TOOLKIT FOR PRIORITIZING AND MEASURING COMMUNITY SAFETY

UMSL
University of Missouri–St. Louis

SAFETY+JUSTICE CHALLENGE
Supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

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December

2023

INTRODUCTION

In 2020, a "reimagine public safety" movement began calling for new and more equitable safety approaches. Though there is a desire to initiate such a reimagination, many communities are unsure of what steps they can take to redefine local safety priorities in an effective and meaningful way. Consequently, many public safety approaches still rely on a narrow definition of safety that focuses on crime and criminal legal system responses. This toolkit is premised on the idea that community safety looks different for different communities and that local conversations about the meaning of safety are needed to develop and sustain innovative methods for making communities safer. Rather than providing a roadmap for a one-time event or engagement, the intention is for the toolkit to be utilized to build capacity and to sustain dialogue and action over time, as part of larger efforts to center the priorities of community members. This toolkit is a resource that can be used by any community to support local conversations about safety that encompass a wide range of perspectives. It can be utilized by communities who are just starting to consider these questions or those who have already been having discussions around reimagining community safety but want to ensure the voices of under-represented groups, including system-impacted individuals, are heard. Specifically, the tool includes:

The information provided in this toolkit is informed by the work of researchers at the University of Missouri, St. Louis and local partners in Missoula, MT, St. Louis, MO, and Mecklenburg, NC that sought to develop new ways to define and measure community safety that reflect the voices of individuals with a range of life experiences. This cross-site analysis enabled a broader discussion of points of commonalities and differences in the meaning of safety across locations and groups, while simultaneously recognizing that, ultimately, community safety must be defined and driven by each individual community. More information on these projects can be found in the report, Redefining Community Safety in Three U.S. Counties. This work was funded by a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Safety and Justice Challenge Research Consortium. The Safety and Justice Challenge seeks to reimage and rebuild local criminal justice systems to be more fair, just, and equitable for all.

- *A set of community safety concepts derived from communities themselves.*
  The indicators outlined in this toolkit serve as topics or themes that will help your community discuss and unpack local safety concerns.
- *Recommendations on ways to align local safety goals and priorities for action.*
  This toolkit provides suggestions for how to turn identified safety concerns into actionable steps that are tailored to community needs, priorities, and values. This includes a discussion of ways for measuring progress towards safety-related goals.

This approach is based on the idea that a broader conversation about the meaning of community safety can lead to a more expansive and inclusive way of thinking that permits the inclusion of various social, economic, and political indicators of safety, such as access to affordable healthcare and government accountability. It also emphasizes that safety is a collective endeavor. To this end, local conversations around community safety are more centered on the advancement of achieving safety for all than narrow crime-oriented definitions.

We recognize that these conversations should not be undertaken lightly. To prepare to engage with difficult questions, we recommend that organizers and facilitators bring a perspective that is trauma-informed and in partnership with impacted communities. This guide also points to further resources to educate and build awareness of ways to approach community safety conversations that will prioritize a safe experience and reduce the chance of re-traumatization.

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This toolkit begins with an overview of the Community Safety Concept Map. Next, information is provided on how to engage communities in conversations around safety, especially with diverse groups of people. The second section provides an overview of several safety concepts generated from our research. The third and fourth sections describe how to use our community safety concepts and map to understand the meaning of safety in your community and identity safety-related priorities. In the fifth section, we offer recommendations on how to turn community safety priorities into actionable steps. In the sixth and final section, we outline key takeaways as well as provide some additional resources that might be useful as you utilize this toolkit.

