

PROJECT SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS

Annual Progress Report



Implementing a Proven Violence Reduction Strategy

Figure 1: Findings from the Michigan State University Project Safe Neighborhoods Evaluation



The Department of Justice launched its nationwide violent crime reduction program Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) in 2001, and reinvigorated it in 2017. Drawing from academic research and decades of experience, the program is based on the fundamental principle that law enforcement agencies and communities must work together to address violent crime to make our neighborhoods safer.

PSN is an evidence-based violent crime reduction program that takes a collaborative approach to public safety. It emphasizes data-driven strategies that focus on the most violent offenders and locations, while also forging partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders in local communities to achieve a sustained reduction in violent crime. Independent academic research found that PSN successfully reduced violent crime by an average of 4–20 percent, with reductions as high as 42 percent in certain locations (Figure 1).¹ The program continues to make America safer.

Project Safe Neighborhoods Program Elements

PSN is a community-based violence reduction strategy in which each local program is designed to address the specific violent crime problem in each district. Every U.S. Attorney across the country has implemented a PSN program tailored to the needs of his or her district. While the specific focus and implementation vary across the country, every PSN program has five common elements (Figure 2):

Figure 2: Five Elements of Every Project Safe Neighborhoods Program

- 1. LEADERSHIP** by the U.S. Attorney to convene all partners;
- 2. PARTNERSHIPS** at all levels of law enforcement and with the community;
- 3. TARGETED** enforcement efforts that:
 - Utilize the full range of available data, methods, and technologies to identify the offenders driving violent crime rates in the most violent locations in the district;
 - Ensure prosecution of those offenders in the federal, state, local or tribal system - whichever provides the most certain and appropriate sanction;
- 4. PREVENTION** of additional violence by prioritizing efforts such as:
 - Ensuring public awareness of the violent crime reduction strategy and enforcement results;
 - Communicating directly to offenders about the consequences of continuing violent behaviors; and
 - Supporting locally based prevention and reentry efforts;
- 5. ACCOUNTABILITY** for results based on outcome (reduction in violent crime), not merely output (numbers of investigations or prosecutions).

We are committed to driving down violent crime, especially in the hardest-hit locations, by targeting violent offenders and engaging with communities to find solutions tailored to local needs.

Jeffrey A. Rosen, Deputy Attorney General, October 16, 2020

¹ Edmund F. McGarrell, et al., *Project Safe Neighborhoods - A National Program to Reduce Crime: Final Project Report at 140-41, 184 (2009)*; Edmund F. McGarrell, et al., *Promising Strategies for Violence Reduction: Lessons from Two Decades of Innovation, Project Safe Neighborhoods Case Study Report #13, at 6 (2013)*.



Implementation

All 94 U.S. Attorney’s Offices (USAO) have active PSN programs.² Each is tailored to the needs of the district, focusing PSN’s comprehensive violence reduction efforts on one or more target areas. Target areas may encompass a specific neighborhood, a precinct within a city, one or more cities or even the entire district.

Leadership

U.S. Attorney leadership is critical to a successful PSN program. U.S. Attorneys and their offices build and sustain the community and law enforcement partnerships that are essential to address violent crime in a comprehensive way. The following are examples of the many forms such leadership can take.



Middle District of Georgia

The USAO created PSN Working Groups for five geographic divisions within the district, each led by an Assistant U.S. Attorney (AUSA) as PSN Coordinator. Other participants include a state prosecutor, a local sheriff’s deputy, and federal agents. These Working Groups meet monthly to review gun cases and jointly decide the best forum for prosecution, with a particular focus on swiftly prosecuting the most violent offenders to reduce crime in the community.



Western District of New York

The USAO has a monthly television program, The Justice Report, featuring its U.S. Attorney and Public Information Officer (PIO), which airs on a local public access channel multiple times per week. The U.S. Attorney and PIO discuss current crime trends in the community as well as the office’s outreach efforts. The show often includes guests, such as the head of a federal or local police agency that investigates the cases the office prosecutes.



Middle District of North Carolina

The USAO has developed regular case screening meetings with PSN sites throughout the district. Each county in the district has at least two assigned AUSAs to foster strong relationships with local investigators, probation officers, and prosecutors and concentrates on offenders with prior felony convictions for violence and/or controlled substance offenses who possess firearms. Case screenings identify leaders, shot-callers, and shooters for investigation and follow-up by law enforcement, and often lead to federal prosecution. Notification sessions or “call-ins” are also utilized to deter identified violent offenders by directly informing them about consequences of continued violence while offering opportunities for assistance by service agencies, re-entry specialists, clergy and community members.



