a professional basketball team to the city. The team was important for changing the way the city's residents viewed the city, and for shaping associations among those outside the state who had come to associate the city with the deadly bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in 1995.
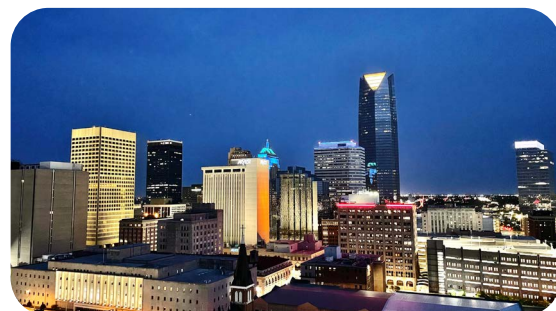
A mayor can also promote pride in the city and unite residents by investing in public spaces and creating places and opportunities for people to engage with the city's cultural offerings. Art walks, playgrounds, outdoor movies and concert spaces all provide opportunities for different groups to intermix and share positive experiences of their city. This can also include efforts to make existing public spaces safer and more welcoming for all residents.

In **Rabat, Morocco**, Mayor Asmaa Rhlalou – the city's first female mayor – is continuing efforts to make public spaces safer for women. According to City President Mohamed Sadiki, "Rabat is engaged in multisectoral partnerships to prevent all forms of violence in public and private spaces, and is committed to mobilising efforts, expertise and capacity to ensure the success and sustain the results of its Safe City with Women and Girls programme".

Invest in active citizens

Mayors should promote active citizenship by providing opportunities for citizens to get directly involved in local decision-making, like city councils or town halls.

At the start of her first term, Mayor Naszalyi of **Budavár, Hungary** initiated the development of a strategy for the involvement of citizens in the local government's decision-making processes. It included the institutionalisation of two new positions within the district government dedicated to civil society engagement and initiated fortnightly town

hall meetings that she chairs where residents can raise concerns and have a debate on prominent community issues.

Furthermore, mayors can help secure the city's future commitment to social cohesion by investing in the city's youngest residents – regardless of their community – enabling them to become active citizens who value inclusion. Develop curriculums for formal and informal education that teach tolerance, democracy and respect for others, as well as critical thinking, conflict resolution and how to engage with people who have different opinions.

In 2016, then-Mayor Vojko Obersnel introduced civic education into elementary schools in **Rijeka, Croatia** to promote non-violence, tolerance and solidarity to some of its youngest residents and help them develop values based on acceptance, inclusion, diversity and respect for human rights. To support the programme, Rijeka developed a textbook – The Pupil Citizen – along with supporting resources that students use throughout their civic education, which lasts from grade five until grade seven and gradually introduces the concepts of civic education.

Engaging communities

A mayor's proximity to the city's residents and, where locally elected, their accountability to them, makes them well placed to build strong, personal relationships with the different communities in their city. Doing so can help enhance trust in local government – thus promoting active citizenship – and creates a channel for two-way communication that allows a mayor to understand what is going on in their city and positions them well to mobilise a response where needed, for example, following a hate- or extremism-motivated incident. This is especially important for identifying signs of trouble within or between communities and working with trusted community leaders to address them before these tensions result in hate- or extremism-motivated violence. These relationships will become even more crucial if the city faces a crisis or violent incident and the mayor needs to mobilise a city-wide response.

To make engagement fruitful, a mayor should be committed to developing trusting and mutually-beneficial relationships and demonstrate a sincere commitment to providing support.

It can damage trust when local officials go to communities merely to extract information or make requests. A mayor should be mindful of what that community needs and how the city can help meet those needs.

Empower communities to promote social cohesion

A mayor should consider ways to take an individualised approach to community engagement that gives each community what they need and gives them ownership in crafting their own solutions.

In addition to offering broadly applicable programmes and services – like those outlined in the section above – local leaders should provide opportunities for communities to define their own challenges and their own solutions. Whatever the approach, a mayor should formalise it and identify ways to fund it (whether through funding from local government or non-governmental sources or some combination thereof) over the long term to ensure it is consistent and sustained.

Interview with Hassan Naveed, Executive Director at the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes, NYC Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice

Anti-Racism in Edmonton, Canada

Concerned about racist incidents targeting Muslims and people of colour in Edmonton, Mayor Amerjeet Sohi led the creation of an Anti-Racism Strategy. The strategy was developed through consultations with those who have been most affected by racism to understand their experiences and needs. As a result, the strategy called for the creation of a community-based organisation fully resourced and dedicated to leading anti-racism work and provided sustainable core and operational funding and capacity-building to community organisations that do anti-racism and anti-hate work, with dedicated funding provided especially to organisations led by people of colour.

To ensure communities of colour have a continued voice in guiding the city's anti-racism work, the strategy also called for the development of an Anti-Racism Advisory Committee of Council, to advise the city council on matters related to race. This has helped ensure the resulting strategy would provide the right kinds of support and created a sustained channel for ongoing communication and cooperation.

The City of Edmonton has stated its commitment to inclusion publicly on their website. "At the city level, we believe everyone who lives here is an Edmontonian, that every Edmontonian deserves to call this place home." Edmonton is placing affected communities at the center of their efforts to make that vision a reality.