PART 01

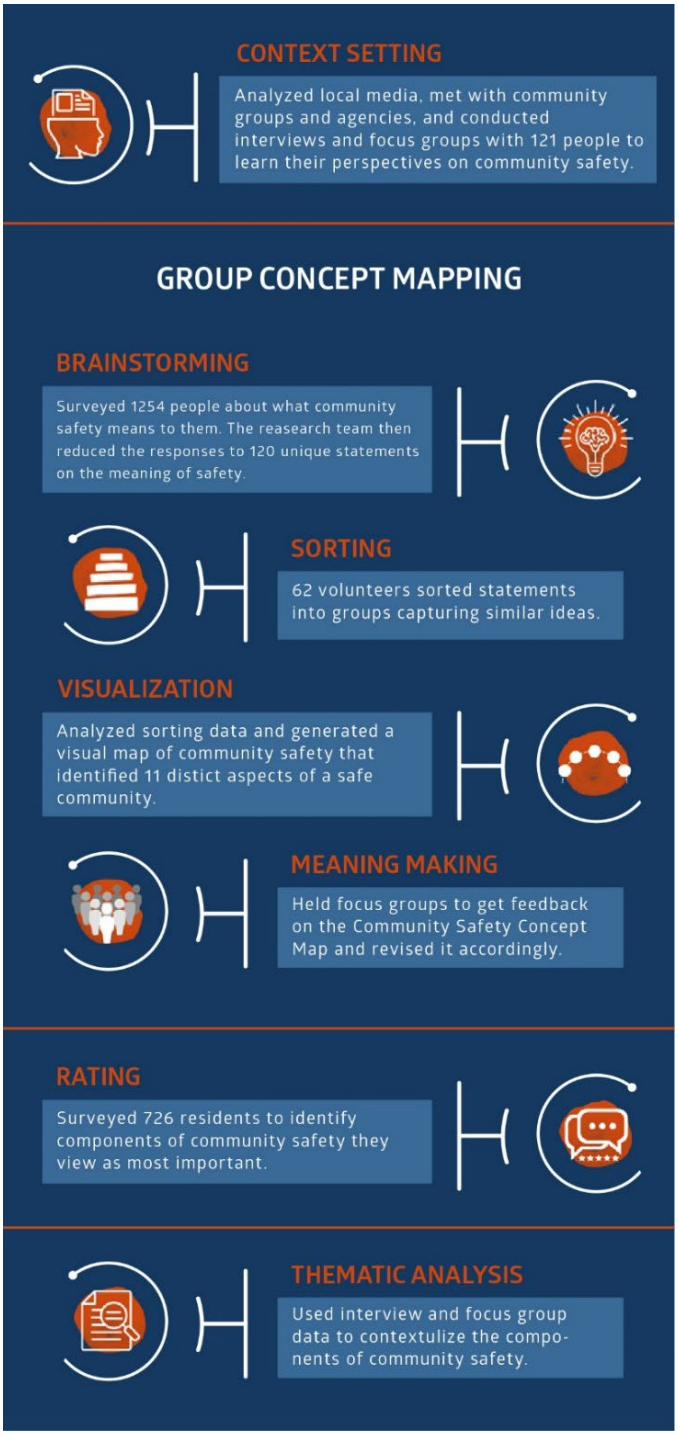
OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY SAFETY CONCEPT MAP

The key feature of this toolkit is the Community Safety Concept Map. This map is a tool that communities can use to facilitate conversations around the meaning of safety and identify local priorities. This section of the toolkit provides a brief overview of the development of the map and an overview of the map components.

DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY SAFETY CONCEPT MAP

The safety concepts were derived using a method called group concept mapping, which is summarized in Figure 1 (more detailed information can be found in the full report). This research technique allows diverse groups of participants the opportunity to define safety in their own words and generates a visual representation of this concept. It relied on responses to an open-ended prompt completed by over a thousand people in the three participating counties that asked them to define community safety in their own words. Researchers then identified 120 unique statements regarding the meaning of community safety that were described in these responses. 62 volunteers across all three sites organized and made sense of these statements by putting them into groups that capture similar ideas. On average, sorters placed the statements into 11 different clusters that represented different aspects of community safety. Based on this information, a visual representation of community safety was developed and then revised with community input. The final Community Safety Concept Map includes 11 different components of safety organized into 5 broader domains or regions (see Figure 2).

Figure 1: Research Process Used to Develop the Community Safety Concept Map



DESCRIPTION OF MAP AND ITS COMPONENTS

The Community Safety Concept Map (Figure 2) includes components commonly associated with safety as well as aspects of safe communities that are often taken for granted or not considered in mainstream discussions of this issue. The map should not be considered the final say on how safety is or should be defined; rather, the concepts serve as topics or themes that can be used by communities to identify priorities and structure collective actions that are aligned with local needs and values. Below, we provide summaries of the 11 components of community safety that were identified, organized into 5 major domains or "regions."

Figure 2: Community Safety Concept Map

Region: Personal Safety and Security

Freedom from Violence and Other Harms

This component of safety includes ideas related to traditional conceptualizations of public safety (e.g., low rates of crime and victimization). It also contains harms that many people of color and other marginalized groups, like LGBTQ+, experience daily, such as discrimination.

- There are low rates of violent crime.
- People are not injured or killed by stray bullets.
- Children are safe from harm both inside and outside of school.
- There are low rates of property crime such as theft, vandalism, or car theft.
- There are low rates of drug use, including public drug use, and drug-related harms (e.g., overdoses).
- People do not stereotype, discriminate against, or harm others based on their race, ethnicity, or other personal characteristics.

Day-to-Day Feelings of Safety

Statements that capture people's perceived ability to live their daily lives without worrying about harm make up this component of community safety. Many of the statements capture emotions and feelings of security.

- People can travel freely anytime, anywhere, including late at night without being on alert.
- People feel safe and secure in their homes.
- People aren't worried they will be a victim of a crime.
- People are not harassed when walking down the street.

Region: Thriving and Socially Connected Community

Sense of Community

Many people described a safe community in terms of their relationships with others. It is a place where people watch out for one another and provide support and assistance when needed. In addition, people trust one another and work together to address common problems, and neighbors are friendly and welcoming to all.

