



National Homicide Review Training and Technical Assistance Project

MILWAUKEE HOMICIDE REVIEW TRAINING MANUAL



COPS
Community Oriented Policing Services
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John Markovic, Patrice Howard, and Vonda Matthews managed the project for the COPS Office.



Introduction

The Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission

Established in January 2005 under the leadership of key elected and appointed officials, the Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission (MHRC) has been a central component of the City of Milwaukee's violence prevention efforts. Drawing on public health and criminal justice approaches, the Commission was designed to achieve the following goals:

1. Gain a better understanding of homicide through strategic problem analysis.
2. Develop innovative and effective responses and prevention strategies.
3. Help focus available prevention and intervention resources.

A key assumption underlying the work of the MHRC is that **homicides are preventable**. With over a decade of collaboration and coordination, the MHRC strives to reduce homicides and non-fatal shootings through a multilevel, multidisciplinary, and multiagency homicide review process which includes independent data collection, analysis, and interpretation; case review and recommendations; and systems and policy change. At each review, partners participate in an intensive discussion and examination of homicide and nonfatal shooting incidents. The process (1) identifies trends, gaps, assets, and deficits within the existing systems, policies, practices, and programs designed to prevent and reduce violence and (2) produces recommendations to strengthen those trends, gaps, assets, and deficits.

The MHRC comprises public health professionals, law enforcement professionals, criminal justice professionals, and community service providers who meet regularly to build and nurture relationships and exchange information and perspectives to identify crime prevention strategies. This innovative interagency collaboration helps to foster neighborhoods and communities where residents, organizations, and law enforcement work together to reduce violence.

The success of the MHRC has been driven by building trust through information sharing among agencies; providing opportunities to network and work together; acting on recommendations and producing results; valuing and drawing on expertise from multiple disciplines and perspectives; and providing timely data on violence in our city.

Proven results

During 2005–2007, the National Institute of Justice funded the Harvard School of Public Health to evaluate the MHRC. The impact evaluation revealed that the implementation of the MHRC interventions was associated with a 52 percent decrease in the monthly count of homicides in the intervention police districts, whereas the control police districts experienced a 9.2 percent decrease in homicide. These findings indicate that the MHRC adds value to understanding violence in our urban communities from a public health perspective.

How to use the training manual

This training manual was created to help urban communities dealing with the problem of lethal violence reduce the number of homicides that occur each year. It illustrates best practices for homicide reviews, using the process of the MHRC as an example. It presents detailed recommendations for homicide review planning, implementation, and evaluation; these recommendations can be selected or adapted for different contexts and localities.

The training manual will be most useful to law enforcement, criminal justice agencies, and community service organizations who are preparing to embark on a partnership to reduce homicides in their community. The methods and strategies used in this report can be used to prevent other crimes and public health problems, such as police-related shootings or gang violence; however, the examples provided in this report focus on violent crimes, specifically homicides, nonfatal shootings, and near-fatal domestic violence batteries. Where possible, we include examples from similar programs that also focus on information sharing, partnership building, and comprehensive case reviews. As well, we include discussions from some sites that are now adapting the Milwaukee model to the needs of their own jurisdictions.

The core of any homicide review commission is the coordination of three key justice partners: police departments, district attorneys, and corrections officials. We describe how to establish this coordination in detail. We also discuss the partnership roles of other stakeholders such as public health practitioners, school officials, the clergy, and community organizations.

Ancillary documents available from the MHRC include sample forms, sample databases, and template memoranda of understanding (MOU).¹

1. These forms are available to download from the project's website at <https://www.mcw.edu/departments/epidemiology/research/milwaukee-homicide-review-commission/>, or contact the Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission at mobrien@mcw.edu to request these materials.

There are vast numbers of publications and resources that will help participants implement specific aspects of the homicide review. This manual only briefly touches on these topics and primarily covers “must know” information, stressing information that is unique to the homicide review process.

Overview

The manual is organized into ten modules. Each module covers a specific topic important to creating a homicide review commission (or similar entity) in your jurisdiction. Each module includes the following:

- An overview of the module and its learning objectives.
- Detailed and practical information about the topic, including real-world examples.
- A section on avoiding pitfalls (including lessons learned and dos and don'ts).
- A list of related training resources.

This manual should be reviewed by all participants in the commission. To quickly work through the manual, assign each partner a single module and have them report on their section to the rest of the group.

Module 1. Homicides are Preventable

This module explains the premise that **homicides are preventable** and how that premise guides the entire homicide review process.

Module 2. Homicide Review Process

This module defines what a homicide review is and can deliver, and lays out the history, advantages, and pitfalls of the process.

Module 3. Key Partners – Law Enforcement and Community

This module describes the criminal justice and community partnerships needed for a homicide review commission and methods for recruiting and engaging partners. Suggested theories of change are provided to help guide the work.

Module 4. Police Department

This module describes the roles and responsibilities of the police department in homicide reviews.

Module 5. District Attorney – Prosecutor’s Office

This module describes the roles and responsibilities of the district attorney’s office in homicide reviews.

Module 6. Corrections

This module describes the roles and responsibilities of probation and parole officers in homicide reviews.

Module 7. Partnerships with Community Service Providers

This module describes the roles and responsibilities of community organizations and social service providers in homicide reviews.

Module 8. The Homicide Review Commission – Organization and Governance

This module covers the details of running the review process. In addition to using the process for homicide reviews, the MHRC has applied the model to other types of incidents (domestic violence, sexual assault, juvenile justice, sentinel event, overdose).

Module 9. The Homicide Review Meeting: Nuts and Bolts

This module covers the preparatory work, overall structure, and characteristics of the actual homicide review meeting and pre- and post-meeting activities.

Module 10. Recommendations

This module reviews the different types of recommendations developed by homicide reviews and offers suggestions of how to implement, track, monitor, and assess them.

Module 1. Homicides are Preventable

This module explains that homicides can be prevented with the right action, timing, or response. The belief that **homicides are preventable** guides the entire homicide review process.

Learning objectives

- Develop an understanding of the principles that guide homicide reviews.
- Develop an understanding of the history of the homicide review, including its foundations in the FARS (Fatality Analysis Reporting System), public health, and SARA (scanning, analysis, response, and assessment) models.
- Learn the advantages of a homicide review process.

The basis of any homicide review is that most homicides could have been prevented with the right action, timing, or response. The belief that **homicides are preventable** guides the entire process. No matter how spontaneous the events were that led up to the homicide or how driven and motivated the suspect was to commit murder, each homicide has at least one opportunity for prevention and an opportunity to learn from tragedy— that is, at least one opportunity to prevent a similar homicide from occurring in the future, to improve an organizational policy or practice, or to refine a public policy or system's operation to enhance community safety.

The belief that homicides are preventable is not wishful thinking. Preventing homicides first requires a commitment on the part of leadership to implement new strategies and engage in key partnerships to reduce homicides. During 2005–2007, the National Institute of Justice funded the Harvard School of Public Health to evaluate the MHRC. The impact evaluation revealed that the implementation of the MHRC interventions was associated with a 52 percent decrease in the monthly count of homicides in the intervention police districts, whereas the control police districts experienced a 9.2 percent decrease in homicide. These findings indicate that the MHRC adds value to understanding violence in our urban communities from a public health perspective.

Homicides are preventable when law enforcement and community service providers intentionally

- think about and develop proactive strategies to reduce the causes of violence and the risk factors associated with violence by examining the social and criminal histories of each individual involved in the case and community-level factors;
- work within and across the local justice systems to develop a comprehensive understanding of the cause of homicides and a multilevel and cross-agency response;
- build or implement the capacity to use, collect, and analyze real-time data, collected from multiple sources, to understand the problem of homicides, develop solutions, and monitor results.

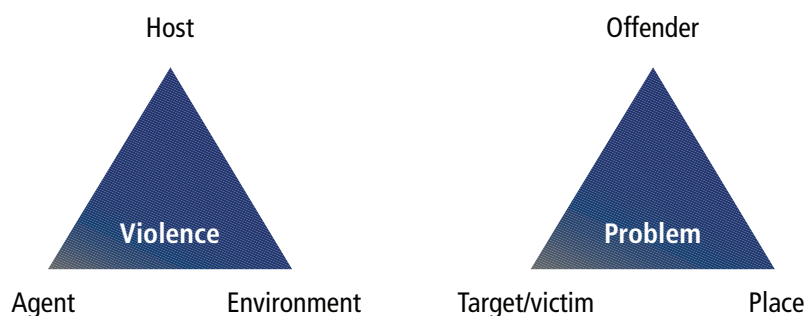
Homicides can be averted and reduced like any other crime or health problem through a combination of prevention, intervention, and suppression.