District of South Carolina

Through its PSN program, the USAO regularly conducts roll-call trainings for state and local law enforcement on a variety of topics, including: how to build strong cases for federal prosecution; common legal issues; officer safety; de-escalation of violent incidents; offenders with mental health issues; and much more. State and local law enforcement are encouraged to trace all recovered firearms through the ATF Tracing Center. In addition, federal law enforcement has coordinated with local partners and the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division to utilize the National Integrated Ballistics Information Network (NIBIN) to develop increased and prompt leads in crime-gun cases.

Partnership

PSN is most effective when it involves partners—including federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement; prosecutors; and community leaders and groups—who share the same commitment to, and involvement in, the program.³ The vast majority of PSN task forces across the country work in partnership with a variety of committed partners.



Eastern District of Louisiana

The USAO meets regularly with federal and local investigative agencies and the local District Attorney’s office to discuss suspects, gangs, ongoing investigations, and strategic enforcement efforts within the PSN target area. The PSN coordinator confers with local investigators and prosecutors to determine which office will handle the long-term gang and violent crime prosecutions and how the other office can assist. Periodic meetings provide a mechanism to assess the effectiveness of the targeted enforcement.

² Information compiled in this report was drawn from PSN narratives updated by U.S. Attorney’s Offices’ in 2020.

³ McGarrell, et al., (2009) at 18-19, 169.



Eastern District of North Carolina

This district’s initiative – “Take Back North Carolina” – is a partnership among the USAO, District Attorney’s Offices, and federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies across the district. The program strategically targets organizations and individuals responsible for increased crime rates and the introduction of illegal drugs into the community, and quickly routes appropriate cases to federal court when prosecution in that venue would deliver the most significant impact. This partnership includes 44 Sheriffs, 188 Police Departments, and 15 elected District Attorneys, and utilizes the regional assignment of AUSAs, strategic targeting, decentralized case intake authority, and public messaging.



District of Nevada

The USAO maintains strong partnerships with local law enforcement and prosecutors in its focus areas.

In one focus area, the PSN Coordinator meets weekly with the local prosecutor’s office to determine which cases are appropriate for federal prosecution. In the other focus area, it has used PSN grant funds to establish a local prosecutor as a liaison between the offices concerning firearm related cases. Through partnerships with federal agencies, the USAO has also increased its commitment to prosecuting firearm traffickers and persons acquiring firearms illegally.



Western District of Michigan

The USAO is working with the Michigan Department of Corrections to host “Facing Choices” forums, which provide recent parolees with input from local and federal law enforcement about the consequences of ongoing criminal behavior. Ex-offenders, who have turned their lives around, and social service providers help parolees obtain benefits, identification cards, employment, and educational and other opportunities. The USAO is working with a research partner to gauge the effectiveness of the district’s PSN efforts.

Targeted Enforcement

Targeting PSN enforcement efforts on the most significant contributors to violent crime is key to successful outcomes.⁴ The reinvigorated PSN program builds on this principle by leveraging advances in research, crime analysis, and technology to identify and focus on the locations and most violent offenders who are responsible for a disproportionate amount of violence.

Districts use a variety of data-driven models to target and prioritize enforcement:

- Focused deterrence (concentrating on high-rate offenders);
- Hot spots policing (focusing on high crime places); and
- Pulling levers (focusing on high-rate offender groups).

Districts frequently ensure prosecution of the most violent offenders by:

- Enhancing screening and/or review of matters referred to the U.S. Attorney’s Office; and
- Enhancing referral and coordination protocols with state, local, or tribal prosecutors.



Middle District of Louisiana

PSN program partners created a priority-offender

list to identify trigger pullers. Agencies participating in the district’s Violent Crime Strike Force nominate offenders, who are vetted using objective criteria. A booking alert system notifies strike force coordinators when priority offenders are arrested, and their cases are fast-tracked for prosecution decisions by state and federal prosecutors. The list is updated quarterly based on successful prosecutions, new intelligence, dormancy, or detention status.



Middle District of Tennessee

In Nashville and Clarksville, AUSAs screen every offender arrested for a firearm violation for potential federal prosecution within 24–48 hours after arrest. In some instances, when a violent defendant has been arrested on a serious charge or has a lengthy record but nevertheless bails out of jail, federal and local partners collaborate to determine whether to obtain a criminal complaint and seek detention to make sure a violent offender is taken off the streets and does not victimize someone else.

⁴McGarrell, et al., (2009) at 16, 170-171, 174-177.



Western District of Pennsylvania

To identify the most violent offenders within the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County, the PSN Task Force uses intelligence from gunshot detection technology, 911 data, the local Crime Gun Intelligence Center (CGIC), NIBIN, law enforcement partners, probation and parole, criminal history, and gang affiliation. As part of its targeted enforcement efforts, the district's PSN program utilizes case-screening protocols, comprehensive crime gun tracing, criminal incident reviews, directed patrols, and field interrogations. The USAO and the local prosecutor's office work together to ensure the most violent offenders are prosecuted in the appropriate forum.