- Community members trust one another.
- People watch out for each other and provide support and assistance for neighbors in need.
- Neighbors know one another and talk regularly.
- There is a lot of activity, with people out in the community and children playing outside.
- People in the community are welcoming and respectful to all regardless of their identity or personal characteristics, such as age, sexuality, gender, or race.
- Community members work together to solve local problems.

Investments in Infrastructure, Businesses, and Programming for a Thriving Community

This component of safety encompasses thriving businesses and local organizations that are invested in the community. A thriving community also includes well-maintained and developed infrastructure. People also associated this component of safety with access to amenities, like restaurants and childcare, and recreational opportunities as well as a clean community with little physical disorder, such as overgrown lots and abandoned buildings.

- Business owners are invested in the community and businesses are thriving.
- There are programs youth can participate in outside of school.
- There are grocery stores and people have access to healthy food.
- There are shops, restaurants, and entertainment venues.
- There are public libraries and institutions that support the arts.
- There are well maintained parks and access to outdoor recreational activities.
- Infrastructure, such as roads, sidewalks, lights, and signs are well-maintained.
- There is adequate lighting, including lights on the streets and roads.
- Infrastructure allows for people to walk and bike safely.

- There is reliable and safe public transportation.
- The community is clean and there are no run-down, boarded up, or empty buildings or overgrown lots.

Region: Resources and Services for a Socially and Economically Just Community

Access to Supportive Services

This component includes statements related to access and quality of supportive services and aid for people in need.

- Everyone who needs it has access to comprehensive mental health services and treatment for substance use problems.
- Resources and support are available for all victims of crime and violence regardless of the circumstances in which they were harmed.
- Resources are available to help support vulnerable populations, including people experiencing houselessness.
- Social services agencies are adequately staffed by competent and compassionate people.
- When natural and man-made disasters occur —such as flooding, hurricanes, tornadoes, and fires —there is aid for people who have been affected.

Social and Economic Justice

The statements in this cluster reflect what a community looks like when fairness, equality, and human dignity are upheld for all individuals.

- A quality education is free and accessible to all.
- Affordable, quality housing is available for people of all income levels.
- People do not need to worry about where their next meal will come from
- Everyone has access to quality healthcare and healthcare providers.
- There are good job opportunities, and everyone can earn a living wage.
- There are low rates of income inequality.
- People are financially secure.
- There is clean air to breathe and clean water to drink.

Region: Responsive Government and Public Safety Agencies

Responsive, Ethical, and Transparent Government

This aspect of safety describes a well-functioning government that acts in the community's best interests. Statements also focused on government transparency, information sharing, and communication.

- Elected officials with different viewpoints work together to solve community problems.
- Government agencies are transparent and act in an ethical manner.
- People in power make fair, just, and unbiased decisions.
- The government is responsive to the needs of all and acts in the community's best interest.
- Information about how to access government services and the legal system is easily available.
- There is consistent and open communication from public officials.
- Community members have a voice in decisions that affect the community.
- People can reach out to local officials, and they know they will be respected.

Comprehensive and Effective Emergency Response

Some survey respondents described community safety in terms of well-prepared and effective emergency response systems, including those traditionally associated with public safety (e.g., police, fire department, and emergency medical technicians). They also discussed first responders who are part of a "re-imagining" of public safety, such as mental health workers and alternate responders.

- First responders—including the police, fire department and emergency medical technicians—arrive quickly when they are called and are well-trained and equipped to handle an emergency.
- People aside from the police, such as mental health workers, are available to respond to emergencies and provide help.
- The local government invests in crime prevention and solutions that do not involve the police.
- People are educated about and prepared to handle natural disasters, including flooding and fires.

Gun Violence Prevention

People indicated that they feel safer when the government is working to combat gun violence and there are laws and practices in place to ensure that guns are used responsibly and safely and kept out of the hands of people who could use them to harm themselves or others, such as children and people with mental health issues. However, there was general agreement that gun violence prevention is a highly nuanced concept, and the meaning varies across people and communities. Perhaps people tended to associate gun violence prevention with government and public safety agencies because much of the responsibility for this aspect of safety falls on these two groups.

- The government takes concrete steps to combat gun violence.
- Laws ensure that guns are kept out of the hands of people who are not allowed to own them.
- People are educated about owning and operating firearms safely.
- Children do not have access to guns without the supervision of a responsible adult.

Region: Systems for Preventing and Addressing Harm

Fair and Ethical Policing

This component of safety captures various aspects of fair and ethical policing, including freedom from harm at the hands of the police; community preferences regarding the visibility of police; and police and the public working together to make safe communities. Many people feel this is what ideal policing looks like, but some, particularly people of color, questioned whether this vision would ever be realized in their communities.

- Police treat people in a way that is fair, just, and respectful.
- Law enforcement is trustworthy and acts in the community's best interests.
- People in the community respect and support local law enforcement.
- Police and community members work together to solve problems, prevent crime, and address concerns.
- Police officers know the members of the community.
- Law enforcement visibility and activity are aligned with community needs and preferences.
- People do not fear getting harassed, harmed, or killed by the police.
- No one has to worry about being stopped by law enforcement or federal immigration authorities because of their race, ethnicity, or immigration status.