Homicide review in practice

A homicide review approach recognizes that for an event to occur three elements must be present. In the case of a homicide (or any type of interpersonal crime) these elements are a motivated **offender**, a **victim**, and a **place**. If any single element is removed, the triangle is broken and the event prevented. Unlike approaches that merely try to impact the offender, the crime triangle reveals more options for intervention. Strategies still might aim to reduce motivational factors for offenders, but they also can be directed at reducing risks for potential victims or making places less risky.

Note that the **epidemiologic triangle** used in the public health field to track, contain, and prevent communicable diseases and the crime triangle or problem analysis triangle used by the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing are virtually identical.

Figure 1. Epidemiological triangle and crime triangle



History

Homicide reviews draw on the body work of several fields, including criminal justice and public health. One important antecedent is the **Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS)**. In 1978, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration began using FARS to collect data on fatal motor vehicle crashes in all 50 states. The type of information collected included *environment* (such as type of road, visibility, weather, and time); *vehicle* (make, model, and safety features); *personal traits* (such as demographics, role, injuries, and intoxication); and *driver history* (charges, license, and driving record). This information is examined regularly and used to identify national and local trends in motor vehicle fatalities. FARS data has been instrumental in targeting approaches such as improving roadways and signage, improving vehicle performance and capability, redefining driving regulations, and more effectively targeting penalties for negligent or unsafe driving. Similarly, homicide reviews are a study of the various data points involved in homicides to identify trends and target preventive solutions.²

A useful visual reference for homicide review is the **social ecological model** used in criminology and social work. The concentric circles of the diagram in figure 2 convey that any individual (e.g. victim or offender) is affected by a sphere of external influences. In general, an individual is most impacted by family or other primary group members, followed by the immediate community, the institutional community, and the broader social political and social structure. Visual devices such as the triangles in figure 1 and the social ecological model are useful for showing how opportunities for prevention, intervention, suppression, and deterrence lie outside of the individual offender.

2. For more information of the role of social networks in violence prevention, see Andrew V. Papachristos and Michael Sierra-Arévalo, *Policing the Connected World: Using Social Network Analysis in Police-Community Partnerships* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2018).

Figure 2. Social ecological model



Source: National Institutes of Health, e-Source: Behavioral and Social Sciences Research, <http://www.esourceresearch.org/Default.aspx?TabId=736>. Adapted from U. Bronfenbrenner, "Toward an Experimental Ecology of Human Development, *American Psychologist* 32, no. 7 (1977): 513–531.

Homicide reviews use a four-step process substantially similar to the public health model and the SARA model used by law enforcement.

The public health model of problem solving consists of the following steps:

1. Define the problem
2. Identify risk and protective factors
3. Develop and test prevention strategies
4. Assure widespread adoption of prevention strategies

The SARA model consists of four similar steps:

1. Scanning
2. Analysis
3. Response
4. Assessment

The homicide review process uses the following four steps:

1. Identify the problem
2. Understand the causes of the problem (or analyze the problem and its context)
3. Identify and test solutions or response
4. Ensure long term or community-wide use of the solution

The advantages of the homicide review process

Homicide reviews should be seen as **complementary** to the investigations and crime analysis efforts that police organizations routinely employ. However, homicide reviews are **fundamentally distinct** from the typical work of a police department's investigations and crime analysis units. Homicide review processes incorporate a more systemic and integrative style of problem-solving than is typical in policing. Table 1 distinguishes homicide review's key elements from those of fusion centers / crime analysis and traditional police investigations.

Table 1. Comparison of investigation types

Homicide Reviews	Traditional Crime Analysis	Traditional Police Investigation
Focus on long-term prevention	Provide data for short-term crime reduction initiatives	Focus on solving the initial homicide case and gathering evidence for criminal proceedings
Focus is on underlying cause of homicide and the events, actions, and personality traits of the individuals involved in the homicide	Analyze trends using police department data only	May focus on preventing retaliation
Focus on systemic change and changing organizational policy and practice		
Involves partners outside of the criminal justice system		

Avoiding pitfalls: Dos and don'ts

In order to assure that the proper foundation of any homicide review is firmly set, leadership should commit to understanding and implementing these essential elements of a homicide review:

- Desire and belief that homicides are preventable.
- Willingness to create and sustain strategic partnerships to conduct homicide reviews.
- Building or implementing the capacity to use, collect and analyze real-time data, collected from multiple sources, to understand the problem of homicides, develop solutions and monitor results.
- Finding ways to devote or secure resources including officers and other staff to serve on a homicide review commission.

What's in this box?

This box provides tips for starting your homicide review process. These boxes appear throughout the manual. If you like to skim, then this box is for you.

Module 2. Homicide Review Process

This module describes the key elements of the Milwaukee homicide review process. Its method of using strategic problem-solving and partnerships to reduce homicides can be adapted to other violent crimes.

Learning objectives

- Develop a working knowledge of the key elements of a homicide review.
- Learn the critical partners for any homicide review.
- Develop an understanding of the key problem-solving strategies and partnerships necessary for homicide prevention.
- Learn how to avoid and prevent pitfalls in implementing a homicide review process.

Definition

Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission, Criminal Justice Review, 2014



A homicide review can be defined in several ways: as a partnership, as an event, or as a learning process.

I. Partnership

Homicide reviews provide a platform to problem solve and brainstorm solutions within non-traditional partnerships. Rather than addressing homicides from within silos of individual disciplines and offices, homicide reviews promote the open sharing of information and experiences.

Homicide reviews are attended by a homicide review team, made up of members from various criminal justice and community service agencies. The team is multidisciplinary and multilevel—line staff attend alongside senior staff. It is extremely important that four partners be involved in the process from the very beginning: **police, prosecutors, corrections, and the mayor's office.**

Partnerships are the fundamental reason Homicide Review Commissions (HRC) are successful. Without a diverse and comprehensive set of partners from all disciplines and sectors, an HRC could not function or work toward its goal of homicide prevention. Module 3 of this manual describes the types of partner involved in an HRC, their roles and responsibilities, and the benefits that each partner brings to the table. It describes the most important lessons learned and provides tips for enhancing and maintaining collaborative relationships in the context of a homicide review initiative. Since the core work of the partners is the planning, implementation, and assessment of prevention recommendations derived from the actual homicide review, information about the partnership process as it relates to recommendations is covered in Module 10, in separate sections on criminal justice and community-based partnerships. A list of related resources is included at the end of the module.

II. Event

A homicide review is a **problem-solving** meeting where representatives from criminal justice and community agencies come together to discuss in detail a series of recent homicide cases. From these cases, participants identify gaps or weaknesses in policy and practice and systemic barriers to homicide prevention.

Module 9 covers the overall structure and characteristics of the actual homicide review meeting. We focus on the pre-meeting preparation and provide advice on how to ensure your homicide review meetings are well planned and executed. This section closes with several resources that can help expedite the development of your overall homicide review efforts and optimize the effectiveness of your meetings.

III. Learning Process

Homicide reviews are a systemic process used to examine the underlying causes of homicides in real time and identify and develop strategies to prevent them. **Homicide reviews are highly detailed and data-driven.** They are a platform to share information about the victim's and suspect's demographics (e.g., age, housing status, substance use, relationship to other individuals involved, and criminal history), weapon used (e.g. whether or not the gun was purchased legally, used in another crime, or linked to another offender), and environment (e.g., in the street, near a tavern, or in a house).

Module 10 describes the outcomes of the HRC learning process and the policy and practice recommendations that result.

NOTE: Due to the sensitive nature of the information shared among HRC members, it is important to check with your city attorney's office regarding state privacy laws.

Module 3. Key Partners – Law Enforcement and Community

This module describes the key partners that make up a homicide review commission, their roles and essential responsibilities, and the benefits that each partnership member brings to the table.

Learning objectives

- Learn the key partners of a homicide review commission.
- Learn and understand the roles and responsibilities of each partner.

Law enforcement and criminal justice partners: police, prosecutors, and corrections

Successful criminal justice partnerships are the backbone of a homicide review process; developing and maintaining these relationships is critical. The agencies participating in the criminal justice reviews provide case-specific information that, when combined, completes a detailed picture not only of the event itself, but of many factors leading up to the event, including the points at which intervention might have been successful. Participants from the criminal justice community may come from local, state, and federal agencies and may include police officers and executives, probation and parole agents (juvenile and adult), and attorneys and lead prosecutors. While public defenders typically do not participate in the reviews because of limitations on information sharing, they have participated in drafting and implementing prevention recommendations, especially those related to probation and parole.