Make yourself available

Showing people that a mayor is willing to make time for them and provide consistent access can help strengthen trust and create a stronger foundation for problem-solving. Mayors should consider establishing a set time during which residents can come by city hall and discuss their concerns or schedule regular town meetings where residents can come together as a group to address issues or exchange ideas. Mayors can also consider creating online platforms where residents can share their concerns or ideas directly with the government.

In **Masaka City, Uganda**, residents can meet with Mayor Florence Namayanja every Friday without an appointment. The mayor told Strong Cities that this openness prompts people to share information with the local government that they might otherwise be reluctant to provide.

In **Cape Town, South Africa**, members of the public are invited on the first Thursday of every month to engage directly with public officials, whether to give feedback or open a line of communication about specific citizens' needs.
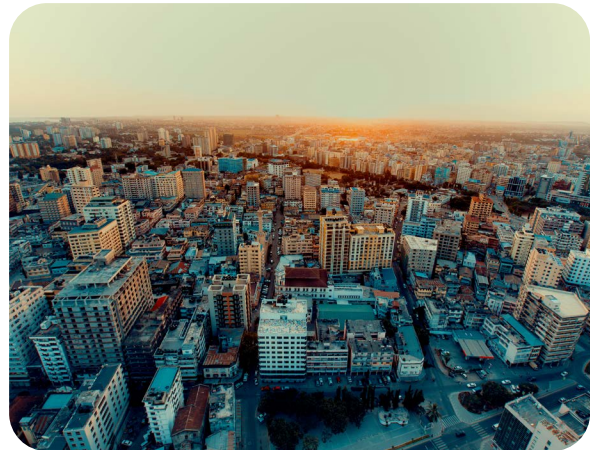
Community engagement can also be enhanced when city officials are available to the public regularly in dedicated liaison roles.

Under the leadership of Mayor Bruce Harrell, **Seattle, Washington, USA**, has embraced a 'high visibility approach' to governing, in which officials are embedded within all parts of the community in designated roles such as community support officers. The intention is to remove barriers to reporting and build the trust needed to ensure residents feel comfortable proactively raising their concerns.
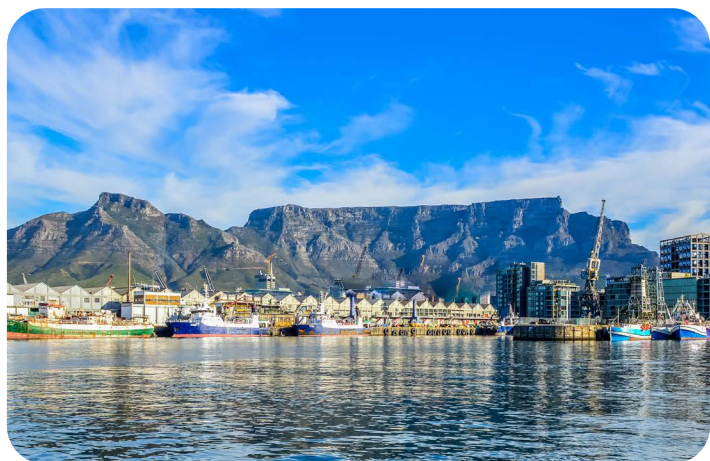
Help diffuse intercommunal tension by providing a safe space for different groups to come together

By maintaining productive relationships with the different communities within a city, a mayor will be better placed to identify where there are tensions between groups, and when these tensions could pose the threat of escalating toward violence. A mayor should consider how they can engage with these communities both separately and together to find common ground so they can address their issues together and work toward a more cohesive relationship.

These activities can be targeted at specific groups to diffuse existing tensions.

One example of this approach can be found in the city of **Bulawayo, Zimbabwe**, where, under the leadership of Mayor Solomon Mguni, the city has established regular meetings with all of the political parties present in the city in hopes of bridging the growing political divide that was affecting the city's cohesion. They also organised public forums where leaders from across the political spectrum could speak to communities in constructive debates that fostered learning and mitigated political conspiracies.

These activities can also be done more broadly to bring groups together to celebrate cultural diversity.

In **New York City, New York, USA**, residents are invited to share a meal and learn about the diverse cultures and traditions that make up the diverse city. Organised by New York City's Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes (OPHC), Mayor Eric Adams initiated Breaking Bread, Building Bonds to break down silos and segregation between different communities. Mayor Adams initiated the programme based on the belief that preventing hate, extremism and polarisation requires individuals to engage beyond their social circles and commit to learning more about cultures and traditions that differ from their own.

Communicating strategically

A mayor and their office should take an active approach to communications around prevention and response. This includes developing and implementing a plan to communicate with residents and other key stakeholders to establish a city's inclusive and peaceful identity and respond to hate- or extremism-motivated incidents, messaging or propaganda.

Communicate for peace

Communication campaigns about the city can also demonstrate its commitment to inclusion and serve as a critical alternative narrative against extremist rhetoric that seeks to target specific communities within a city. Such campaigns can be targeted at those inside the city and those outside to establish or re-establish a city's identity.

