

Responding to Mass Shootings at the City Level

Sacramento Case Study

The purpose of this case study is to provide other municipalities and their stakeholders with a roadmap on how to respond to a mass shooting in their community when, and if, it occurs. In addition to sharing the series of events and responses to the shooting in Sacramento in April 2022, this document offers lessons learned which aims to assist in the development of a plan of action after the crime is committed.

The Tragedy

On April 3, 2022, the City of Sacramento witnessed its largest mass shooting which took the lives of six individuals. Over the next few days, details of the tragedy emerged, and Sacramentans learned that the shootings were gang-related.

Initially, there were calls for increasing safety measures downtown where the incident took place and for more gun control. As so often happens, there was no talk of prevention work with youth in part because the perpetrators were adults. The Mayor and leaders of the downtown business district urged residents to return to the downtown core for entertainment without fear. Looming on the horizon was the call for more police on the streets.

Recognizing that investing in violence prevention strategies – “upstream investments” where impact is often not seen for years – would be the best course of action, City officials and other stakeholders needed to develop a response quickly to answer demands by community leaders for more of these upstream investments. While both acknowledging that some individuals do want more police hired and attempting to avoid knee-jerk, short-term actions that are highly visible, City leaders (both elected and community-based) had to find the path that would lead to a real commitment by the City to invest in strategies that would prevent the very kind of incident to which they were responding.

The Key Players

Multiple key players played significant roles in the shaping of the City’s response.

Media: The news about the shooting began with the horror of the incident and the unraveling of the details. Meanwhile, the Councilmember who is considered as the Council’s youth champion immediately penned an op-ed that called on City leaders to invest more in violence prevention programs. What the op-ed did not do was call for the defunding of police. For the Councilmember, it was not an “either/or” situation. The op-ed was submitted by the Councilmember without knowing whether it would get published.

At the same time, a real opportunity for the allocation of City funds towards these kinds of programs was in process as the City was embarking on its annual budget development; thus, the Councilmember’s appeal to City leaders had an actual possibility of materializing. Moreover, a deeper investment in youth violence prevention programs was squarely in line with a City

Council-approved resolution two years ago that redefined the City's public safety services to include police, fire, emergency services, and youth-centered violence prevention programs.

The op-ed, published just over a week after the shootings, was accompanied by an unanticipated news article written by a reporter who regularly covers equity issues in the region and a reporter who covers health care. The article featured community leaders who had been relentlessly making the same call for the previous seven days. (Links to Op-Ed and to news article) Thus, the media was finally representing a unified call from both City officials and community leaders for the same kind of response to the shooting.

Community-Based Providers: The City's community-based providers that focus on violence intervention and interruption work were out in force on the ground, working to thwart any acts of retaliation given that the shootings were gang-related. These are the same staff who are the first responders to incidents of violence in the community often being called into action by the City's police officers. As of this writing, they have been successful in preventing any retaliatory acts.

One of the City's largest philanthropic foundations took a leadership role and brought all of the violence prevention, intervention, and interruption providers together two times via Zoom. The meetings aimed to develop a framework that would address three tiers of violence: primary support (one-on-one violence prevention and wraparound services), secondary support (one-on-one violence intervention and wraparound services), and tertiary support (community-based crisis response). The input from participants on the strategies for each tier would help shape a proposal to the City for immediate funding needs for a community-led response.

City Councilmembers and the Mayor: The Mayor and several City Councilmembers were on the scene soon after the shootings and participated in press conferences with the Police Chief. While initially the narrative of needing to invest more in violence prevention programs was absent, it did not take long for the Mayor to seize the opportunity to elevate an issue that he cares deeply about (having had a platform that included youth as a focus during his election), and along the City Council's youth champion, shifted his message. The Mayor was seeking a path forward that would support the expansion of youth violence prevention programs in high-need communities. However, the management of City dollars actually lays with the City Manager in Sacramento and not with the Mayor, and thus, the Mayor could not reallocate funds on his own to respond immediately. Moreover, the City staff who are considered to have the expertise to advise the Mayor on his response report to the City Manager, not the Mayor; therefore, the Mayor did not have a direct line of communication to these staff (as it is with all weak Mayor city government structures). Given the City Manager's control over the purse strings with authority to reallocate funds up to a threshold amount without going to Council, the Mayor was keenly aware of the need for him and the City Manager to work together in crafting the City's response.

Echoes of past Council meetings when there was a push for more youth funding were surfacing. City Councilmembers raised the same questions as they had in previous debates: How much is

the City spending already on youth? What impact are these investments having? Why should the City invest dollars in programs and services beyond its core functions of public safety, infrastructure and parks?

At the Council meeting that took place six weeks after from the shooting, the discussion turned to the immediate needs of upcoming summer months, particularly because only a few weeks prior, a large fight broke out among youth who had been spending time at a local mall. The Mayor called for public presentations on the City's plans for the summer to prevent any further violence, and another Councilmember requested a presentation on the City's overall violence prevention strategy. A third Councilmember, aware of the community-based provider proposal that had been developed in conjunction with one of the City's largest philanthropic foundations, asked that this proposal be presented to Council at the same time as the summer plans and violence prevention strategy. Rather than putting the presentations on a meeting agenda at the earliest possible subsequent Council meeting, the presentations were slated for a Council meeting over a month later.