As you begin to design your homicide review process, it is extremely important for four primary partners to be involved in the process from the very beginning: police, prosecutors, corrections officials, and the mayor's office. Depending on local circumstances, additional criminal justice partners may include representatives from any of the following:

- Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives
- City Attorney's Office
- Department of Corrections
- District Attorney's Office
- Federal Bureau of Investigation

- High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Task Force members
- Housing Authority
- Medical Examiner's Office
- Office of the Chief Judge
- Public schools
- Sheriff's Department
- State criminal justice investigations
- U.S. Attorney's Office
- U.S. Immigration and Customs
- U.S. Marshall's Office

Police department

A successful review process is not possible without strong leadership and active support by the local police department. The police department must be fully involved from the outset in the development and execution of the review process in any jurisdiction. By its very nature, the review process begins with the police department's initial investigation and data collection. Access to information is vital to developing the data the review uses to identify problems; law enforcement has access to a preponderance of the information relevant to case reviews, as well as the most critical resources for addressing homicides and conditions that give rise to them.

In Milwaukee, police personnel are engaged at every point in the review process; they participate in all of the reviews, in the working group, the executive committee, and the MHRC subcommittees. The MPD is directly involved with the majority of recommendations that result from homicide reviews; line officers participating in reviews are the source of many suggested recommendations and are ultimately responsible for implementing many of them.

District attorney

As with the police department, strong leadership and active support from the District Attorney's Office is also critical to a successful review process. Prosecutors provide valuable information on prosecution cases prior to incident. Prosecutors work closely with police investigators and offices and are frequently involved in investigations with their own in-house investigators. Milwaukee is committed to a community prosecution model and its prosecutors are key implementers of many of this model's prevention, intervention, and suppression strategies. As with the police department, prosecutors' involvement in the homicide review process has led to a cultural shift: Prosecutors now view themselves as problem-solvers working as part of a team, as opposed to reactive agents whose main function is to charge suspects.

Corrections

Corrections is another key partner whose leadership and support is required for a successful review process. Many of the individuals involved in violent crimes have had prior or current contact with the correctional system, including supervision under probation or parole. Understanding the nature of these contacts and convening key stakeholders from local correctional agencies can aid in recidivism reduction strategies. In open homicide cases, basic information such as knowing where recently released detainees reside, work, or hang out can be particularly useful. Knowing which probationers and parolees have histories of violent crime will lead to insights about cases, particularly those involving retaliatory or gang-related violence.

Community partners

Multiple agencies outside of the criminal justice sector also participate as partners in a homicide review process. Government partners may include the medical examiner's office or health and human services agencies, while community partners may include the faith community, other community organizations such as tenant committees, and nonprofit organizations from the affected areas. In addition to its criminal justice partnerships, the MHRC maintains working relationships with dozens of community service providers such as social welfare agencies, community-based organizations, universities, faith-based groups, and other grassroots organizations. These relationships were formed at the start of the MHRC in 2005 and have expanded over the years.

Avoiding pitfalls: Dos and don'ts

In order to assure that the unique characteristics of the homicide review are fully realized, the following guidelines are stressed:

Homicide reviews should be driven by action-oriented partnerships. Every partner agency should gather and share information that informs their understanding of the problem and potential solutions. Every partner should actively be engaged in the successful formation, implementation, assessment, and continuation of prevention strategies.

Homicide reviews should have a long-term view. Every homicide review should be focused on long-term prevention of homicides, not the solving of homicide crimes. The process of a homicide review is to gather information on the events, actions, and personality traits of the individuals involved in the homicide in order to establish patterns and trends that are the underlying causes of homicide.

- Consider starting small and scaling up. Don't try to start out too big—think manageable. Focus on a geographic area or a specific type of homicide cases or both. For example, a jurisdiction could start with all gang/group/crew-related homicides in several districts or precincts, or all youth-related shootings in designated hot spot areas.
- Do not strive to reinvent the wheel. Review resources such as the website of the U.S. DOJ Office of Community Oriented Policing Services Resource Center (<https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ric.php>), including *Promoting Effective Homicide Investigations* (<https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-P139>), and the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing (<https://popcenter.asu.edu/>) for best practices to resolve an identified problem. See what has worked elsewhere for similar problems.

Module 4. Police Department

This module describes the unique role of the police department in a homicide review commission, its essential responsibilities, and the benefits that the police department brings to the table.

Learning objectives

- Learn the key role of the police department in a homicide review commission.
- Learn the key police officer member positions of a homicide review commission.
- Learn and understand the responsibilities of the police department.
- Learn and understand the limits of police action with regard to homicide prevention

Key information

Typically, two police department staff are assigned to the HRC: a police officer and an office assistant. These individuals have **direct access to police department records**, including the records management system, homicide files, National Crime Information Center (NCIC), ATF eTrace, and the state law enforcement network for corrections status.

The HRC will create distinct database for homicides it is investigating. **Case identification and data collection is conducted in real time**; data should be entered into the HRC databases within 12 hours of a homicide. As an investigation progresses, updates and new information are continuously entered into the HRC databases. Numerous standard reports are regularly generated from the database for command staff and officers, and ad hoc customized reports can be generated as the need arises.

A **police officer** (possibly one on limited duty) with a breadth of departmental knowledge and internal credibility is tremendously helpful for navigating both the police department and the criminal justice system. The officer is an invaluable resource, integrating knowledge of personnel, politics, data storage locations, prior initiatives, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and training. It is important to find the right police officer: one who is respected and trusted by peers and can help create a cohesive team. Knowledge of internal records management software, as well as spreadsheet, database, presentation, and word processing programs, is a must. The police officer is involved in everything from creating presentations for the reviews to developing recommendations and helping ensure follow-up.

The **administrative assistant's** primary responsibilities focus on the retrieval, entry, and analysis of case-specific information from both hard copy files and various electronic data systems. Accordingly, the assistant should be proficient in the police department's records management system, NCIC, and various other state systems (like the WILENET in Wisconsin). Knowledge of programs like Excel and Access is very helpful for generating specific data reports. The administrative assistant also manages the HRC's meeting calendar and takes minutes. Key attributes of a successful administrative assistant include good organizational skills and the ability to work with diverse partners from across the criminal justice spectrum, as well as with community representatives.

HRC staff are responsible for retrieving case-specific information from reports on the victims, suspects, locations, and weapon, including criminal history for case presentation.

While not day-to-day members of the review team, criminal investigation personnel from the police department—most often the day shift lieutenant of the homicide division—are responsible for presenting the case overview and investigation to the HRC. These department personnel who participate in the reviews provide additional insight into the incidents. They may know and share information regarding incident location, such as calls for service, nuisance status, drug house status, climate of the neighborhood, gang or drug territory, and law enforcement initiatives in the area; as well as information on the persons involved, such as prior contacts with police, gang or crew involvement and affiliation, involvement in related incidents, family and friends, retaliation likelihood, and other relevant information.

Avoiding pitfalls: Dos and don'ts

As the core organizational partner, the police department can help leverage other agencies to participate in the reviews and the implementation of developed recommendations:

- The police department cannot reduce homicides alone. Success is achieved with the collaboration of partners, both from the criminal justice field and from the community.
- Develop a standard presentation about your review process to share at command staff meetings, in-service trainings, and meetings nonprofit agencies and the community. This presentation should inform the audience of the review process, the types of recommendations generated, and how agencies and personnel are involved. Making the partners and front-line personnel aware of the process and its framework from the outset can help improve data sharing, cooperation, and collaboration. Be prepared to give it often!
- Police departments, like your other partners, will experience staff changes due to promotions, transfers, and attrition. It is especially important to inform each new homicide detective, lieutenant, or captain of your review process and goals. Don't assume that just because the review process is in place that everyone in the police department will be informed about it. In any large department, not all personnel will be aware of and on board with the process.

Module 5. District Attorney

This module describes the unique role that prosecutors from the district attorney's (DA) office serve in a Homicide Review Commission, their essential responsibilities, and the benefits that they bring to the table as part of the law enforcement community.

Learning objectives

- Learn the key role of the prosecutor in a homicide review commission.
- Learn the key prosecutor positions of a homicide review commission.
- Learn and understand the responsibilities of the district attorney's office.
- Learn and understand the limits of legal action with regard to homicide prevention.

Information resource

Prosecutors are involved in every level of the review process. They participate in the reviews by sharing information and actively participating in a HRC's working group, executive committee, and subcommittees. DA offices frequently have specialized prosecution units (drug, homicide, gun, sensitive crimes, domestic violence, community prosecution, etc.), so the type of case being reviewed will influence which prosecutors attend. For example, the domestic violence supervising prosecutor participates in a domestic violence homicide, and the community prosecutors participate in all case reviews, providing community and district perspectives. In cases that involve prior nonfatal shootings, you might request that a violent crimes felony prosecutor or gun prosecutor participate in the reviews as appropriate.