For example, under the leadership of Mayor Carlos Moedas, **Lisbon, Portugal** sought to recast what it means to be a resident when they developed the public communications campaign "Somos os Direitos que temos" ("We are our rights") in 2022.

The campaign sought to enhance awareness about diversity, human rights and inclusion and showcase the city's pride in its diversity.

Keep residents informed

Mayors should communicate about the opportunities, events and programmes available to them in the city and increase awareness about city-led strategies and activities related to prevention. Such communication will help maximise the impact of these initiatives and promote active participation. This is especially important for targeting communities that have been historically excluded or have been difficult to reach. Mayors should take a strategic approach when targeting these groups specifically. This includes delivering messages in the relevant local languages and leveraging mediums and platforms – online and offline – that these groups frequent.

In **Narayanganj, Bangladesh**, Mayor Salina Hayat Ivy and her administration have prioritised the citizens' right to digital information and the digitalisation of services. During an interview with Strong Cities, Mayor Ivy explained that this has given residents more consistent, transparent and immediate access to information from the city, as well as direct access to the mayor and other officials who can use the platform to respond to their needs, grievances and suggestions. Information officers are also available to every citizen with an online click or a phone call.

In **Uganda**, mayors are utilising radio shows – a popular medium across the country – to keep their residents updated and provide more visible leadership. Mayors should consider using a range of different mediums and platforms, including social media and direct messaging apps, that are popular and easily accessible by different demographics to reach as many people as possible.

Responding to hate and extremism

Be prepared to respond in the event of extremist or hateful incidents or messaging campaigns. These could be targeting the city government, or even the mayor directly, or the wider public. Mayors should utilise communications strategically to reaffirm the city's stance on hate, address misinformation and disinformation, counter extremist ideologies and promote peace.

Such campaigns can also be used to stand in solidarity with communities who have been targeted or diffuse tension between groups following an incident.

Alarmed by the sharp increase in anti-Asian hate crimes during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, **New York City** worked with multidisciplinary artist Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya to develop a targeted art campaign, "I Still Believe in Our City". Under the leadership of then mayor Bill de Blasio, the NYC OPHC and the NYC Department of Education also developed a "Stop Anti-Asian Hate Education Resource Guide", and a range of other resources, including comics, podcasts, a spoken word poem, videos and other multimedia components. The artwork was displayed in public places across the city alongside powerful anti-hate messages and information about the initiative, as well as through social media.

By artist Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya for NYC's "I Still Believe in Our City" campaign.

Tips for developing a communication strategy

To help communicate both proactively and reactively, a mayor can lead the development of a well-defined communications strategy that can be employed as needed. Such a strategy should:

- **Provide guidance** on when, how and who should communicate in different scenarios. Ensure everyone can communicate with confidence and in accordance with city guidelines and strategies by developing a communications playbook. To ensure consistency between different messengers, this strategy should include and clarify key terminology and messages.

- **Define the role of different messengers**, acknowledging the limitations of official city messaging and utilising credible messengers and partners to fill gaps in trust and credibility. This will include approved messengers within the local government and non-governmental actors such as community and/or religious leaders.

- **Incorporate a range of mediums**, platforms and languages to reach everyone. While government websites are a good repository for information, they are not always the best way to reach a wide and varied audience. Consider using popular online platforms to reach younger audiences and utilise popular offline spaces to bring messages directly to a target community. Also consider which mediums will be most inclusive for those with disabilities.

- **Include a range of resources and templates** to expedite content creation and establish a recognisable brand for city-led communications. Templates will enable a city to create new content and resources quickly and more affordably, while ensuring there is consistency in the look and feel of all the city's outputs.

Building capacities

Prevention is best achieved through a whole-of-society approach in which actors across sectors and levels can play their part effectively in support of the city's plan or policy. This may require upskilling different actors through training and resources, especially for those whose role does not explicitly deal with preventing hate and extremism or do not otherwise have any experience with it. To get the most out of their own team and other contributing stakeholders, a mayor should consider identifying specialised expertise and providing access to training and resources that help enhance:

- Familiarity with hate, extremism and related threats to public safety and social cohesion and understanding of how misinformation, disinformation and conspiracy theories are fuelling them. This can include the theoretical background and approaches underpinning the field of preventing and countering violent extremism as well as specific threats facing the city, such as anti-migrant, anti-LBGTQ+, anti-Semitic, Islamophobic or other forms of hate or anti-establishment sentiment, and local dynamics fuelling many of these.

- The knowledge and skills needed to design, manage and evaluate prevention projects that follow a 'do-no-harm' approach. This is especially important for civil society and community actors who may seek support to run programmes in their communities.

- Awareness of local and national strategic prevention and response frameworks and their role in supporting prevention and response.

- Processes for reporting and responding to potentially dangerous situations.

- Local government-led communication and engagement with the city's residents, especially when working with potentially vulnerable individuals

Each mayor should keep in mind the need to ensure that training and other support are made available on an ongoing basis. That way each actor can build relevant skills and knowledge in a sustained way, rather than through single-day sessions, and stay up to date on new developments and approaches.