Accountability for Harm

This aspect of safety includes ideas related to holding individuals, institutions, and businesses accountable for harm. It encompasses fair and consistent courts, and well-trained police and prosecutors who take violent crimes seriously. Some participants pointed out how research and lived experiences show that traditional forms of punishment, such as keeping people in jail while awaiting trial and incarceration, do not contribute to community safety and, in fact, can increase offending and make communities less safe. Others argued that if the criminal legal system does not hold people who cause harm accountable, it could make communities less safe, especially if these individuals harm again, or if victims believe they needed to take responsibility for their own safety (e.g., through retaliation). Still, others suggested a potential common ground between these two views—effective alternatives to incarceration. Statements regarding government and business accountability emerged in the interviews with stakeholders and were added to provide a more inclusive conceptualization of accountability that recognizes those in power can also cause harm.

- Individuals who commit violent crimes & felonies are held accountable.
- Effective alternatives to incarceration are available when people have caused harm.
- Police and prosecutors take violence, including domestic and sexual violence, seriously and have significant training in how to handle reports and investigations.
- Police enforce laws in accordance with community needs and preferences.
- The courts can be trusted to uphold the law in a fair and just manner, giving out consistent and appropriate penalties for breaking the law.
- Police are held formally accountable for their actions.
- Governments and businesses are held accountable for harm they have caused.

PART 02

USING THE COMMUNITY SAFETY CONCEPT MAP TO EXPLORE THE MEANING OF SAFETY AND IDENTIFY LOCAL PRIORITIES

This section walks communities through the process of using the Community Safety Concept Map to facilitate discussions around community safety.

STEP 1. GATHERING PARTICIPANTS AND PLANNING DISCUSSIONS

Before starting community conversations around safety, it is important to thoughtfully consider who will participate in those discussions. All voices in the community matter, though there are many voices that often get lost or overlooked. Individuals who have been marginalized due to their race/ethnicity, gender identity, income, housing status, primary language spoken, and/or involvement with the criminal legal system are often excluded from conversations around safety. While brainstorming potential community participants, ask yourself the following questions:

- Are any marginalized community groups included, such as people of color, individuals who reside in neighborhoods of historic divestment, unhoused individuals, and/or victims of crime and police violence? What are the ways we can engage directly with individuals negatively impacted by the criminal legal system?
- Are there any community members with experience working in the criminal legal system (e.g., law enforcement, probation and parole officers, public defenders, prosecutors) or helping people navigate the criminal legal system (e.g., victim advocates) being included for participation?

What We Did: Community Stakeholder Inclusion Criteria

Our research team sought to engage a diverse group of participants who could provide multiple vantage points about their experiences and thoughts on safety. We prioritized speaking with people who are most impacted by crime and the criminal legal system. These include people who work for the criminal legal system (courts, corrections, law enforcement), people who been impacted by the criminal legal system (arrested, incarcerated, victims of crime); and individuals who work with system-impacted individuals (e.g., service providers, advocates, county employees). Additionally, we learned from our participants that some communities feel "over-surveyed and over-engaged" in research activities. This can result in frustration, especially when their cooperation produces only data and reports rather than change or action. As you start to engage with your local community, be mindful of which members bear the burden of research participation. In our work, we relied on service providers and leaders of community-based organizations to share the perspectives of residents that have been overly engaged.

- Are different sectors of the community represented, such as government officials, elected representatives, social services providers, health care providers, policymakers, neighborhood associations, business leaders, heads of religious groups, activists, and educators?
- To connect with a wide group of people in your community, you may want to engage through neighborhood groups, local public events, and local cultural and religious institutions. What pathways might enable you to reach individuals who might not typically participate in conversations around safety perhaps because they already view their own community as safe?

Prior to starting community conversations around safety, it is also important to think through how you can foster an inclusive engagement process. In planning the conversations, you may want to partner with facilitators who represent the communities or stakeholders you would like to engage. As you consider how to best build engagement, especially with folks who are often excluded from conversations around safety, consider the following:

- What level or amount of engagement is realistic for members of your community? How might engagement/participation vary for different types of community members? How might you schedule sessions to best fit a variety of schedules?
- What are some steps you can take to increase accessibility and show respect for community participants' time and schedules? What resources can be leveraged? Are there ways you can minimize barriers to participation, such as travel, childcare, or access to technology? Are there some stakeholders that would benefit from the option of a one-on-one conversation or a smaller sized group?
- How will you go about building rapport, trust, and credibility within the community? What steps will you take to integrate the voices of people who are disproportionately impacted by crime and the criminal legal system, but are typically underrepresented in community matters, such as Black, Latinx, Indigenous and LGBTQ+ communities?
- What steps will be taken to ensure community members feel safe to share their opinions? What partnerships already exist with trusted members or representatives of local communities who can aid in recruiting participants and/or facilitating conversations?

