

Event Report

Insights on Developing and Operationalizing Whole-of-City Prevention Frameworks

Virtual Convening
November 20, 2023



Summary

On November 20, 2023, the Strong Cities Network, an independent global network of 220+ local governments dedicated to enhancing city-led prevention of hate, extremism and polarization, hosted a virtual event on Insights on Developing and Operationalizing Whole-of-City Prevention Frameworks. The goal was for Strong Cities members and partners to share their experiences and good practices with the six U.S. small and mid-sized cities Strong Cities is currently working with to [develop local prevention frameworks](#).

Participants shared several strategies and examples for developing and operationalizing whole-of-city prevention frameworks. Key takeaways included:

- **Leverage existing local structures and programs.** Identifying existing governmental and non-governmental structures and programs that are positively impacting communities is a critical starting point for building a whole-of-city approach to prevention.

- **Build trusted relationships with local communities.** Trust building is essential to developing and operationalizing prevention frameworks. Community brokers can be invaluable conduits for building sustainable connections between communities and city governments, especially in communities where mistrust in government is well known.
- **Understand the threat and needs' landscape through regular convenings of key stakeholders and sustained community engagement.** Identifying key stakeholders—both government and non-government—to create networks for information sharing helps local governments understand the lived experiences of constituents and provides grassroots avenues to promote city-led prevention initiatives. Strategizing ways to help communities recognize the manifestations of hate, extremism and polarization among their members informs local governments' understanding of the often diverse needs and expectations of different communities and facilitates opportunities for improved prevention measures.

Leveraging Existing Local Structures and Programs

Participants shared their experiences building out local prevention frameworks with Strong Cities. **Joumana Silyan-Saba, Director of Policy and Enforcement for the Civil + Human Rights and Equity Department for Los Angeles, California**, provided insight into how the city, a founding member of Strong Cities, developed its prevention approach addressing its diverse threat landscape. Los Angeles, a city of four million, has historically faced many challenges within their communities that have resulted in the creation of community-based programming and city-led initiatives to address those issues. Many such programs and initiatives have been successful and proved an invaluable starting point for Los Angeles to examine what components are necessary to successfully engage with and meet the needs of residents in a prevention framework. For example, Los Angeles evaluated the gang violence-reduction programming it already had in place to determine if the same programming could be expanded or replicated to address other societal harms. Los Angeles also looked to county and other city partners to leverage their resources. As a result, they leveraged the county-wide [2-1-1 mental health hotline](#) to be a hub for all types of health, human, and social services issues, including hate crime reporting.

The City of Oslo, Norway highlighted important learnings from adapting their crime prevention strategy to prevent other harms. **Mari Nilsen, a senior adviser in the Governing Mayor's Office**, shared how the [SaLTO prevention model](#) was originally developed for drug and crime prevention among youth. Given the model's success, it has now been adapted to prevent recent issues relating to violent extremism, more specifically moving individuals away from the fringes of society and back into the mainstream. The adapted model takes a social approach to prevention and has been developed for all ages.



Participants also highlighted the importance of leveraging law enforcement resources, including crime data, and strategies when developing local prevention frameworks. The point was made that data sharing, including related to crime reporting, the number of offenders or former extremists living in specific communities, escalating trends in specific crimes or targeting specific communities as well as intelligence insights, can enable law enforcement to contribute to the elaboration and implementation of local prevention frameworks. In addition to the importance of facilitating data and other information sharing between law enforcement and local governments, participants underscored the need to delineate the roles and responsibilities of different law enforcement agencies (e.g., national and local) to ensure that local prevention work is not inadvertently securitized. Thus, for example, in **Oslo**, the local police,

which focuses on “social prevention” are involved in local prevention frameworks and networks, whereas the national police, which focus on more traditional police work such as investigating and disrupting criminal activities, are not.

Building Trusted Relationships with Local Communities

Participants acknowledged that building trust between the local government and communities, while often a challenge, is a key ingredient to building a local prevention framework. Discussions highlighted how local governments’ proximity and access to residents provide many avenues for building trusted relationships between a city and residents, especially those who are subjected to hate or have been historically marginalized. Participants shared that when local communities trust the local government residents are more likely to report crimes or concerns to local officials. This in turn helps increase local governments’ understanding of the local threat landscape and its ability to align prevention resources with that threat. Cities shared different methods and key components for building trusted relationships, underscoring that this takes time and requires the involvement of the right people and consistency.

“Central to everything is relationship building!”

Joumana Silyan-Saba, Director of Policy and Enforcement
for the Civil + Human Rights and Equity Department
City of Los Angeles



City officials pointed to the role that ‘trusted community brokers’ — such as faith leaders, non-profit groups, respected residents or others who have strong connections with local groups — play in enhancing ties between governments and communities. In addition to leveraging their existing connections to establish clear channels of communication between the government and the relevant communities, the brokers can help create new ones. These channels enable communities to share their needs and expectations with city hall, giving them a voice in decision-making. This information allows local governments to better democratize access to city-led resources and programming. Trusted community brokers can also facilitate grassroots awareness raising about city-led resources and programming which can help increase engagement from community members in city-led prevention initiatives.

Participants also highlighted the importance of ensuring that local frameworks take into account the local drivers and grievances that fuel or exacerbate the mistrust. **Dr Heidi Ellis, Director of the [Trauma and Community Resilience Center at Boston Children’s Hospital](#)**, shared how social conditions in the aftermath of the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombing catalyzed her team to examine what unmet needs were driving distress that manifests as violence in children to begin identifying pathways and partners to establish better prevention measures in schools. Stigmatization based on racial or ethnic bias was identified as a driver to distress resulting in the Trauma and Community Resilience Center instituting a psycho-social model for behavioral threat assessment teams in schools instead of the securitized approach formerly used that contributed to stigmatization. Working with trusted, community-based partners created organic pathways to raise awareness in

communities about the efficacy and benefits of the model which in turn facilitated greater trust between Boston school systems using the psycho-social model and their communities.