In **Mechelen, Belgium**, for example, the city makes training available for local organisations and maintains a budget dedicated to supporting youth innovation. Part of their training is specifically targeted for youth workers and was developed in collaboration with youth workers and educators to support professionals in creating safe spaces for young people. The resources are available online, via the European Union's ORPHEUS project.

Strasbourg, France provides training on extremism and prevention to its local partners, including regular threat briefings hosted by subject matter experts. Training is offered as widely as possible and thus fosters networking and relationship-building between participating organisations.

Training can also be delivered to help enhance trust and improve relationships between residents and frontline actors. Three American cities provide instructive examples.

Under Mayor Rotering's direction, **Highland Park, Illinois** is working with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) to deliver anti-bias and cultural sensitivity training for all their police officers as part of the city's wider Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives to help improve relationships between residents and the police and enhance the city's resilience to hate and extremism.

Houston, Texas, under the leadership of Mayor Sylvester Turner, is working to enhance community-oriented policing by working directly with the community and empowering community groups to deliver training to law enforcement on topics ranging from mental health to cultural sensitivity and inclusion.

In February 2020, **Seattle, Washington, USA**, Mayor Jenny Durkan signed an Executive Order to combat hate crimes and crimes of bias. The order named the Office of the Employee Ombud (OEO) as one of the units responsible for addressing these issues, with the OEO then tasked to conduct training for all city employees on preventing of hate and polarisation in the workplace.

Chapter 3
Response

In times of crisis, people look to their elected leaders and government institutions for guidance. In the case of a hate- or extremism-motivated attack, mayors will be expected or called upon to lead their city's response to manage the immediate fallout while also planning for intermediate- and long-term responses to secure their city, support their residents and ensure it builds back stronger and more resilient. Mayors and other local officials must often take quick decisions in the face of uncertainty to avoid missteps that could erode multi-agency or citizen trust or derail future recovery efforts.

The absence of strong and visible mayoral leadership in a post-attack environment can reduce trust in the mayor's ability to lead the city and the local government's ability to handle crises. For example, according to a city official in **Oslo, Norway**, in the aftermath of the 2011 attacks in Oslo and Utøya, "mayoral leadership inspired trust that the system was working".

In today's complex information and threat environment, it is necessary to have plans in place for pooling resources across agencies, countering the likelihood of mass panic and/ or retaliatory violence, navigating the online space and effectively communicating with survivors and their networks who are directly impacted.

This chapter focuses on the key points that a mayor will need to consider as they chart out an effective and sensitive response following a hate- or extremism-motivated attack, including:

- Coordination between local actors, as well as with national response teams, to meet the varied local needs while minimising duplication.

- Communication with the public to prevent panic, keep them informed about the incident and the city's response, and minimise space for misinformation, disinformation and conspiracy narratives.

- Different means of providing support and comfort to residents, giving particular attention to communities that have been directly targeted by the attack.

- Strategies to mitigate fallout in the medium- to long-term.

Above all, a mayor should work to enhance trust and build unity between the population and local authorities. This will lay the groundwork for subsequent efforts.

In the first moments after an attack

Take a moment.

The next few hours will be difficult.

Take a moment to prepare yourself mentally and physically. While it may seem trivial, it is essential to find the right mindset to make rational decisions under pressure

Analyse the situation.

Get a complete picture as possible of the attack:

- Is there an ongoing security risk?
- How could the situation potentially escalate?
- Which emergency actors are on the ground?
- Do certain communities or institutions need immediate protection?

Check the chain of command.

Make sure you know and have communicated the chain of command, so all teams are aware of and respect each other's roles.

Identify clear hierarchies for decision-making, timeframes for updates and a spokesperson to streamline public messaging.

Identify priorities.

Clear priorities will guide and justify your next steps.

Make sure you communicate these priorities internally and to the public.

Ensure future decision-making is consistent with these principles.

Coordinating the local response

A hate- or extremism-motivated incident typically triggers a wide range of responses and responders, both from the local and national levels. Each will have an important role to play, but they can only work effectively if their efforts are coordinated so they complement each other without contradiction or duplication. As the most senior local leader, a mayor is oftenest placed to coordinate a multi-agency effort to provide support locally and liaise with national agencies to lead a single cohesive response.

Too often, national governments dictate post-crisis responses to the exclusion of local governments, even though it is the mayor and local leaders who the city's residents will look to for information and support. Even where a mayor does not have an explicit response mandate, it is critical that they can assert their leadership to spearhead the response effort.

Lead from the ground

Once an incident has been neutralised, mayors should be on the ground wherever possible to consult with survivors, bereaved families, first responders and community leaders to identify gaps in response, psychosocial and other needs.

"The most notable actions we have undertaken, which had a direct impact on countering terrorist operations and positively influencing the people, is that we made sure to be an integral part of the community. This meant being present now at the event with our community to provide support and strengthen their resilience, as well as directing everyone towards finding real solutions to the problem."

Mayor Ibrahim Khalil Awsaj,
City of Ramadi, Iraq

A mayor should help ensure that everyone knows their role and have what is needed to perform it. When assigning roles and responsibilities, consider if there are individuals who will be better placed to liaise with certain communities.