Eastern District of New York

In October 2019, the USAO created the Rapid and Strategic Prosecution (RASP) initiative. RASP was developed to ensure rapid federal response to spikes in gun violence in specific areas of responsibility such as precincts, neighborhoods and housing developments by identifying the individuals who are the drivers of gun violence and expediting the intake and prosecution of gun cases against those individuals. The RASP director works collaboratively with the New York City Police Department and local prosecutors' offices, as well as other federal agencies, to pinpoint areas with rising violent crime rates, identify leaders of violent criminal organizations, and expedite the intake and prosecution of RASP cases.

Prevention and Outreach

Achieving a sustained reduction in violent crime requires deterring individuals from engaging in crime while also providing them the tools they need to succeed. Local community organizations are essential to this effort, so law enforcement agencies must cultivate relationships with committed partners in the communities in which they operate.

Public awareness and support of the local PSN program is key. Comprehensive PSN programs incorporate and support local prevention and reentry efforts to prevent added violence.



Central District of California

The USAO works in partnership with the district court and other agencies to support diversion and reentry programs aimed at reducing recidivism for defendants. This is accomplished through meetings with judges and prosecutors, by providing self-help and life skills training, and by offering alternative sentences. The USAO also participates annually in the City of Los Angeles' Summer Night Lights violence intervention program that operates in 32 parks throughout the city during summer months, providing recreational and social activities. The USAO has also recently adopted a local elementary school, with the goal of providing presentations to students, teachers and parents on topics such as gang prevention and opioid awareness.



District of Rhode Island

The USAO has partnered with multiple violence-prevention community organizations, including a nonprofit organization, to de-escalate and mediate tensions between neighborhood gang members, and provide services to families and others affected by gang violence. The organization also hosts summer programs, educational programs, and employment and job-training services to steer at-risk and gang-involved youth away from criminal activity. Neighborhood clergy also assist with the organization's de-escalation services to calm gang-based tensions.



Southern District of Florida

The Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) employs a multi-faceted strategy to prevent criminal activity. One aspect focuses on at-risk youth. Guided by data indicating that academic failure is a key factor in youth turning to criminal activities, the PSN-VRP Program utilizes six programs designed to steer at-risk youth away from crime. Another aspect of the VRP focuses on providing formerly incarcerated felons with the tools and life skills they need to avoid criminal activity.



Western District of Wisconsin

The PSN task force partners with the Focused Interruption Coalition (FIC), which comprises formerly incarcerated individuals with deep ties to the community. It is a community and faith-based organization that seeks to prevent retaliatory violence through peer support. FIC contacts those deemed most likely to join gangs and responds to every shots-fired event involving a victim. Because witnesses of gun crime are often identified on social media and discouraged to cooperate with law enforcement for fear of reprisal, FIC also works to encourage these witnesses to cooperate.



Accountability

The Department must be able to measure and demonstrate the effectiveness of PSN. This requires that the Department assess the impact of PSN nationwide, using measures that reflect the overall goals of the program. The National Institute of Justice currently is overseeing a comprehensive, multi-year study of the nationwide effects of PSN, combined with site-specific studies of PSN implementation.⁵

In addition, since the goal of every local PSN program is to reduce violent crime, U.S. Attorney’s Offices work with research partners to assess the effectiveness of crime reduction strategies and to adjust them as necessary.



Eastern District of Texas

PSN program participants worked with a dedicated research partner to develop a comprehensive site proposal based on local crime data. The research partner identified several areas as “hot spots” of violent crime within Beaumont, and the police department adjusted its patrol areas to correlate with the data. PSN partners also developed a “top ten” list of the worst offenders in the area for targeted enforcement.



Northern District of Georgia

The district has engaged a research partner to develop a comprehensive research agenda designed to inform a data-driven implementation plan. The partner has developed a systematic approach to identify places at risk of repeat violence and police practices that effectively address the causes of violence in target locations and the individuals responsible. The research partner has also developed a webpage for law enforcement to report crime data that will be used to analyze violent crime in the targeted areas and measure the success or failure of the enforcement strategy.



District of Montana

The USAO, the Billings and Missoula Police Departments, and Michigan State University have worked to develop a data-driven process to identify those likely to commit violent crime for investigation. Since implementing PSN in Missoula County, and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, murders, robberies, and aggravated assaults decreased for two consecutive years. Over the course of the two years ending April 30, 2020, those violent crimes decreased over 25 percent, and there were 85 fewer violent crime victims than in the 12 months before the initiative began. In addition, the Yellowstone County PSN effort, from April of 2018 through August of 2020, yielded approximately 270 defendants charged, 333 pounds of meth seized, and 343 firearms seized, including 78 semi-automatic rifles.