What Worked for Us:
Transparency with Community Members

While there are various ways to build effective engagement, we found that open sharing of information, goals, and intended use of data from the project can help to support ongoing engagement and involvement. We found community members were more receptive to participating when we were clear about expectations for their involvement and intentional about how and why we asked for input. We also provided anyone we engaged with the option of receiving project updates and opportunities to participate in later stages of the project.

As you are planning, recognize that individuals who are system-impacted or other marginalized groups may not feel safe in sharing their thoughts if they are in the same space as system actors. How can we organize our conversations to best engage different groups of stakeholders in ways that suit their needs and recognizes the potential impact of power differences on people's willingness to share their viewpoints?

Prior to starting this work, we recommend that organizers familiarize themselves with a trauma informed approach to engagement to guide their planning, implementation, and future action. As an accompaniment to this toolkit, we also recommend an additional resource, Trauma Informed Approaches to Data Collection and Engagement, which provides strategies and considerations for organizers and facilitators who are engaging in difficult issues that may potentially be re-traumatizing.

Capacity building and sustainability are also essential components of the project. We recommend organizing a coalition of diverse individuals to serve as ambassadors and support the project from concept, to planning, to implementation, and beyond. This group can be comprised of advisory board members, credible messengers, and other key constituents in the community who are invested in improving community safety and providing feedback to the project leaders.

What Worked for Us: Recruiting Credible Messengers and Compensating Participants

We were able to build local credibility, particularly from those most impacted and often left out of community conversations around safety, by asking for assistance from trusted members of the community, sometimes referred to as "credible messengers." In our experience, not only do these messengers help forge initial relationships with community members, but they can help identify high-impact community members to speak to individually. At the start of the project, we created Advisory Boards that comprised of a diverse set of community stakeholders to help build engagement, especially from hard-to-reach populations. Throughout the project, we compensated participants to ensure that they felt acknowledged and appreciated for providing their perspectives and insights. We were also able to increase participation by offering referral (bring a friend) compensation.

STEP 2. APPLYING THE COMMUNITY SAFETY CONCEPTS AND MAP IN YOUR LOCALE

This section provides a series of questions that encourage critical reflection around what safety means and looks likes for residents in your community, using the Community Safety Concept Map as a starting point. We would encourage you to use these questions as part of a convening of community stakeholders or in a series of smaller conversations with stakeholder groups. Group facilitators can be recruited to lead small group discussions and take notes to reflect discussion and priorities. The goal here is to understand not only differences in how people think about safety but identify points of consensus. There are many aspects of community safety that people with various life experiences can agree are important. Those points of agreement can be used to foster collective action and, in turn, meaningful change. This departs from dominant approaches that explore community safety exclusively as an individual experience; rather, safety is a collective endeavor in which people are encouraged to critically think about others' definitions of safety, evaluate them and identify areas of consensus for action.

If possible, distribute the concepts and map ahead of time so that people have a chance to reflect on the various components before convening. After the concepts are introduced and people have time to review them, ask if there are any domains or components that people want to prioritize for discussion. This is important because there may not be time to discuss all 11 components in one sitting. As community members explore each of the domains of safety and their respective components, consider asking the following:

- What do each of the domains mean to community members? Are their meanings consistent across different groups that reside in the community?
- Do the concepts provided reflect the broader safety concerns of your community? Which concepts align with what safety means and looks like in daily life? In people's neighborhood? In interactions with friends, family, acquaintances, or people in public places? In interactions with institutions like the police, courts, social service providers, schools, and government agencies?
- Are there aspects of community safety that are not included on the map but should be?
- Should any concepts be reframed to better match the values and needs of the community?

STEP 3. IDENTIFYING LOCAL SAFETY PRIORITIES

Now that you have discussed what the various components of community safety mean to members of the community, the next step is to identify priorities for action. There are many ways to actively involve residents in identifying the primary safety concerns in their locale. These range from surveys of large segments of the community asking them to identify which components of community safety are most important, to focus group discussions intended to go more in-depth about not only what is important, but also where the most impact can be made. Again, you will want to plan for appropriate facilitation and staffing, as well as pursue engagement and outreach through local collaborative initiatives and local community engagement efforts. Some questions to consider when identifying priorities include:

- What do community members value about each concept? What concepts are most important? Least important?
- If community participants had to choose the most important safety concept, what would it be? Which regions/concepts are most important for community members that are often marginalized from conversations around safety, such as Black, Latinx, and Indigenous residents as well as other groups impacted by current criminal legal system practices?
- Are the regions/concepts viewed as most important to safety the same ones that are currently prioritized?
- Which region/concept is your community best prepared to act on?

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STEP 4. TURNING COMMUNITY SAFETY PRIORITIES INTO ACTIONABLE STEPS

Thus far, this toolkit has provided a guide for exploring what safety looks like in your locale and identifying the most important safety-related priorities. Regardless of how people defined community safety, there was a consensus among residents we spoke with that there is a need to move away from identifying what is wrong towards taking concrete steps to making communities safer.