Following the 2013 marathon bombing in **Boston, Massachusetts, USA**, Mayor Thomas Menino formed part of the unified command centre that oversaw the city's response. Utilising this multi-agency structure, the mayor was able to assign roles and responsibilities for different aspects of the response, and craft clear, concise and unified messages to be delivered by the mayor and other city leaders. This helped ensure consistent messaging shaped by multiple local government agencies and emergency responders.

Coordinate with national government responders

In most cases, an extremism or hate-motivated attack will trigger a response from the national government, as well as state, provincial or regional-level agencies where relevant. Having this support is critical for response, but it can create coordination challenges, especially where the national response does not immediately align with local needs. Part of a mayor's role will include coordinating with these different agencies and advocating for the needs of their constituents, serving as a buffer where necessary between national and local actors on the ground. In doing so, a mayor should be mindful that voices at other levels do not drown out local voices and overshadow their perspectives, concerns and needs.

Communicating with the public

"By taking a proactive role in communicating with the public, the mayor can shape the narrative to promote unity, resilience, and community support. Effective management of disinformation ensures that reliable information reaches the public, mitigating panic and facilitating a coordinated response."

Representative, City of Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina

Following an extremism or hate-motivated attack, mayors should be at the forefront of public communications. These initial communications set the tone for response and can help mitigate additional fallout from misinformation, disinformation and conspiracy narratives. Fear and uncertainty create fertile breeding grounds for misinformation as well as disinformation from malicious actors who wish to take advantage of the situation to spread hate. This can undermine the response effort by spreading panic or fuel polarisation that can critically damage social cohesion and lead to further violence in the future. It is crucial, therefore, that a mayor help the city stay ahead of such threats by communicating clearly, frequently and early to set the official narrative for the event and calm uncertainties insofar as possible.

In general, the mayor should advocate that the city shares as much as possible to avoid the spread of rumours and misinformation and disinformation within the bounds of relevant security or information-sharing protocols. Even if there are no immediate updates, it is crucial to outline the steps being taken and any barriers to actions or causes for delay. Being seen as transparent is the cornerstone of trust.

A mayor should remember three key principles for post-incident communications:

- **Accessibility:** Communication should be plain and straightforward as much as possible. Avoid jargon, keep messaging succinct and provide translation – including sign language interpretation – wherever needed, depending on the community's composition.

- **Balance:** Messaging should balance the need to inform – and reduce space for conspiracy narratives – with the need to minimise fear and post-crisis intercommunal tensions. Focus on the city and its communities rather than on perpetrator(s) and avoid militaristic and other loaded rhetoric in favour of language that emphasises unity and resilience as a means of recovery.

- **Transparency:** Leaders should be transparent about the city's response. This is crucial for maintaining credibility with and the trust of affected communities. As the city identifies lessons learned from its response, these should be shared with the public.

📣 **Interview with Nancy Rotering, Mayor of Highland Park, Illinois, USA**

Phases of post-incident communication

There are three primary phases of post-incident communication. Communications should align with the priorities set following the attack and be consistent across the phases to provide messaging that informs, reassures and builds trust.

Phase 1: Immediate reaction and engagement

Whether in person or through their team, the mayor will need to ensure that the city's residents are informed about the situation and the city's response, managing insecurity and expectations. In the immediate aftermath of an attack or during a crisis, it is important to focus on providing safety guidance, as well as official updates on the event and the local authority's response. This could be done in cooperation with local media, via the mayor's official social media channels and/or through any other available rapid communication channels.

To help the population regain a sense of control, the information shared should be timely, clear, concise, relevant, non-contradictory, accessible to all those impacted and generated from credible sources. In the immediate aftermath, providing safety guidance, updates on those in danger and how to get practical help are essential.

## Phase 2: First official statement and/or appearance

It is essential for the mayor to get their first official public statement and/or appearance right, as people will hold them accountable for their words and reactions. While the immediate situation will feel all-encompassing, it is important to plan strategically for the medium- and long-term to ensure early communications can support future rebuilding efforts. A mayor should aim to communicate strength while promoting a unified response. Mayors have shared some tips for how to approach a post-incident statement.

- Speak out explicitly against hate, violence and extremism; make it clear that they have no place in the city and will not win.

- Call for unity, reasserting the city's inclusive identity and calling on residents to come together and find strength in one another.

- Focus statements on the city and its communities rather than giving a platform to the perpetrator(s), their motives or manifesto. Avoid saying the perpetrator's name so as not to glorify them with notoriety or martyrdom (something perpetrators often long for), especially if they are operating in radicalised spaces online.

- Avoid militaristic or reactionary language that heightens feelings of fear and antagonism. Recognise the profound sense of violation and anger people experience after an attack but be mindful not to inflame tensions with calls for retaliation.

- Diffuse tensions and the potential for retaliation based on race, ethnicity, religion or tribe. If members of a specific community carried out the attack, be mindful of potential backlash against that community.