The DA's Office provides detailed information on prior cases it has handled.

Prosecutors present information on the charging history of each victim and suspect in a case, including initial arrest charge, final charging decision, bail, plea, disposition, sentence, and explanation of why prior cases might have been dismissed or not prosecuted. The prosecutors can often provide additional information on related cases or cases presented to the DA's office. Additionally, old case files can be a treasure trove of information, such as mental health issues raised by the defense, instances of witness intimidation, or requests by the victim to have charges dropped. The past behaviors of suspects, victims, witnesses, and other involved parties often provide insight into the current case.

Community prosecutors, firearms prosecutors, and violent crimes prosecutors will likely be the prosecutors most often participating in the reviews. Community prosecutors often have additional detailed information on the neighborhoods involved. Additionally, community prosecutors have active partnerships with community-based organizations in the districts and assist in the implementation of recommendations. In cities that do not follow a community prosecution model, specialized prosecutors should be included. If these prosecutors work on a county-wide or city-wide caseload, attention should still be focused on the community dynamics, including the impact of gangs, their rivalries, and other particular neighborhood characteristics.

Avoiding pitfalls: Dos and don'ts

- Meet regularly with the DA, supervising attorneys, and prosecutors, and provide regular data reports to the DA. Discuss with the DA's office opportunities for the HRC to assist with targeted data collection and analysis around issues raised through the reviews.
- Incorporate prosecutors at every level of the process.
- Develop a key point of contact in the DA's Office who is tasked with working with the HRC and acts as the liaison with the HRC.

Again, homicide review staff should develop a standard presentation that describes your review process and share it with prosecutors. Just as police officers are transferred or promoted, so are prosecutors; be prepared to give your presentation to anyone new who will be working with the HRC. Continue to build and maintain relationships with prosecutors and supervisors. The DA can help leverage other agencies to participate in the reviews and the implementation of developed recommendations.

Related resources

1. Association of Prosecuting Attorneys (visit <http://www.apainc.org/innovative-practices/>).

Module 6. Corrections

This module describes the unique role that parole and probation officers serve in a homicide review commission, their essential responsibilities, and the benefits that they bring to the table as resources on suspects and detainees.

Learning objectives

- Learn the key role of the probation and parole representatives in a homicide review commission.
- Learn and understand the responsibilities of the corrections officials.
- Learn and understand the relationship between corrections officials and community partners.

Basic information

Corrections personnel, including probation and parole agents and their supervisors, are involved at every level of the review process from the review meetings to the activities of the working group, executive committee, and subcommittees. They provide detailed information on offenders' conduct while on supervision, such as prison release dates, urine analysis results, reporting habits, employment, conditions of supervision, and social relationships. Through the information-sharing process, corrections agents and supervisors are instrumental in the development and implementation of new strategies. Understanding the timeline of events between an offender's interaction with their parole or probation officer, their friends, or their release date from detention facilities can help the HRC find markers for homicide prevention intervention. Corrections personnel also provide detail on the individuals' time incarcerated (e.g., services or trainings attended, disciplinary issues), and on the community supervision process (e.g., risk assessment scores, pre-release services, criteria for revocation of supervision).

Avoiding pitfalls: Dos and Don'ts

- Meet regularly with the regional corrections chiefs, supervisors, and agents; provide regular data reports to community corrections departments, specifically on persons with prior contact with corrections.

- Develop a key contact within community corrections departments to serve as a liaison with the HRC, preferably someone just below the regional chief.
- Incorporate agents or supervisors at every level of the process.
- Discuss with community corrections opportunities for the HRC to assist with targeted data collection and analysis around issues raised through the reviews.
- Facilitate ongoing and frequent communication between probation and parole officers working in the field and patrol officers and detectives working in the same community.

In Milwaukee, the Wisconsin Department of Corrections has assigned key field staff to work directly with the police. The MPD has facilitated this process by providing workspace for community corrections staff to work out of police district stations and encouraging police officers and corrections field staff to work in tandem.

Module 7. Partnerships with Community Service Providers

All HRCs should maintain working relationships with community groups and community service providers. This module describes several of the benefits of law enforcement-community-based partnerships, of which the following are the most significant:

1. **Community service agencies provide services that help prevent homicide, violent crimes, and violence from occurring in the first place.** Such agencies provide services designed to increase individual and family functioning and facilitate community building, such as clinical treatment, housing and employment support, and other social services. These services have the potential to reduce the number of individuals and populations at risk for becoming a homicide victim or suspect; they have the potential to transform individuals, communities, and neighborhoods, making them healthier and safer.
2. **Community service agencies typically collect a wealth of non-criminal justice information about the individual, family, neighborhood, or community involved in a homicide that can be used to inform problem-solving discussions and formulate prevention strategies.** Additionally, community service providers have access to information about crimes, disorder, and community discord that police may lack. Some of this information is shared through the intake process for social services, or during individual or group counseling sessions, which can shed light on the problem and the cycle of violence in families and communities. Care is taken to maintain the confidentiality and privacy of the clients or residents working with the community service providers. For example, if community organizers learn from neighborhood residents of a drug house that is pertinent to a case being reviewed, they can share the address and occupant descriptions that law enforcement needs while protecting the anonymity of the neighbors who may fear retaliation. Working through the frontline workers of the service providers protects the residents while giving them an opportunity to make change in their neighborhood.

Learning objectives

- Learn the key role of the community service providers in a homicide review commission.
- Learn and understand the types of community service providers and the information they can share.

- Learn and understand the expectations for community service providers.
- Learn how to identify, recruit and engage community service providers in the homicide review process.

Types of partners

Since homicides affect a variety of populations, neighborhoods and communities, the types of partners that participate in homicide reviews should be very diverse. MHRC partners include large and small agencies, some that explicitly focus on violence or crime prevention and some that don't: grassroots organizations, multi-service and multi-issue organizations, older and newer nonprofit organizations, and groups that are themselves coalitions or collaboratives.

It is extremely important to involve the following five types of partners in your homicide review process from the beginning:

1. **Local agencies known for their work in violence or crime prevention.** It makes sense for these agencies to be involved, since their work will immediately be impacted by the work of your homicide review.
2. **Substance abuse and narcotics trafficking specialists.** These groups are important to involve since many homicide victims and suspects are either users or sellers of drugs.
3. **Mental health providers.** These are essential since many homicide victims or suspects experienced childhood and adult trauma and many have clinical mental health diagnoses or have received treatment for acute symptoms.
4. **Criminal justice specialists, such as halfway houses and case managers for individuals on supervision.** This is especially important, since most homicide suspects and many victims have a criminal history that includes incarceration and convictions for many types of crimes.
5. **Youth workers and community organizers.** Groups that work with youth, such as block watch clubs, neighborhood associations, and faith groups, are critical, since the age range for the highest risk of being an offender or a victim spans the teens and early twenties. Youth workers and community organizers also have a finger on the pulse of local neighborhoods and are aware of changes in the attitudes, dynamics, and behaviors of their residents.

In addition to the above areas, the MHRC partners represent the following areas of expertise:

- Aging, social security benefits
- Conflict resolution, mediation
- Counseling, group therapy
- Crisis management
- Domestic violence shelters
- Economic development
- Education, GED preparation
- Employment training, jobs
- Faith-based services and healing
- Fatherhood, parenting, and family development
- Healthy relationships
- Homeless youth, families, and residents
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues
- Men's health
- Mental health treatment
- Multicultural and culture-specific programming
- Neighborhood development
- Prostitution
- Reproductive health
- Sexual assault, rape, and child sexual abuse
- Women's health, pregnancy
- Youth development and programming

The types of community service provider professional staff participating in a homicide review varies and can include social workers, nurses, project managers or directors, field staff, group facilitators, counselors, and community organizers.

Identifying Community Service Providers

The MHRC has found the following strategies to identify community service providers helpful:

- Asking existing partners to identify practitioners and agencies and make referrals to the MHRC.
- Searching online and reviewing the agency's website for fit and relevancy.
- Making cold calls or sending emails to potential partners.

Recruitment and engagement of community partners

Finding the right partner agency—and then the right staff person inside the agency—is probably the hardest part of establishing the right community service partnerships. In the MHRC experience, once the agency has been identified and engaged, most will dedicate staff and other resources to the homicide review process. Recruitment of partner agencies may be completed by the city agency or authority leading the HRC initiative, or by HRC staff, as discussed in Module 9, starting on page 41.