The safety priorities and goals that you and your community generated can be leveraged to generate action and sustainable change in a number of domains. What this looks like will vary from community to community. In this final stage of the toolkit, we offer several recommendations on how to turn community safety priorities into actionable steps, with an emphasis on the importance of measurement. For examples of how group concept mapping can be used to support action, see the section "Additional Resources."

"What Gets Measured Gets Done": Measuring Change

An important component of enacting change is measuring progress towards safety goals. Measures can be used to track more traditional safety priorities (for example, using crimes reported to the police to measure crime) as well as more expansive and encompassing goals (such as utilization of mental health care and substance abuse treatment clinics to measure supportive services). Our research identified several important lessons about measuring community safety:

- **Leverage existing data.** Many local agencies already collect and share publicly data that can be used to capture a wide range of safety indicators. These can often be identified through agency websites, annual reports, and data dashboards. We recommend reaching out to agencies in your community to see if the data you need is already being collected. For examples of measures and data sources see [reference individual reports].
- **Garner support for alternative measurements.** Emphasize the importance of measuring safety using data besides the traditional indicators of crime, arrests, jail admissions, and calls to the police. Some points to share include:
  - If the success of programs and policy changes is measured exclusively by their effects on crime, the broader positive impact of these initiatives on can be overlooked.
  - Continued reliance on crime statistics can lead to an over-reliance on crime control strategies, especially if calls for "public safety" are conflated with enforcement and incarceration.

- Measuring impact on residents' daily lives and well-being can help secure funding to expand services and programming.
- Measuring only crime overlooks less visible forms of harm, such as harassment, intimidation, and other forms of interpersonal violence.
- A reliance on official crime data, especially in the media, can contribute to stigmatizing narratives that some neighborhoods are "dangerous" and fail to recognize that communities with high rates of crime suffer from a broad range of systemic issues that negatively impact safety.

- **Build capacity and trust around data sharing.** There is a need to build trust so that people understand how the data they provide will be used and know that they will be given credit for their work. The purpose of the data sharing work should be stated up front, and the potential benefits and risks should be clear for all involved. Particularly for people who have been system involved, but for any residents or stakeholders, it is important to share data and findings back directly to ensure that language and recommendations reflect their intent and experiences. It is also important to disseminate data out into the broader community through local public channels. Consider a diverse range of channels so that you ensure widespread accessibility of this information, especially for those most impacted by the criminal legal system. These might include traditional outlets—like newspapers, television or radio media, and websites—but also less traditional ones like social media, newsletters, and bulletins. Some of this work may lend itself to dissemination through creative outlets like community art project, murals, or videos. Creating strong feedback loops for information sharing can help link disparate community efforts, promote buy-in and action, and reveal new pathways for change.

Take Action:
Build or Assess Local Safety Plans

Your community's safety priorities can be used to help create a local safety plan or to assess if a current safety plan reflects your community-identified priorities. For example, in **The Way Forward: Mecklenburg County's Violence Prevention Plan**, the county's Office of Violence Prevention compiled different components of community safety to develop strategies for improving the lives of residents. The priorities identified by Mecklenburg County residents could be used to ensure that this plan, as well as municipal leaders, are acting in alignment with community needs and values.

- **Use both administrative data and surveys capturing residents' perceptions, if possible.** Administrative data can provide an understanding of trends, gaps in coverage and resources, and specific needs. Resident perceptions can provide context and the 'story behind' or contributing factors to the overarching shifts.
- **Break down data by demographic groups to identify who is disproportionately harmed and benefitted.** Only looking at large scale trends can hide realities that exist for minoritized groups. Disaggregating data

by race, ethnicity, geography, income, ability, and age, among others, can help illustrate how minoritized groups or geographies might be disproportionately impacted by a concern or issue. Tracking this data over time can help prioritize accountability and commitment to addressing disparities that exist.

- **Make the collection of measures easy.** If collecting and sharing the information needed to measure progress is relatively simple, then people are more likely to participate. It is best to start by identifying some basic metrics that are easy for people to capture. To do this, some sites are starting with a small group of service providers and helping them build the capacity for data collection. This can help the service providers determine what is working for them and how they might want to adjust before tackling larger data projects. The community or group with the most data doesn't "win"; rather, the goal should be utilizing relevant data to understand local issues, pose the most viable solutions, and solve the most pressing problems in your community.
- **Ensure that data is collection is carried out in an ethical manner**. There are power dynamics and bias embedded in the research process, and it is vital that these issues be at the forefront of any data collection process. Chicago Beyond offers a guide for an equity-based approach to community research that centers the community as the experts and owners of knowledge and shifts the power dynamics among community members, researchers, and funders.
- **Convene people to discuss data.** Convening people on a regular basis to analyze and discuss the data that is coming in is a valuable activity. These meetings provide an opportunity to bring together people from different sectors (e.g., law enforcement, hospitals, victim services, mental health providers) to identify emerging issues and potential solutions and to determine how best to provide a full range of supports and resources to people most affected by safety-related issues. This can also help to break down existing silos and lead to coordinated cross-sector action. A resource from the Urban Institute, Data Walks: An Innovative Way to Share Data with Communities, may be helpful.
- **Include media organizations in conversations around community safety measurement**. If the media relies only on criminal legal system data to describe trends in community safety, it presents a narrow and distorted picture of this issue and can lead to stigmatization of certain communities. Encouraging the media to integrate in their reporting various social, economic, and political indicators, such as access to affordable healthcare and government accountability can help educate the public about the broader meaning of safety. The media may already be reporting on these issues, but by framing these as community safety issues, the media can promote the message that safety is not only more encompassing than crime, but also a collective responsibility.