Phase 3: First direct engagements

The mayor's initial engagements will be equally important in demonstrating their priorities. For example, whom the mayor visits first (for example, survivors in hospital, other institutions related to the target of the attack, schools), which media outlets they talk to and the potential political allegiances that might demonstrate. The mayor should ensure that their actions are consistent and in line with the priorities they have set from the beginning of their term.
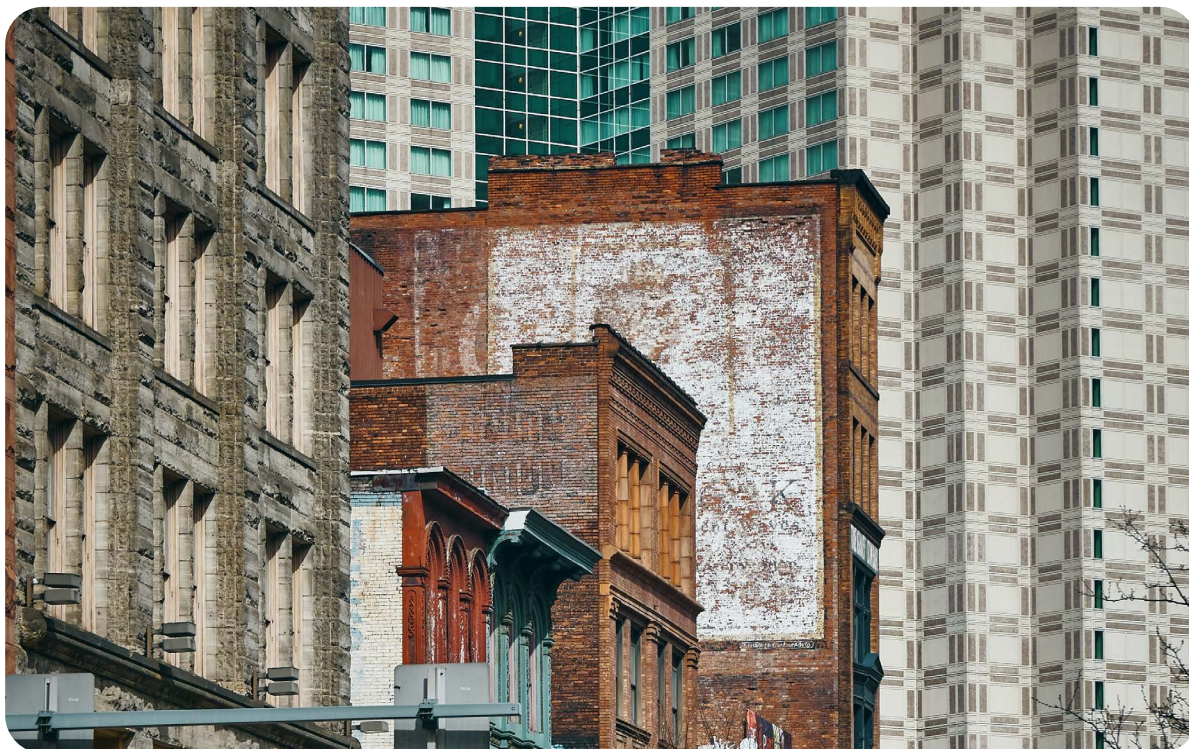
Advice from Mayor Bill Peduto on communicating following a hate-motivated attack

In October 2018, a man entered the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and opened fire on congregants during Shabbat celebrations, killing 11 people and wounding six others, including four police officers. It was the deadliest anti-Semitic attack in American history. Former Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto, now a Senior Adviser to the Strong Cities Network, shared his experience and his response decision points:

1. Have multiple communication devices and mechanisms that work on different sources (i.e., phone signal, ethernet, radio frequency) for both internal and external communications. During the attack, Mayor Peduto wanted to communicate as much as possible with the public, inspired by the response to the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombing, but the phone network went down and his public information officer was unable to use his phone.

2. Be transparent and upfront with the public regarding the official response. Even if there's nothing new to say, say there is nothing new to say.

3. Be transparent about your top priorities in the immediate term to manage expectations. Mayor Peduto told the public up front that his first priority would be the victims and the families; second, those who were wounded; third, the Jewish community; fourth, the greater Pittsburgh community.

4. Use your priorities to guide all future actions: Following the attack, there was an idea to close a major road in front of the synagogue. The Public Safety Director did not want to because it was a major route to several hospitals. As families of the victims were his first priority, Mayor Peduto asked them what they wanted. They wanted the road open, so it stayed open.

5. Remember, trauma can have unexpected ramifications. Even if there is somebody who lives 15 miles away from an attack, who is not a member of the targeted group and has no connection to the incident, they can be affected by that trauma.

6. Do not politicise the event. There will always be opportunities to talk about the political ramifications and legislation that could help prevent future attacks. However, immediately following an attack is not the time.

Supporting communities

As a city recovers from the trauma of a hate- or extremism-motivated attack, a mayor can encourage this process by providing personal support for the city's residents, especially for communities directly affected by the incident. A mayor's ongoing presence and commitment can help reassure people in addition to the direct benefits their commitment to recovery can bring. Below is some guidance for mayors to help support their communities in the immediate- and medium-term after a hate- or extremism-motivated attack.

Maintain trust and credibility among residents by demonstrating empathy, competence, expertise, honesty, openness and commitment. Continue your work on the ground, engaging face-to-face with affected communities. During these ongoing engagements, remember to promise only what you can deliver, highlight efforts and results, refute allegations succinctly and manage public anger and hostility by acknowledging it and providing answers thoughtfully, confidently and in line with established key positive messages.