Eastern District of Michigan

The city of Detroit experienced a small increase (4.6 percent) in homicides in 2019. However, the PSN target area (the 9th precinct) experienced a decrease in homicides (10 percent). More impressively, the 9th precinct experienced a 24 percent reduction in the number of combined fatal and nonfatal shootings in 2019. This was at a time when the city experienced a 3 percent increase. These trends suggest PSN’s targeted approach made an important contribution to public safety. Additionally, the USAO’s PSN research partner, Michigan State University, conducted a recidivism analysis of participants in the PSN/Ceasefire focused deterrence program. It found significant reductions in re-offending, particularly for violent crimes (47 percent lower likelihood of re-arrest).

Highlights of Project Safe Neighborhoods Successes

The following are some of the many examples of PSN programs across the country that have successfully reduced violent crime rates.



Southern District of Indiana

In 2019, the USAO increased its prosecutions of illegally possessed firearms (and pretrial detention of associated offenders) in the core PSN areas. There were several tangible successes in 2019, including a 10 percent decrease in the number of homicides committed by individuals using firearms.

⁵ <https://njj.ojp.gov/funding/awards/2019-75-cx-0008>.



District of New Jersey

In Newark, the USAO participates in biweekly, data-focused meetings with all its PSN law-enforcement partners to discuss priority investigation targets and violent threats, including any recent shooting incidents. In 2019, Newark saw some of its lowest rates of violent crime in over four decades, with a 26 percent decrease in homicides from 2018. To maintain lower crime rates, key city and county stakeholders confer with supervisors at the USAO at least twice weekly to discuss recent shooting incidents and homicides, thereby allowing swift enforcement action in hot spots. In addition to rigorous enforcement, the USAO participates weekly in the federal Reentry Court, which strives to prevent individuals from reoffending by helping with job placement, educational opportunities, housing, and medical and childcare.



Northern District of Alabama

Firearms matters referred to the USAO for prosecution increased by 73 percent from fiscal year 2017 to fiscal year 2019. Between fiscal years 2017 and 2019, there was an 83 percent increase in the number of defendants found guilty of federal firearms offenses. Overall, there has been a 64 percent increase in violent crimes prosecutions since FY2016 (2016 – 171 defendants, 2019 – 281 defendants).



Western District of Texas

The violent crime rate in Killeen, Texas, had jumped 20 percent from 2013-16. By 2016, its violent crime rate was 43 percent higher than the rate of similar-sized U.S. cities, and its murder rate was 72 percent higher. In late 2017, the USAO formulated a plan to identify potential federal firearms violators in Killeen and aggressively pursue them in federal court. As federal firearms indictments increased, violent crime decreased. Since October 2017, the USAO increased its firearms prosecutions over 300 percent. The increased federal prosecution led to a 65 percent overall decrease in violent crime in Killeen and an 84 percent decrease in murders.

Resources to Support Project Safe Neighborhoods

The Department has dedicated significant additional resources to support successful implementation of the PSN program.

The Department awarded over \$18 million in grant funds to support PSN programs in fiscal year 2019, and nearly \$18 million in fiscal year 2020.⁶ Since the Department reinvigorated PSN in October 2017, the Department has also awarded millions of dollars in other grant funds to support related crime reduction activities, such as Crime Gun Intelligence Centers.

In 2019, the Department also awarded \$1 million to support comprehensive and tailored Training and Technical Assistance (TTA) to PSN districts. Since the reinvigoration of PSN, the Department has received over 70 requests for TTA, and completed over 30 engagements with PSN task forces to improve their strategic planning processes, policing and prosecution strategies, and victim/witness support capacities. A comprehensive catalogue of PSN TTA resources is available at <https://psntta.org/tta-resources/ttacatalog/>.⁷

- The Bureau of Justice Assistance's PSN Training and Technical Assistance (TTA) program launched regional teams in 2019 to support all PSN districts with training and evidence-based best practices for violence reduction. The following are examples of the support TTA teams provided:
 - **Middle District of North Carolina** - helped develop focused deterrence approaches within the district and facilitated training on a violent impact player program.
 - **Northern District of Ohio** - analyzed whether survivors and witnesses in homicide cases were receiving appropriate services, and recommended practical solutions.
 - **Eastern District of Michigan** - provided training in social network analysis, spatial analysis, and other tools to support the district's violence reduction strategies.

⁶ Bureau of Justice Assistance, *Project Safe Neighborhoods Overview, Important Resources: FY 2019 and 2020 Funding Allocations*.

⁷ Bureau of Justice Assistance, *Violence Reduction Response Center*.