Community Safety is a Collective Responsibility

Community safety is not the sole responsibility of one agency, entity, or group. A wide variety of factors contribute to safety and the responsibility for ensuring communities are safe cuts across communities, local agencies, and beyond. Broadening the reach to engage local business groups, health institutions, education institutions and other cultural and human service sectors can help embed local priorities with and across a variety of partnerships, collaborations agencies, communities, and groups. As you think about cross-sector action, consider the following questions:

- Can your community safety priorities be used to identify relevant stakeholders and shared needs/goals across sectors (e.g., government agencies, direct service providers, advocacy organizations, etc.) as well as different types of neighborhoods (e.g., high and low crime communities, resourced and under-resourced communities)? How might the community safety priorities that were identified inform the development of a community-wide safety plan?
- What actions are already being taken by local entities, resident groups, or collaborations that are linked to your local community safety priorities? How can existing work be highlighted, connected and furthered to current safety goals?
- How can collaborative data efforts help link these efforts and their impact even further?

Take Action:
Engage in Participatory Budgeting

Community safety priorities can be leveraged to promote the active involvement of the community in spending decisions that affect them. This can ensure that funding streams are tailored to community safety needs and values, especially of those who are closest to the challenges of building and maintaining safe communities and/or those who are often left out from community safety decision-making (e.g., youth, victims of crime and violence, system-involved people, unhoused people). The ***People's Plan in St. Louis*** provides an example of using a survey to gauge public opinion around local budget priorities. ***Forward through Ferguson's*** work in St. Louis highlights how sharing information on public safety budgets can be used to assess priorities and facilitate action. For more information on how to engage diverse groups in community conversations, see "Building Community Engagement" in the additional resources section.

PART 03

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Safety can look quite different from place to place.** Safety looks and feels different to people based on their life experiences. Some concepts are more universally recognized as components of a safe community, while others represent local norms and values and therefore vary by community. In some cases, what makes one person feel safe may have the opposite impact on someone else residing in another community or with different life experiences. In our study, we found diversity in what made people feel safe was particularly evident in conversations around policing, responses to law violating behavior, and firearm regulations. In part, this diversity is due to the nature of this community-driven process, which is intended to encompass resident priorities in communities located in diverse urban contexts.
- **Community safety is a collective endeavor in which people should be encouraged to critically think about others' definitions of safety, evaluate them and identify areas of consensus for action.** Although safety can look quite different from place to place, there are many aspects of community safety where there is alignment. For example, concern about the safety of children was a universal concern among the people we spoke with. Points of consensus such as this can provide initial opportunities for action that serve as foundations for later collaboration. Differences and discrepancies can be reconciled within communities through more intentional conversations and focusing on points of overlap and consensus.
- **Importance of measuring safety with a wide range of indicators that capture community priorities.** Community safety is far more than the criminal legal system and traditional measures of crime and violence. We found that a community-driven conceptualization of safety permits the inclusion of various social, economic, and political indicators of safety, such as access to affordable healthcare and government accountability. Safety impacts many different areas of life, spanning everything from access to housing and healthcare to education around owning and operating firearms safely.
- It is important to note that community conversations around prioritization and data should not be considered a one-time engagement. Rather, the guidance, examples, and resources in this toolkit are aimed to build the capacity of local leaders to sustain action.

Widening the lens on a definition of community safety provides communities with new opportunities to engage with residents, community groups, and current safety endeavors. Seeking to understand the specific priorities and relevant data within your community can help identify innovative ways to impact safety with continued and new initiatives and partners. Our goal in providing this toolkit is to provide a foundation for local deliberation, definition, and action. It is a starting place for those looking to engage in dialogue regularly over time in a way that intentionally centers the broader community. The following resources complement our process and findings and offer additional tools and case studies to assist you with this work further.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Rethinking and Re-Imagining Community Safety:

- *Reimagining Public Safety: A Toolkit for Cities and Towns* produced by the National League of Cities
- *Re-imagining Public Safety: Prevent Harm and Lead with the Truth* by the Justice Collaboratory at Yale Law School and the Center for Policing Equity
- *Reimagining Public Safety: First Convening Report* by the Justice Collaboratory at Yale Law School and the Policing Project at New York University School of Law
- *Reimagining Community Safety in California* by Catalyst California and the ACLU of Southern California