There is no rule of thumb to follow when selecting partner staff, but generally participants should be well-regarded in their fields and have the ability, willingness, and conviction to critique existing policies, practices, or programs in a constructive way. There is no test the partner can take for you to determine this; it's a judgement you need to make, based on your interaction with the agency or staff person. MHRC meetings are attended by line staff, mid-level supervisors, and executive directors. All personnel levels are important for the discussion and no one level has more desired characteristics than others.

Other attributes that you should consider when selecting agencies and staff are listed in table 2 on page 27.

Table 2. Desirable attributes of community service partners

Agency	Staff Person Attending the Review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Known for providing quality services • Known for developing successful partnerships • Specializes in a related issue area or with a specific population, or provides a specific service or strategy important to homicide prevention • Engages in public policy and other advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is well-regarded and knowledgeable in a particular system, policy, issue area, or target population • Has time to attend meetings and participate in follow up activities • Has the experience or ability to assess problems at the macro level, such as organizational practices or citywide initiatives • Has decision-making authority for the agency or has direct access to decision-makers • Is able to critique the work of other partners and raise questions without passing judgment

The second hardest (and ongoing) challenge is finding the community service providers that have directly or indirectly served the homicide victim or suspect or their neighborhoods. In each community there is only a single networked criminal justice sector; one police department, one department of corrections, and one court system. In the community service sector, there may be dozens of agencies providing substance abuse treatment, dozens of shelters, and dozens of youth service organizations. **Finding the particular one(s) that served the persons (or families) involved in the homicide is no easy task, and sometimes you will not be successful.** In addition to the challenges of identifying the right service provider, providers might face additional challenges in determining whether they have served any of the individuals involved. For example:

- Most nonprofits do not use the same unique identifiers as the police department providing the data, nor do they usually have electronic and searchable files using the person's name, birth date, social security number, or driver's license number.
- Paper files often are used instead of electronic files, making the search impractical.
- Client files sometimes are organized by program rather than client, making the search for a client difficult (the agency would have to eliminate duplicate names and search for the person program by program).
- Files older than about five years may be routinely destroyed, stored offsite, and otherwise unavailable.

Maintaining Relationships with Community Service Partners

At the MHRC, the project director and associate researcher are responsible for maintaining ongoing partnerships with community service partners, including attending partner organization events. At their first meeting with the partner, they provide a meeting schedule, a short flyer describing the program, a capability statement, and the prevention model guidebook. The purpose of the meeting, meeting format, and activities are reviewed with key stakeholders from the agency or organization.

Once agencies begin to participate in your homicide review, it is the homicide review staff's responsibility to keep information flowing to and from that agency and to other agency partners. Integrating new partners into the homicide review meeting is covered in module 9 on page 41, and sustaining partnerships via recommendations is covered in module 10 on page 51. Beyond engaging partners during meetings or during the planning and implementation of recommendations, MHRC staff do the following:

- Attend partner-led events, including community forums or roundtables and annual recognitions.
- Share data regularly and consistently and provide data that can be used in grant proposals, and during program development.
- To the extent practical and affordable, provide advice and technical assistance about improving internal data systems and enhancing the sharing of data in the homicide review process.
- Support partner-led initiatives by writing letters of support, participating in task forces, and supporting their work in other ways outside of the homicide review process.

The benefits from engaging community service providers are infinite. Many resources can be leveraged by involving a range of community service providers in the homicide review. Some examples of the types of resources leveraged at the MHRC include the following:

- Facilitating workshops and presentations for services providers about criminal justice issues. For example, teen pregnancy prevention programs benefit from learning about domestic violence homicide prevention.
- Conducting secondary research for partner presentations, publications, and grant applications.

- Placing college interns within partner organizations. The MHRC supervised 25 undergraduate and graduate students between 2005 and 2018. Having future practitioners and leaders work with community organizations benefits the interns, the organizations, and the homicide review process.

Theory of change

Each agency's work is guided by a theory of change—a set of assumptions about problems, possible solutions, and anticipated results. Theories of change provide potential springboards for partnerships relevant to violence reduction. These are four of the most basic theories of change that guide the work of potential community partners:

- **Social ecological model.** This model of change emphasizes the role community, public policy, and large social systems play in an individual and their social network's behaviors and attitudes, overall health and well-being, economic status, and sociopolitical and cultural opportunities. The social ecological model is used largely by public health and social service agencies.³
- **Stages of change.** This model focuses on the person undergoing the change. As an individual's behavior changes to a positive or prosocial behavior, that individual goes through five stages of change: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. This framework is also used by social service agencies.
- **Life stage development.** Individuals (as well as families, groups, social network, neighborhoods, and communities) go through mental, physical, and sociocultural stages of development. At each stage, certain milestones should be achieved and can be measured. Trauma, including interpersonal violence and physical injury, can delay or expedite the developmental process. This theory is used to explain many behaviors, such as why child sexual abuse survivors often engage in high-risk sex or are addicted to substances. This theory of change is used by medical, behavior health, mental health, and social service providers.⁴
- **Motivational interviews / appreciative inquiry.** These concepts shift the therapeutic process from solely looking at "what's wrong" to looking at "what's right." These approaches do not change the intended outcomes of social or clinical interventions. This theory of change is used by social workers, counselors, and other front-line providers, including community corrections.⁵

3. L.L. Dahlberg LL and E.G. Krug, "Violence-A Global Public Health Problem," in Krug, Dahlberg, J.A. Mercy, A.B. Zwi, and R. Lozano, eds., *World Report on Violence and Health* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2002, 1–56).

4. Child Development Institute, "Stages of Social-Emotional Development in Children and Teenagers," accessed January 19, 2020, <http://www.childdevelopmentinfo.com/development/erickson.shtml>.

5. Stephen Rollnick and William R. Miller, "What is Motivational Interviewing?" *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy* 23, no. 4. (October 1995): 325–334.

Avoiding pitfalls: Dos and don'ts

Here are a few things to consider as you develop your homicide review program and engage community service providers:

1. Develop partnerships with agencies—not just with individual staff members. As the partnership grows, it is important to intentionally learn about the entire organization. As staff are promoted within the organization—or leave it—and are no longer able to participate in the reviews, having working relationships with other staff ensures a smooth transition. That is, you do not have to start the relationship again with a new person and other participating agencies at the homicide do not have to become acquainted with an entirely new partner.

2. Not every partner will participate in every homicide review, but all should be expected to help with recommendations under appropriate and relevant circumstances. Both types of partnerships are valuable. For example, advocacy groups for the homeless may not have a stake in most homicide reviews, but should be involved in cases involving homeless victims or offenders.

3. Law enforcement officials should know an organization or program's theory of change and share their own theories of change. Each organization or program has an operating framework (plus terminology) that guides their work. Understanding an organization's framework will help identify opportunities to connect their work to the work of other partner agencies and to specific strategies.

4. Homicide review staff must attend partner events and participate in partner initiatives if you expect them to participate in the homicide review. It is important to reciprocate and support partner-led efforts.

5. Engage agencies before you actually need them to participate in a review or assist with a recommendation, so that they can learn about the process before they are asked to dive in and support the group's effort.

6. Many of the partners you will want to engage must adhere to strict confidentiality policies. These policies (e.g., HIPAA, FERPA, and other confidentiality laws or practices) should not impede the homicide review process. Law enforcement officials are probably well aware of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), as well as the confidentiality policies of other government-private institutions that serve children and other vulnerable populations. Under these acts, agencies must follow strict standards to protect client

information. The MHRC has had success with engaging agencies that adhere to HIPAA or FERPA by creating memorandums of understanding (see relevant appendices) and other safeguards. For example:

- The MHRC receives information about shelter use only on homicide victims (not suspects or other living persons involved with the case), as per the agencies' safeguards to protect client data.
- The MHRC receives personally identifiable information about cases from a large social service provider which adheres to strict privacy standards. Its sharing of this information follows guidelines set out in a memorandum of understanding with the provider.

7. Law enforcement agencies should use Community Liaison Officers (CLOs), Community Police Officers, or similar staff to identify ways that law enforcement agencies can bridge the culture gap between the two sectors. Milwaukee the Milwaukee Police Department CLOs and Community Prosecution Units work together in neighborhoods to address nuisance properties, such as drug houses or after-set party houses. Officers from these units often have work relationships with the service providers. During their reviews, the two sectors have an opportunity to process and reflect through facilitated discussions about information sharing and best practices, helping them devise collaborative response strategies.

