

Needle-Moving Community Collaboratives

Case Study: San Jose

By the late 1980s, many of San Jose's once safe neighborhoods had become crime-ridden. The city had experienced a 300 percent rise in violent juvenile crime, along with significant increases in drug-related and other criminal activity. To take back their streets, community members, led by the citizens' group People Acting in Community Together (PACT), approached the City Council and mayor for help.

Fast Facts:

- **Community:** San Jose, CA
- **Problem:** High and rising violent crime rates
- **Results:** 38% reduction in violent crime rate between 2001 and 2010
- **Differentiating Feature:** San Jose mayors have served as central leader and spokesperson for the collaborative, convening monthly meetings, heading up a principle subcommittee, and helping to support it with city funds.
- **Leaders/Lead Organization:** San Jose Mayor and Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force (MGPTF)
- **Philanthropic Support:** City Funds, BEST

The resulting Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force (MGPTF), launched in 1991, has put forth a sustained commitment ever since to reducing violent and antisocial behavior within the city's youth population between the ages of 6 and 24, who exhibit high-risk behavior. With a mission to address the root cause of youth violence through personal transformation, MGPTF has aimed its strategy at prevention, intervention and most recently, re-entry. It works directly with targeted youth, seeking to reconnect them with their families and communities, using law enforcement only as a last resort. The ultimate intent is to get troubled young people back into schools, provide them with a supportive and healthy environment in which to learn and grow, and redirect them towards more productive behaviors.

MGPTF today coordinates multiple efforts aimed at addressing the challenges of San Jose's disconnected youth. This wasn't always the case. Originally, MGPTF was focused on gang prevention in the San Jose area. But because of a commitment to continuous improvement, MGPTF has broadened its support of youth to include academic success, workforce preparation and neighborhood safety.

Due in large part to MGPTF, San Jose is now one of the safest big cities in America. The rate of violent crime in San Jose decreased by 38 percent from 1991 to 2010. During the same period, the city experienced a sustained 41 percent decrease in

property crimes. Today 32 percent more high school graduates in the San Jose area meet the admissions requirements for the University of California than in prior recent years. The state has even adopted the “San Jose model” as the official structure for California gang prevention. In the midst of these successes, MGPTF acknowledges the need for greater involvement from philanthropy and the business community and is actively working to forge those partnerships.

Five key things have enabled MGPTF to have success in reducing crime in the city:

Strong, central leader: *effective leadership and governance*

With a strong precedent set by the founding mayor, Susan Hammer, MGPTF has had continuing prominent leadership by the subsequent mayors of San Jose. Today, Mayor Chuck Reed serves as the central leader and spokesperson, convening the monthly meetings of MGPTF. He is also the head of the technical subcommittee. Since the mayor has final approval of the city budget, strong mayoral leadership has helped guarantee adequate annual funding—in good times and bad. As the public face of MGPTF, the mayor frequently makes public appearances on behalf of the group including the community forums. Indeed, the leadership of a long line of San Jose mayors has helped to procure funding and get traction in the community.

Commitment to strategy refreshing: *shared vision and agenda*

To keep the group focused on the community’s latest priorities, MGPTF revises its strategic plan every three years. This regular strategy-setting process is a collaborative effort between the group and community members. The group reviews citywide statistics and previous performance of the collaborative’s grantees to identify emerging trends on the street. This data, as well as qualitative information from MGPTF members, shapes the strategy for the next several years. Also determined through this process is the funding mix for grantees. As the process moves along, hundreds of community members also provide input through public forums, youth focus groups and designated seats in the policy team. As MGPTF put it: “Change must be driven by the community and sustained by the community.”

Emphasizing cross-collaboration: *cross-sector engagement*

MGPTF encompasses a wide variety of community organizations and members. These include representatives from the city and county, dozens of nonprofits, courts, law-enforcement agencies, school districts, faith-based organizations, gang intervention experts and parole officers. Government agencies play a larger role in MGPTF relative to other collaboratives. Cross-collaboration within this disparate group has been enhanced through much effort, with an astounding

80 percent of participants citing that they have established new or strengthened existing community-building relationships through participation in MGPTF.

Innovative allocation of funds: *sufficient resources*

Taking an innovative approach to funding, MGPTF's rolled out what it calls its Bringing Everyone's Strengths Together (BEST) program. General city funds are pledged to BEST, which then makes yearly grants to more than 25 organizations. BEST represents one of the larger children and youth funding sources in San Jose. Originally, BEST allocated its funding with an emphasis on prevention, intervention and law enforcement. Today, the funding allocation mix is recalibrated each year to reflect San Jose's changing needs. Recently, funding has become tenuous for BEST. Due to budget cuts, BEST lost its entire budget of \$4.7 million in direct city funds last year. But the mayor saved the day by providing \$2.8 million from the city's general fund to keep BEST running. Nevertheless, funding will continue to be a challenge.

Clearly defined roles: *dedicated capacity and appropriate structure*

MGPTF operates through a policy team and a technical team to ensure effective support, alignment and coordination. The policy team consists of government officials, school district leaders and representatives of key community-based organizations. Chaired by the mayor, this group provides strategic direction for MGPTF. The technical team consists of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS) staff, police officers and direct-service organizations. This latter team assures the effective development of programs for gang prevention, intervention and law enforcement. And with its members' direct knowledge of the street environment, the technical team provides updates to the policy group on changes in the gang climate. To support this infrastructure, MGPTF has a team of six BEST analysts and two supervisors at PRNS.

SOURCES

- National Cities League and Institute for Youth, Education, and Families. *Beyond City Limits*. 2007
- *Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force Strategic Work Plan: 2008-2011*. City of San Jose. 2011.