[City Staff:](#) The City has several staff positions which focus on youth with individuals who have extensive knowledge and expertise in the areas of positive youth development, youth workforce development, and youth violence prevention as well as strong relationships with community-based providers. Two of the position are in the City Manager's office and one in the Police Department. Hearing the calls for investment in youth violence prevention programs, the three staff, within five days of the shooting, drafted a response plan that included a short-term response to address the needs of a quickly-approaching Spring Break and Summer as well as a longer-term response. These staff also had heard that a proposal being developed by the local philanthropic foundation along with community-based providers was going to be delivered to City Council and the Mayor.

These City staff also took the difficult step of proposing a re-allocation of some funding currently supporting a violence prevention program put in place several years ago. The City staff based their recommendation on evidence that the program may not be having the same kind of impact as it did in its inception (particularly with the intended target population of older youth whose participation was low) and on the fact that needs have changed. Timing played a key role in the staff's ability to put this recommendation forward as the contract for the implementation of this older program was ending at the close of the fiscal year (June 30), freeing up the resources to support more current and possibly more impactful work.

Regardless of timing of their presentations to Council in mid-June, these staff continued to shape and advance a plan for the implementation of City-funded summer opportunities for older youth (in addition to the City's traditional programming for elementary school-aged children) including a significant expansion of a summer youth employment program and a series of community events open to all on all weekend nights in designated "priority neighborhoods." The implementation hinges on the ability of the City Manager to reallocate funding without Council approval (up to a certain amount) and on the City's partnerships with community-based organizations already doing the work.

Results to Date

In the nearly three months since the shooting, the work of all the key players has resulted in some initial positive outcomes.

- **Funding:** The City Manager is moving forward with the re-allocation of funding towards the strategies presented by his staff.
- **Comprehensive violence prevention strategy:** The City Council scheduled a special meeting in mid-June to hear from City staff about the City's overall approach to violence prevention, plans for expansion of youth workforce development programs, and plans for expansion of summer opportunities for children and youth. The fact that these three presentations will occur at the same time will prevent the City's response from occurring in silos.
- **State of the City address:** The Mayor's State of the City address, scheduled for mid-June, will focus on investing in youth. While not clear how the Mayor selected this focus for his speech, he did say that he wanted to do something different from the traditional report on the City's current status overall.
- **Community responders:** The Chief of Police, who has publicly shared her desire to work more closely with community-based providers, is considering the creation of a formal community-based crisis response program. The Chief is also developing a strategic plan to address the larger challenge of increased gun violence in the City.
- **Increased and protected funding for children and youth programs:** Recognizing the need for sustainable, ongoing funding, community-based providers, the Mayor, and several Councilmembers are poised to bring a measure for the November 2022 ballot to City Council in July that would, if passed by the voters, create a permanent source of revenue for children and youth programs.

Lessons Learned

In addressing future responses to incidents of violence, initial take aways include the following.

Ensure that the Mayor focuses on violence prevention as the response: It was critical for the Mayor to expand the Mayor's public response to the tragedy beyond "more security" and "keep coming downtown." He was hearing from his colleagues on City Council as well as community leaders that upstream investments in youth violence prevention programs need to be prioritized.

Keep all elected officials up to date on the City's work around violence prevention: The Mayor was lacking the knowledge about the City's overall approach to violence prevention, intervention, and interruption as well the current City-funded and City-operated programs already in place that advance that approach. All of this information should be brought to the

Mayor and other elected officials by the City staff who are most informed on this work on an ongoing basis rather than as a result of a crisis or tragedy.

Seek an elected official who can write an op-ed: As a counterpoint to the news articles about the perpetrators who were adult gang members, the local media has been one of the best vehicles to elevating the message around prevention.

Build on the programs and services already in place as a short-term response: The Mayor wanted to point to something concrete as a way to show that the City is “doing something.” The fastest way for this to happen is to look at current City-operated and community-based provider programs focused on violence prevention that could be easily expanded.

Reconsider current investments: With most cities facing tight budgets, the City should review its current investments in youth violence prevention programs and strongly consider re-allocating some or all of the funding from programs that are less effective today to the identified short-term needs.

Keep provider capacity in mind: Violence prevention, intervention, and interruption community-based providers are the first responders to incidents of violence and have deep connections in the communities where they work. While many operate strong programs, many of the same providers struggle to maintain adequate organizational capacity to keep pace with the increasing demand for their services. If the City offers additional funding to these providers to expand their programming, the City should, at the same time, allow for some of the resources to go towards strengthening these providers’ capacity.

Start the work before the crisis: The City of Sacramento’s work to strengthen its efforts to support children and youth began nearly 10 years ago. These efforts were not always about more funding. The work also focused on adopting policies that support better outcomes for youth and on building the City’s capacity in the areas of organizational structure, staffing and technology. At the same time, community-based providers have gone to the ballot to create a permanent revenue source for children and youth programs two times in the same period and are actively working with the Mayor and the City Council’s youth champion to prepare for a third attempt in November 2022. All of this groundwork has put the City in a position to respond to the tragedy.