Related resources

- Sample MOUs: [Milwaukee County Offender Reentry Program \(MCORP\)](#)
- How to Prepare for a Homicide Review Tip Sheet: [Community Service Providers, Law Enforcement](#)
- [Community Service Provider Review Flyer](#)
- [Community Service Provider Review – Summary of Annual Recommendations](#)
- [Community Service Provider Review – Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Community Service Provider Area of Expertise Grid](#)
- [List of affiliated universities and related projects](#)
- [Intersections: Homicides and Other Issues](#)



Module 8. The Homicide Review Commission – Organization and Governance

The previous modules discussed the key partners for a Homicide Review Commission—the police department, district attorney, department of corrections, and various community partners and service providers. As mentioned in module 2 on page 11, homicide reviews have key elements: a partnership, an event, and a learning process. This module discusses the partnership element in further detail.

Learning objectives

- Develop an understanding of the structure of a homicide review commission—who leads?
- Learn the key staff of a homicide review commission and their respective roles.
- Develop an understanding of the importance of fairness and neutrality in HRC meetings.
- Learn the key startup costs in establishing an HRC.

Infrastructure and governance

The operation and control of any homicide review body will depend on what agency leads the initiative. For example, if the police department leads the initiative, then the control of the homicide review body will depend on the extent to which leadership within the police command shares and divides the governing, resources, and responsibilities with other partners.

Building the homicide review body also depends on local administrative and political environments.⁶ The Milwaukee Homicide Review model was built upon three key structures: an **executive committee**, a **working group**, and **core staff**.

The **executive committee** is the first tier of a homicide review commission's governing structure. It can be made up of 25–30 senior-level representatives from city and state agencies and community partner organizations. Core agencies typically include the police department, city or county district attorney's office, corrections department, and local FBI field office. Other

6. The instructions in this training manual are built upon the Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission model. In that model, leadership for the initiative came from the Milwaukee Police Department, who received funding from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) at the U.S. Department of Justice to establish and provide staffing for a Homicide Review Commission.

important parties might include the director of public schools and a local domestic violence service provider, who are valuable additions to help address youth issues and domestic violence. In the MHRC, partners have consisted of senior representatives from the following offices:

- Attorney General
- Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives
- Chief Judge
- Chief of Police
- City Attorney
- Commissioner of Health
- District Attorney
- Executive directors of local nonprofits
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
- Mayor of Milwaukee
- Researchers at local universities
- School Superintendent
- Secretary of Department of Corrections
- U.S. Attorney

An executive committee is responsible for approving recommendations and assisting with the implementation of the recommendations. Members may meet every other month but should initially meet monthly.

A **working group** is the second tier of a homicide review commission's governing structure and meets monthly. The working group consists of 10–15 mid-level representatives from many of the same organizations as the executive committee and does the preliminary groundwork for individual homicide reviews. It also serves as the primary conduit for most recommendations that require executive-level approval and support.

Organizational Structure

Consider the following when developing plans for the governance structure of your homicide review initiative:

- The governing body should be made up of decision-makers with the authority to formally approve recommendations, initiate and modify policy and practice, and allocate resources (including money, staff, and supplies) to support the implementation and continuation of a recommendation.
- The governing body should meet regularly (e.g., every 3–4 months) to keep abreast of the homicide review team’s work.
- The representatives of the mayor, police chief, district attorney, and head of corrections should all be a part of the executive committee. Working group representatives might include mid-level managers as well as persons with hands-on experience in dealing with homicides, shootings, or other types of crime being reviewed.

Staffing

Staffing levels for any homicide review group will depend on the resources the lead agencies or municipal authorities devote to its establishment, by the scope of crimes it reviews, and the volume of those crimes. In Milwaukee, the MHRC has employed two to four full-time staff from different partner agencies. In addition, graduate, undergraduate, and law school students and interns also provide administrative and research support. **Core staff** should include a **program director**, **one police officer** dedicated to the homicide review commission, **a city employee** (office assistant), and **one researcher or data analyst**. Sample staff roles, responsibilities, and division of work are listed in table 3 on page 36.

Table 3. Homicide review staffing

Staff Title	Roles, Responsibilities, Division of Work
Homicide Review Program Director	Lead technical assistance provider Primary liaison to criminal justice practitioners, including Chief of Police, Secretary of Department of Corrections, District Attorney, and Mayor's Office Primary liaison to community service providers and related interventions Supervises HRC staff and manages project budget Data analysis Manages reporting
Police Officer	Prepares and presents homicide, near-fatal shooting, and domestic violence cases during homicide reviews Liaison to community service providers and related interventions
Office Assistant	Schedules meetings Organizes project files when appropriate Maintains project files, including meeting notes
Researcher/Homicide Review Program Associate	Builds collaborative partnerships among nonprofit professionals Supports and contributes to reporting Data analysis

The MHRC has had four paid staff since its inception. Under optimal funding conditions, this staffing level could be doubled, which would allow for greatly expanded data collection, analysis, and dissemination. Alternative models of staffing could include assignment of additional police officers and hiring more program or research assistants.

Getting Off the Ground

Consider the following when refining your homicide review initiative:

- Start small and scale up.
- Be realistic and match resources to your initial focus. Startup staffing and decisions about the scope of effort should be based on the time and efforts key partners can afford to devote. Expansion will garner more favorable views after you establish a process and a successful track record.
- If reviewing every homicide is too burdensome, consider reviewing homicides that occur in a particular geographic area (e.g. north side cases, police district five's cases), or review homicides among select populations or problem areas (e.g., gang-related homicides, youth homicides, domestic violence-related homicides, drug-related homicides, or homicides occurring in designated hot spots).
- Adjust to standard investigation processes and cycles. Allow 2–3 weeks for the police to investigate the homicide prior to calling the case up for review. This will ensure sufficient time for facts to come in and for investigators to collect and organize relevant information.
- Actively involve community organizations and leaders in the review process. Given the sensitivity of information shared, you may elect to have a separate review meeting examining cleared or solved cases. In Milwaukee, community organization meetings only address cleared or solved cases.
- You do not have to provide extensive technical assistance or engage in capacity building during the first few years of your homicide review initiative. It will take at least two years to get the kinks out of the process just by focusing on homicide reviews.

Fairness and neutrality

For most major urban areas, we recommend at least one paid full-time employee responsible for putting the data-intensive reviews together and supporting the development and implementation of recommendations. To the extent possible, this person should be a **“neutral convener”** and not report to any of the principle agencies (e.g., police department, mayor's office). This helps maintain objectivity and a sense of equality among partner agencies. This staff person should be fully familiar with the criminal justice sector and have established relationships within that sector. In some instances, a public health professional or researcher has been the “neutral convener.”

If it is not possible for the convener to be part of a neutral agency, all efforts should be directed at preventing bias and assuring that partner agencies are on equal footing. For instance, a jurisdiction might delegate this responsibility to a research or crime analysis division within the local police department that has a reputation for objective and independent analysis and evaluation and that works well with other city and county agencies.

Review commissions that also monitor homicide trends with the level of detail required will need a full-time or part-time staff person dedicated to data extraction and data entry. In smaller jurisdictions with lower volumes of homicides (or other crimes of focus), this position may be assigned to staff that are expected to multitask.

Review teams should involve a dedicated person assigned to analyze the data. This should be someone with training and experience in applied statistical analysis and who is intimately familiar with the capacities and limitations of agency data and the data collection process. Familiarity with standard U.S. Census data and the capacity to produce maps with computerized geographic information system (GIS) software is a plus, particularly in larger urban jurisdictions.

Costs

The cost to run a homicide review program will vary by locality and scope of effort. The cost to run MHRC at the time of this writing is approximately \$225,000 per year. The bulk of MHRC's current budget is for staff salaries and benefits. However, in the first year of operation, a network server, several desktop computers and laptops, a projector, several office desks, one printer, one fax, several office phones, wall dividers, and other office supplies were purchased. Light snacks were provided at each review for the first four years of the project. An updated database worth over \$10,000 and additional software purchases were made in later years. Agencies should consider similar startup and operational costs in their budget processes.

Funding sources will vary by locality. The MHRC has been entirely grant funded. Multi-year grants paid for staff and supplies. In its seventh year of operation, MHRC began receiving federal funding in the form of cooperative agreements, fee-for-service evaluation contracts, and general operating support grants from local foundations to sustain the project.

Funding Your Homicide Review

Consider these tips to fund your homicide review initiative:

- Partner agencies can designate a staff person to the project. This means you can start your project without writing a grant.
- Partner agencies can reallocate computers, work stations, and meeting spaces for the benefit of the homicide review initiative.
- Using or adapting Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission forms and template databases can save time, costs, and other resources.
- In its current form, Milwaukee Homicide Review funding comes from a variety of governmental and charitable sources dedicated to criminal justice, public health, education, and human services.