Similarly, **Courteny Tassin, Crisis Intervention Program Manager for the City of Aurora, Colorado** outlined how the city worked closely with faith-based organizations, schools, immigrant/refugee/asylee populations, and other groups who may be at higher risk of victimization, to understand the needs and the expectations of each community as they built out their whole-of-city prevention framework. Acknowledging these needs and expectations, a critical component to Aurora's prevention framework is community outreach and education, including about how the city assesses and manages threats. This transparent approach to city-led engagement has helped build trust with local communities.

To ensure outreach and education efforts are reaching the different communities across a city, participants stressed the importance of increased language access to city-wide resources and programming. For example, Los Angeles ensured their [LA for All](#) campaign, a campaign aimed to build trust between residents and city government, was made available in 21 languages. Ms. Silyan-Saba highlighted the positive impact language access had on community members' engagement with the campaign, particularly amongst minority groups in the city.

Understanding the Threat and Needs' Landscape

Throughout the discussion, participants stressed the importance of a local government understanding the local threat landscape so as to properly target its hate and extremism prevention measures. For example, the local government in **Luton, United Kingdom** has sought to empower communities to recognize how hate and extremism manifest within themselves. **Sarah Pinnock, Prevent Coordinator at Luton Borough Council**, highlighted the effectiveness of mobilizing youth and women in this recognition process in Luton due to their proximity to hate and extremism-related events. Such recognition not only helps facilitate strategic dialogue between communities and local governments, but also provides important contextualization of grievances and societal factors that city officials can use to bring to the attention of local politicians the issues that need to be addressed.

Anton Visser, Strategic and Operational Support Manager for the City of Cape Town, South Africa, shared how the city developed 'neighborhood watch' programming overseen by the local government and law enforcement. The programming has been successful in raising awareness about how extremism manifests in local communities, resulting in increased crime reporting and greater community trust.

Stefan Petkovski, Assistant to the Mayor of Kumanovo, North Macedonia highlighted how the city's multi-disciplinary Community Action Team, which works closely with different community-based actors across the municipality to build resilience to extremism and hate, has helped the Kumanovo Local Prevention Council gain a better understanding of the threat environment in the city, including the relevant local grievances and drivers. Moreover, because of their ties to local communities, the CAT has been able to raise awareness within them of the negative impacts of extremism and hate, which has helped facilitate greater cooperation and engagement from community members and local civil society organizations in prevention efforts.





City of Albuquerque, New Mexico

Challenge: Hate-fueled attacks against religious communities and minority-owned businesses.

Approach: Albuquerque developed networks to connect key stakeholders within these communities to support one another. The city also held a summit in partnership with the

Federal Bureau of Investigation, local police, and faith group organizations. The summit featured listening sessions to understand community needs to increase safety and provide city-led resources to participants.

Impact: Albuquerque improved safety and frequency of public transit in the targeted communities and is continuing to hold summits to inform community members about measures the city is taking to address hate, extremism, and polarization.

Resource: City of Albuquerque United Against Hate Webinar, 5 December 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8B9RTt7sT2U>

There was also consensus amongst city participants about the efficacy of regularly convening community and government stakeholders representing diverse communities and issues-areas to increase understanding of hate and extremism-related issues. For example, **Dr Alejandro Gimenez-Santana, Deputy Director of the Rutgers Center on Public Security (RCPS) and Director of the Newark Public Safety Collaborative (NPSC) in New Jersey** detailed how NPSC convenes a bi-monthly working group of diverse local stakeholders, which has expanded from 10 to 40 individuals, to share how each understands hate and extremism-related issues in their neighborhood. This reoccurring convening has helped the City of Newark better understand the lived experiences of their community members. Moreover, he shared that by ensuring that the membership represents voices from every corner of their city and that discussions are informed by data, the group has been able to remain focused on tackling the threats of greatest concern to community members.

Next Steps:

This virtual convening is just one step Strong Cities is taking to ensure that its work to pilot local prevention frameworks in six small and mid-sized cities in the United States is informed by the experiences of other cities in the network and beyond, both in and outside of the United States. In the coming months, Strong Cities will work with the six local governments to establish local leadership groups that will oversee the development of their local prevention frameworks. The development process will include conducting local needs and threat assessments, building community engagement models, and increasing capacity for multi-actor coordination and community-based programming.

Additional Resources

- Piloting Multi-Actor Frameworks in Small and Mid-Sized Cities in the United States, Strong Cities North America grant project website, <https://strongcitiesnetwork.org/piloting-multi-actor-frameworks-in-small-and-mid-sized-cities-in-the-united-states>.

- A Guide for Cities: Preventing Hate, Extremism & Polarisation, Strong Cities Network, September 2023, <https://strongcitiesnetwork.org/resource/a-guide-for-cities>.
- A Guide for Mayors: Preventing and Responding to Hate, Extremism and Polarisation, Strong Cities Network, September 2023, <https://strongcitiesnetwork.org/resource/a-guide-for-mayors>.
- Why Local Networks Are Key to Preventing Extremism and Hate, Strong Cities Network, <https://strongcitiesnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/SCN-Why-LPNs-are-Key-to-Prevention-April-2022-compressed.pdf>.

Donors & Partners

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Contact Information

For more information on this event or the Strong Cities pilot initiative with small and mid-size American cities please contact the Strong Cities North America Hub at na.hub@strongcitiesnetwork.org.