Following the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing in **Manchester, United Kingdom**, Mayor Andy Burnham commissioned a review of the city's response. The review found that the mayor's personal visits to survivors and bereaved families and his strong civic leadership had enhanced community reassurance and confidence and further underscored the city's commitment to mounting a united 'families first' response. The review also found that outreach should extend to survivors of the attack who were not among those injured but still experienced the trauma, and that such efforts should continue in the long-term.

Plan for the long-term by using the momentum of social solidarity in the initial days to lay the foundations for professional support that survivors may need in the future. Survivors' needs will change over time and must be monitored and acknowledged constantly through mechanisms such as annual public meetings and open houses chaired by the mayor, professional support groups and working groups. This provides ongoing opportunities for direct mayoral leadership and allows for a sense of shared responsibility, the development of community-led solutions, an opportunity to troubleshoot issues and re-introduce existing resources, and strategies how to best to fill gaps.

🖱️ **Interview 2 with Nancy Rotering, Mayor of Highland Park, Illinois, USA**

Build solidarity and acknowledgment, particularly in the days following the attack when relief support is being mobilised and survivors and their loved ones need reassurance that they will be cared for, listened to and supported. Express concern, ask questions, be responsive to survivors' ideas, and remind them that help is available and problems can be solved. It helps to be aware of the stages of grief and trauma they may be going through during this time. Ongoing official statements, appearances and direct engagements should foster hope, social cohesion and understanding of the different needs of those experiencing bereavement, physical injuries and emotional or psychological trauma.

Build partnerships with those who already have trust and credibility on the ground and can be entry points for community engagement. This can include CSOs, local media outlets, private companies, community leaders and other cities that have experienced similar events. They can help ensure messages are conveyed appropriately through relevant channels to key groups, provide a 'temperature check' on how certain communities are responding to an attack, and serve as critical service providers in the short- and long-term.

Provide the right resources through either an online information referral centre or a one-stop shop with a front office that engages with survivors and front-line workers (for example, healthcare, educational, security and relief professionals) and a pool of organisations with relevant expertise in the back end that can be engaged on a needs-basis. These should include mental-health support, such as confidential support lines, live chat services, and local therapy clinics. Awareness and coordination should also be conducted around charitable funds, government welfare and social support services for carers, people with disabilities and vulnerable groups, including children, youth, minorities, refugees, asylum seekers and foreign nationals.

Protect communities from potential backlash. Specific communities will be more vulnerable to backlash than others following an attack. For example, it has been documented that anti-Muslim hate crimes often increase dramatically following Islamist terror attacks. Mayors should work with law enforcement to understand and prepare for these risks against potential target communities by including emergency plans in their response priorities.

These plans should account for how to best ensure the physical safety of vulnerable groups and prevent sentiments of retaliation among citizens. One way a mayor can support this is by clearly stating that they stand behind the city's communities and that the perpetrator does not represent anyone who lives peacefully in the city.

Following a 2021 deadly knife attack in **Wuerzburg, Germany,** Mayor Christian Schuchardt spoke at a memorial service for the victims. The attack was carried out by a young Somali man at a time when there was widespread tension across Europe regarding refugees. Anticipating potential backlash against the city's Somali community, the mayor urged that "the crimes of individuals should never be ascribed or extended to ethnic groups, religions or nationalities" and asked that Somali refugees not be blamed.

Bavaria Governor Markus Soeder added to this plea, emphasising that "we must never answer such a hate-filled deed with hatred or revenge". After noting that online conversations had highlighted the perpetrator's immigrant background, the Governor asked the city's residents "but didn't people with an immigrant background also help in exactly the same situation?"

Conclusion

Every mayor has a role to play in prevention and response. Whether it is an urban centre or a rural village, whether they have faced or are yet to experience hate or extremism directly, whether they have an explicit mandate or no mandate at all, a mayor should be thinking about how they can incorporate prevention and response into their administration's priorities to enhance their city's resilience to hate and extremism and enhance their preparedness if and when violence occurs.

As a mayor first enters office or begins to prioritise prevention, there are several questions they should consider as they lead the development of their city's strategic approach:

- What is my mandate as a local leader? How can I work within that mandate to strengthen my city's resilience to hate and extremism and improve its preparedness for violent attacks?

- What are the limitations in my understanding of the hate and extremism-related threats facing my city? How can I enhance my understanding – and that of others in the administration – of those threats and the city's readiness to address them?

- What role can I play in setting priorities and developing strategies?

- Will my city benefit most from a dedicated, standalone framework for addressing extremism and hate-related threats, or should I pursue a more integrated approach that leverages existing strategies and plans?

- Who are the relevant stakeholders who can support the government's prevention and response objectives? What do they need to play their part effectively?

- How can I build trust-based relationships with stakeholders in and outside the government to ensure a smooth and coordinated approach to prevention and response?

There is no single way to engage in prevention and a mayor can play a central role in determining which approach will work best for their city. In all cases, a mayor should consider opportunities for pursuing a whole-of-society approach that draws on the advantages of different stakeholders across the city.