Avoiding pitfalls: Dos and don'ts

- Ideally, the homicide review director and other senior staff should be independent of and not directly answer to the chief of police, mayor's office, or other governing agency. In this way, the work of the homicide review team is more likely to be seen as neutral and guided by data rather than by the political agendas of appointed and elected officials. In Milwaukee, the MHRC has used an outside facilitator from an area university who already had extensive relationships with law enforcement, criminal justice, and community partners.
- Homicide review staff, particularly staff that enter data and perform data analysis, should be physically located in the police department and be cleared to obtain full access to homicide data in real time. In practice, this means the data entry and analysis person should be an official staff member of the homicide review team. Ideally, staff computers should be connected to the police server and should have unrestricted access to paper and electronic homicide files, including photos and police investigation logs.
- Consider a case-control evaluation model and conduct a formal evaluation of the homicide review initiative in order to assess whether your homicide review process is working. This evaluation should be of sufficient length—perhaps two years—to allow for development and full implementation. Properly conducted, your evaluation could help determine if the results found in Milwaukee can be replicated in other jurisdictions.

- Homicide review staff should be onsite and accessible to police administrators. They should also have access to police-maintained information systems. Being onsite helps support active and agile problem-solving, as well as timelier implementation of interventions.
- Seek out multiyear, general support grants that fund core staff. Seed funding for the first two years is essential to develop and implement the program and measure results, including initial reductions in homicide rates. General support funding also allows staff to provide unlimited and wide-ranging technical assistance to any government, private, academic, medical, or human services agency that requests it.
- If resources exist, consider holding all reviews at least monthly to avoid a backlog of cases that need to be reviewed. Participants appreciate reviewing cases in near real time, and, more importantly, this aids in recall and helps assure that recommendations are timely and relevant to the conditions at hand.
- Other cities have adapted the Milwaukee approach to focus on different subsets of crime. In its early adaptation of the Milwaukee approach, Chicago has elected to engage in place-based problem solving, initially developing its review process around youth-involved shootings in particular high crime areas.

Related resources

Unless other addresses are specified, resources may be found at

<https://www.mcw.edu/departments/epidemiology/people/mallory-o-brien-phd>.

- [Excerpt from National Institute of Justice Two-Year Evaluation of Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission](#)
- [Map of Intervention and Control Districts](#)
- [MHRC Prevention Model, Achievements, and Future Directions](#)
- Sample Reports ([2010 Data Report](#), [2011 Mid-Year Report](#), [2013 Data Report](#), [Police Chief's Report 09/10/2014](#), [Police Chief's Report 09/14/2014](#))
- [Wisconsin Medical Journal article about homicide review](#)
- [News articles about homicide review](#)
- [Confidentiality Statement](#)
- [Copy of Meeting Minutes for Homicide Review, Working Group, and Executive Committee](#)

Module 9. Review Meetings—Nuts and Bolts

Holding homicide review meetings is a crucial component for any productive homicide review initiative. The homicide review meeting is made up of many interdependent functional components and each must be carried out successfully. This section covers the overall structure and characteristics of the actual homicide review meeting. We focus on the pre-meeting preparation and post-meeting activities, and provide advice on how to ensure your homicide review meetings are well planned and executed. This section closes with several resources that can help expedite the development of your overall homicide review efforts and optimize the effectiveness of your meetings, whether they are devoted to the review of homicides or of other non-fatal crimes of a serious nature.

Learning objectives

- Develop an understanding of the steps necessary to plan and execute homicide review meetings.
- Learn the five key components of a homicide review meeting.
- Develop an understanding of the importance of the steps that should be taken following each homicide review meeting.

Meeting preparation

Prior to each meeting, homicide review staff carries out the following tasks:

1. **Each new homicide case is entered into a homicide database** (see **appendix** on page 59) and **existing entries are updated as needed**. Note: Suspect and clearance data is often updated regularly (even if the case is more than a year old) as new suspects are identified and as cases clear. It takes an average of four hours to complete all data entry related to one new homicide incident.
2. **For every homicide, staff completes a referral form with the victim's next of kin contact information and emails the form to a victim services program**. It usually takes about twenty minutes to locate next of kin information and complete the form.

3. **An electronic file is created and used to store all materials about the case.** Files are arranged by victim name. The file contains the police report, victim and suspect criminal histories, list of police contacts at incident location, victim and suspect supervision history, copy of the criminal complaint, medical examiner's and corrections data, and completed HRC forms. It takes about one hour to make copies and fill out various forms to maintain this electronic file.
4. **A list of cases, meeting dates, times and locations, and related announcements are sent out to participants two weeks prior to the review meeting.** The meeting schedule and location of each meeting is developed at the beginning of the year and participants are given the 12-month schedule at the first review of the year. Identifying the appropriate meeting participants is a dynamic process; the participant email list is updated as participant emails are changed and as individuals are added or removed from the list. Participants are sent additional reminders and, if it is determined that a specific stakeholder must be part of the discussion, a call is made to that person. It typically takes about 25 minutes to develop the list of cases, draft the email reminder, update the list of participants, and respond to any questions.
5. **A slide show presentation is developed for each homicide.** All cases are assembled in one presentation and listed in chronological order unless another arrangement is needed. It takes about 1 to 2 hours of staff preparation time to become familiar with each case and create the slide deck for the case. Note: Information on each review meeting is stored on the project's server. Copies of presentations are rarely given out to participants for security reasons.
6. **Staff are asked to be prepared to provide an update on the previous meeting.** This sometimes requires staff to reach out to partner agencies responsible for a follow up item or recommendation shortly before the next meeting.

Presentations created by HRC staff should be the focal point of each review meeting. For each case, slides are presented that detail all relevant information about each incident. Use the latest information or data available at the time of the review. A homicide lieutenant or violent crimes lieutenant, typically from the district in which the homicide occurred, leads the review, one incident at a time, while HRC staff act as recorders. Standard data presented include the dates, time, and location of the incident; the age, sex, and race of the victim(s) and offender(s); the weapons used in the incidents; and the criminal histories of the individuals involved in the incidents. These data are supplemented by information provided by line-level law enforcement involved in the investigation. Often these officers include community liaison officers and community prosecution unit officers who provide a detailed understanding of the

violence and criminal networks, including ongoing neighborhood conflicts, recent changes in the neighborhood, and other information about the social dynamics of the area, such as knowledge of active neighborhood associations and block watches.

Timely data is essential to your homicide review initiative. The police department is the source for all initial information about a homicide. It helps to have at least one member of the homicide review team with full access to police data. This person should ideally be physically placed in the police department to gather information about homicides as they occur.

Meeting structure and facilitation

The meeting should be structured into three sections: an informational meeting, a brainstorming and problem-solving meeting, and a planning and decision-making meeting.

Within these sections, the overall structure of the meeting can be broken down into five steps. Steps 2–4 are carried out for each homicide incident (even if it involved more than one victim). Reserve 15 minutes for Step 1, 90 minutes for Steps 2–4, and 15 minutes for Step 5. Overall, the meeting should take about 15 minutes per case on average. The five steps are as follows:

Informational

1. **Opening remarks.** These include updates from the previous meetings, upcoming activities, and other announcements. Typically, participants introduce themselves at the beginning of the meeting, giving their name, title, and agency/police assignment (e.g., Anti-Gang Unit, Police District 1). At the first meeting of the year, changes in approach are discussed and an analysis of the previous year's homicides is presented. A presentation of the number of homicide and nonfatal shooting victims and incidents (year to date of the meeting) is presented. A total is provided for police district and the entire city. Any particular trends in homicide types (e.g., changes in the number or proportion of gang-related homicides or among particular populations, such as the homeless) are also detailed.
2. **Presentation of homicide cases initiated since the previous review.** Usually this is conducted under the lead of the police officer assigned to the MHRC. This presentation lays out what is formally known about the suspect(s), victim(s), witnesses, known associates (gang membership or previous co-arrestees), location (address and neighborhood), and circumstances surrounding the incident. Data on victims, offenders, and key witnesses includes their criminal histories. Because the individuals involved in a homicide are often part of the same social circles or networks, expanding the focus beyond suspects to

victims and associates provides a more contextual understanding of the homicide and its circumstances. A homicide unit lieutenant reviews the presentation and delivers up to date information on the cases.

3. **Agency report outs.** In this step, each partner shares what they know about the victim, suspect, witnesses, persons of interest, weapon (if firearm), location, and circumstances of the incident. Because many persons involved as suspects and victims of homicides and shootings have extensive criminal and juvenile delinquency histories, there is often a great deal of detailed information available about individuals' or families' institutional involvement, particularly among veterans of the criminal justice system. Even if they do not have direct experience with the individual suspect or victim, the discussants may bring forth pertinent information about family members—for example, that the arrest and prosecution of an older sibling revealed the family to be a multigenerational gang-involved household known in the neighborhood.