Building community engagement:

- *A Framework for Effectively Partnering with Young People* by the Annie E. Casey Foundation
- *Pursuing Racial Equity Through Intentional Community Engagement* by the National League of Cities
- *Center for Rural Health Community Engagement Toolkit* developed by the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Science
- National Resource Center for Refugees, Immigrants, and Migrants (NRC-RIM): *Community Engagement Toolkit* developed by the University of Minnesota

Instructing/facilitating community meetings:

- *Guide to Conducting Public Forums and Listening Sessions*, Kansas University Community Toolbox
- *Guide to Effective Meetings and Techniques for Leading Group Discussions*, Kansas University Community Toolbox
- *Guide: Trauma-Informed Meetings, Discussions, and Conversations* by Whitney Marris, LCSW, Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice
- *Trauma-Informed Approaches to Data Collection and Engagement* by Dr. Phylicia Bediako, MSW, University of Missouri-St. Louis Community Innovation and Action Center

- *Data Walks: An Innovative Way to Share Data with Communities* by Brittany Murray, Elsa Falkenburger, and Priya Saxena, Urban Institute

Budgeting and Compensation:

- *Subject Payment Guide* produced by the University of Washington
- *Public Investment in Community-Driven Safety Initiatives: Landscape Study and Key Considerations* by the Urban Institute's Justice Policy Center
- *Participatory Budgeting Toolkit* by the National League of Cities

Supporting cross-sector action:

- *The Intersector Toolkit: Tools for Cross-Sector Collaboration*
- *Developing Effective Coalitions: An Eight Step Guide* by the Prevention Institute
- *A Framework for Improving Cross-Sector Coordination for Emergency Preparedness and Response: Action Steps for Public Health, Law Enforcement, the Judiciary and Corrections* by the Public Health and Law Enforcement Emergency Preparedness Workgroup
- *Cross-Sector Innovation Initiative* by the Center for Sharing Public Health Services

Collecting community safety measures:

- *Measuring Progress Toward Safety and Justice: A Global Guide to the Design of Performance Indicators Across the Justice Sector* by the Vera Institute
- *Collecting Data for a Safer Community* produced by The Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)
- *Measuring Community Safety in NYC* by the National Innovation Service (NIS) and the NYC Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS)
- *Measuring Upward Mobility in Counties and Cities Across the US* by Urban Institute
- *Why am I Always Being Researched? A Guidebook for Community Organizations, Researchers, and Funders to Help Us Get from Insufficient Understanding to More Authentic Truth by Beyond Chicago*

Using Group Concept Mapping to Facilitate Action:

- A group of asylum seekers in St. Louis used group concept mapping to identify ways to address their detention restrictions. Ultimately, a majority of individuals in the group successfully appealed to have their ankle monitors removed, a key action identified through the process. See Migrantes Unidos, Adriano Udani, Maria Torres Wedding, Ángel Flores Fontanez, Sara John & Allie Seleyman. (2023). Envisioning a world without prisons: Group concept mapping as a collective strategy for justice and dignity, *Politics, Groups, and Identities,* DOI: 10.1080/21565503.2023.2266721.
- Residents of a Canadian city used group concept mapping to develop a plan to advance urban agriculture in their community. See Martin, Wanda & Lindsey Wagner. (2018). How to grow a city: Cultivating an urban agriculture action plan through concept mapping. *Agriculture & Food Security,* 7(1), 1-9.
- For step-by-step guidance on how to conduct group concept mapping along with practical examples of how this technique can be used to facilitate action, see Kane, Mary, & Scott Rosas. (2018). *Conversations about group concept mapping: Applications, examples, and enhancements.* Los Angeles, CA.: Sage.

This research was supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation through the Safety and Justice Challenge Research Consortium (Consortium). Launched in 2019, the Consortium advances criminal justice research, grounded in the efforts and data of Safety and Justice Challenge sites, to expand the field's collective knowledge of how to safely reduce the overuse and misuse of jails and racial and ethnic disparities through fair and effective pretrial reforms. The Consortium is comprised of research organizations who develop and are granted projects under independent review by a panel of academic, policy, and practice experts, including individuals with lived experience. The Consortium is managed by the CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance.

We are grateful to our community partners, without whom this work could not have been done. We would like to especially acknowledge the assistance of our Missoula County & St. Louis County Redefining Community Safety Advisory Board members, who provided thoughtful guidance throughout all stages of the project. A special thanks to Chelsea Wittmann and Chandra Tyler for their thoughtful input throughout the life of the project. The Urban Institute, JustLeadershipUSA, and Gwen Wright also provided valuable feedback that enhanced the quality of the toolkit. Finally, we are in debt to the residents of Missoula, St. Louis and Mecklenburg Counties who shared their personal stories with us.