Generally, the most impactful role a mayor can play in addressing hate and extremism is through **primary prevention** – pursuing actions, policies and programmes that make a city and its residents, both long-time locals and new arrivals, more resilient and socially cohesive. This can include a range of activities that aim to:

- Develop and promote an inclusive city identity.

- Communicate strategically and consistently to counter hate and extremism, including by clearly and consistently stating what you and your administration stand for.

- Engage community actors directly in prevention so they can drive bottom-up activities that enhance city-wide ownership over resilience.

- Build the capacities of critical prevention stakeholders.

Unfortunately, even when a city actively engages in prevention, hate and extremism can still take root in a city and result in a violent incident. A mayor, therefore, needs to approach response planning as if an attack is a matter of when rather than if. A mayor will need to consider several things as they chart out an effective, sensitive and proportional response following a hate- or extremism-motivated attack, including:

- Ensuring local actors are all aware of response plans and understand the chain of command, their role and whom to contact in a range of different scenarios.

- Coordinating between local actors, as well as with national response teams, to meet the varied local needs while minimising duplication.

- Communicating with the public to prevent panic, shape the narrative around the incident and minimise space for misinformation, disinformation and conspiracy narratives

- Different means of providing support and comfort to residents, giving particular attention to communities directly targeted by the attack.

- Strategies to mitigate fallout in the medium- to long-term.

A mayor is uniquely placed to understand the threats facing their city and coordinate a response sensitive to the individual needs of different communities. Every city is different and every mayor will need to take a tailored approach to serve its residents effectively. However, they do not have to stand alone.

Mayors worldwide are facing similar challenges and can learn from each other's experiences and draw strength from one another. This Guide is a merely a starting point for mayors to draw from other mayors' experiences; we encourage you to go beyond this resource and connect with other local leaders.

This Guide supports the role that local government officials and practitioners play in effecting this cooperation and in building common ground. It is complemented by a **Cities Guide** and a **Response Toolkit** as well as by the **NLC Implementation Toolkit** developed in collaboration with the GCTF, supporting other key components and stakeholders at local levels to address hate, extremism and polarisation.

This Guide, as with all other Strong Cities tools, will be hosted on **Strong Cities' Resource Hub**. It will be a living document, added to and updated based on Strong Cities engagement with mayors and cities, and a starting point for local officials on the myriad ways cities can and have developed and delivered prevention. The Guide also provides an outline of the types of support local leaders can look to Strong Cities and other partners for and how future training, capacity building and engagement might focus on the particular needs mayors and other local leaders identify in relation to their prevention and response journey. As such, it continues to support Strong Cities' ongoing effort to build a community of practice between local leaders that crosses national and regional boundaries and transcends differences in context and resourcing, with the basic aim of sharing experiences, good practices and key learnings, in order to unlock the prevention and response potential of cities.

Annex
Contributing Cities

Addu City	Maldives
Ajloun	Jordan
Akkar Atika	Lebanon
Al-Ramadi City, Al-Anbar Governorate	Iraq
Alexandria	United States
Alqosh	Iraq
Amman	Jordan
Arsal	Lebanon
Arusha	Tanzania
Aurora, Colorado	United States
Banja Luka	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Basra	Iraq
Blantyre	Malawi
Budavár	Hungary
Bulawayo	Zimbabwe

Cape Town	South Africa
Columbo	Sri Lanka
Columbus, Ohio	United States
Commune Mukaza en mairie de Bujumbura	Burundi
Dabrowa Gornicza	Poland
Danilovgrad	Montenegro
Dayton, Ohio	United States
Delhi	India
Dhamrai Municipality, Dhaka	Bangladesh
Durban	South Africa
Edmonton, Alberta	Canada
Elbasan	Albania
Francistown	Botswana
Gostivar	North Macedonia
Hani i Elezit	Kosovo
Helsinki	Finland
Highland Park, Illinois	United States

Houston, Texas	United States
Junik Municipality	Republic of Kosova
Kampala	Uganda
Karak	Jordan
Koboko	Uganda
Kumanovo	North Macedonia
Los Angeles, California	United States
London	United Kingdom
Mardan	Pakistan
Masaka	Uganda
Mechelen	Belgium
Mosul, Nineveh Governorate	Iraq
Mukaza	Burundi
Nacala Port City	Mozambique
Narayanganj	Bangladesh
Nebbi Municipality	Uganda
New York City, New York	United States

Novi Pazar	Srbija
Nowshera	Pakistan
Oslo	Norway
Podgorica	Montenegro
Poznan	Poland
Prishtina	Kosovo
Rabat	Morocco
Ramadi	Iraq
Sarajevo	Bosnia & Herzegovina
Seattle, Washington	United States
Shimla	India
Singra Municipality	Bangladesh
Sousse	Tunisia
Sremska Mitrovica	Serbia
Stamford, Connecticut	United States
Stockholm	Sweden
Strasbourg	France

Tangail	Bangladesh
Tetovo	North Macedonia
Toba Tek Singh	Pakistan
Trans Nzoia	Kenya
Tripoli	Lebanon
Vilvoorde	Belgium
Zomba City Council	Malawi

Strong Cities
Network