Brainstorming and Problem Solving

4. **Group problem solving and discussion of possible prevention strategies.** Having presented case summaries and gleaned additional information from discussants, the meeting facilitator next turns the discussion to forging recommendations, with an emphasis on intra- and interagency policies and practices and potential changes to city, state, or federal laws and regulations.

Planning and Decision-Making

5. **Summary of follow up items and action steps.** Based on the preceding discussion, the meeting facilitator reviews and clarifies the actionable recommendations that arose during the meeting, including the persons assigned to follow up, and makes other concluding remarks. It is at this point that the facilitator may connect the dots between events—for example, homicides and shootings that appear related to an active gang rivalry or those involving a unique type of weapon).

Meeting facilitation tips

As mentioned in the previous module, **neutral facilitation is needed** to ensure all partner agency information is shared in the time allotted and that the discussion includes adequate identification of the underlying problems and possible solutions, including recommending changes to the entire system of response to homicides.

Skilled facilitation of HRC meetings requires the ability to keep participants' attention focused, to provide all participants a chance to contribute, and to tactfully redirect the discussion when individual discussants dominate the conversation or discuss irrelevant details. There are many resources available on how to facilitate meetings and establish the group as a collaborative committed to ongoing work. Describing the different meeting styles and facilitation skills needed goes beyond the purpose of this section and this training manual.

A **neutral facilitator** actively participates in the discussion, moving it from information-sharing to problem-solving by doing the following:

Information sharing

- Ask clarification questions and ask participants to explain agency-specific or sector-specific acronyms or labels. This will help other participants understand the material being presented and become familiar with the internal processes of different organizations.
- Call on participants who are less engaged or do not readily speak up during the meeting. This might include young or junior-level staff persons and staff new to their positions.
- Incorporate some team building opportunities during the break (e.g., introduce participants to each other).
- Ensure the conversation is moving forward and is not repetitive or irrelevant.
- Ask basic questions such as “Do we have all the information we need to identify the problem or solution?”
- Ask open-ended questions that push participants to examine the underlying issue and develop solutions on their own using the information shared at the meeting. While asking these questions, the facilitator should have a sense of which agency or participant to call on first so that information is shared in a coherent and organized manner. This ensures participants are not confused by, or dismissive of, the circumstances leading up to or contributing to the homicide.

Brainstorming and problem solving

- Balance the discussion between criminal justice and non–criminal justice strategies and primary and secondary prevention strategies. Homicide prevention strategies are wide-ranging and affect every sector and multiple communities. Homicide prevention strategies should be thought of as existing on a continuum from prevention to suppression.
- Politely redirect participants who make comments such as “this homicide could never have been prevented” so that the group continues to think of homicide as a preventable act. **For some agencies, thinking about homicides as something that can be prevented is part of a larger cultural shift toward primary prevention rather than enforcement- and intervention-centered approaches.**

Recommendations

- Acknowledge all potential solutions and give equal consideration to each solution. The facilitator should look for ways to demonstrate that seemingly unrelated or opposing solutions are actually part of a continuum of response. Facilitators should thank participants for their input and suggestions and encourage participation by anyone who has relevant information.
- Summarize participant comments to reiterate the main points. Summaries should be stated in a way that makes the connection between the participant’s point and the potential implications for changing a system stronger and clearer.

Other meeting facilitation tips

The meeting format can change and should be reflective of stages of group development.

- In your first few homicide reviews, formally mention the goals of the group and outline the homicide review meeting process (the five steps mentioned earlier). After the group has met for 6 to 12 months, expectations will become clear and institutionalized. However, you can remind the group of the program’s goals and process at least twice per year or as needed.
- Prepare new members of the group before the meeting by contacting them individually, and then check in with them during the break to get their perspectives on the meeting and to see if they need anything different from the facilitator.

- Intentionally incorporate new participants into the discussion—especially those who are least likely to speak during the review—by providing them with opportunities to successfully participate in the meeting.
- Continue to have participants introduce themselves if new members are attending the group and if group members do not yet know each other.
- Assist members with developing a **shared analysis** of the problem of violence in your jurisdiction by reminding them of past observations, trends, and insights developed by the group in previous meetings.

Note: A **shared analysis** is created when members go through a collaborative process to identify a problem and its origins, understand a problem's nuances, and consider implications for possible solutions. This shared analysis is useful for getting participants on the same page when discussing a problem. Having the same level of analysis is also useful, such as a set of aggregate information shared by all agencies on an identified group of individuals.

It's all in the details

Preparing new members for the meeting includes explaining the meeting's goals and overall structure, sharing stated and unstated group rules and norms (particularly the guideline that the meeting isn't to point fingers or blame participants), sharing information about past and current recommendations relevant to their organization or area of work, and suggesting immediate ways that they can participate in a recommendation (if applicable). If your relationship with the participating agency is new, attend their events and ask to observe their program until you get a sense of what they do.

Disagreements, arguments, or other conflicts should be anticipated and resolved prior to the homicide review meeting or curtailed during the meeting so that the discussion is fruitful for everyone. The neutral facilitator should do the following:

- Do their homework and anticipate tension between partners, either as a result of the homicide case or of external factors (e.g., the partners were competing for a grant). The facilitator should be aware of partner agencies' perspectives, biases, past work histories with other participating agencies (including conflicts), typical response to conflict, and whether any formal statements have been made about the case to media by the partner agency.
- Keep a pulse on individual participant triggers. The facilitator should have a keen ability to read group dynamics and a sense of when to take a meeting break, change the subject, or ask questions to defuse a tense conflict between participants.

- Remain neutral and objective, offering solutions and continuing to ask tough questions. Questions ideally should acknowledge the conflict, but transform the issue of contention back into a problem-solving discussion.

Note-taking and post-meeting activities

Typed notes are taken by a homicide review staff person and are very important to the homicide review process. Key points shared during the review are typed almost verbatim and used to follow up and track recommendations. Other staff take notes during the review, and their notes are used to fill in missing information in the final set of notes. Notes are sometimes transformed into handouts for future meetings.

While the homicide review meeting forms the foundation of the process, follow-up events are vitally important. The meeting and recommendations must be memorialized, and momentum must be maintained. Post-meeting activities are fairly straightforward:

1. Meeting notes (used internally by homicide review staff) are drafted and stored in electronic files (each review has its own electronic file on a secure server).
2. Immediately after the review (on the same day or the next day), staff are quickly assigned follow-up activities and begin working on those activities, such as reaching out to the appropriate partner agencies.
3. At the next staff meeting and working group meeting the recommendations from each level of review are discussed and next steps (including persons responsible) are identified.
4. The executive committee receives an update on the annual priority recommendations and other transformative recommendations as needed. Sometimes the update is a short piece on the agenda or a full-length presentation.

Gauging Success

How you know if your homicide review is successful?

- Agencies continue to send staff to the reviews.
- Staff members contribute to the discussion and are more and more prepared for the meeting.
- Participants linger after the meeting has formally ended to network with other participants. Each agency is working on at least one recommendation during the year.
- Agencies report that the information is useful to their daily work.

Avoiding pitfalls: Dos and don'ts

- A lot can be learned from reviewing pending and cold cases. Sometimes a review might generate new leads or tactics to put pressure on uncooperative suspects, witnesses, or members of their social network who might have relevant information that they had been reluctant to share.
- Hold meetings when most day/night/early police shifts can attend. Most homicides occur in the evening, so it's important that the responding officer attend the review.
- Revise the review process if a case warrants it. Outside participants often have contributed critical knowledge outside their particular geographic area or substantive focus. Victims, offenders, witnesses, and their families move within the city and are involved in social networks that span the city.
- Encourage participants to attend each homicide review. Since relatively few meetings are held during a year (6 to 12), one missed meeting means a lot more than missing meetings that review shorter intervals of activity (e.g., one week).
- Encourage participants to attend even if the homicide does not affect their geographic territory, population, or issue area.
- Aim to have at least one staff person from each provider agency and in each key issue area attend each meeting. We have found that it is helpful to have more than one staff member from an agency participate in the reviews. This helps build agency relationships. It will also help the agency find a suitable substitute if one person cannot attend the meeting.
- After the group has been reviewing homicides for a while, they will begin to see the connections between seemingly unrelated homicides and develop a **shared analysis**.
Note: Because of resource constraints and staffing shortages in multiple sectors, do not be surprised if staff have to cut back their participation and only attend reviews where the homicide case is directly relevant to their work.
- Staff from smaller nonprofit organizations or understaffed organizations attending the reviews might need additional support from the facilitator. In general, staff from smaller and underfunded organizations will have considerably less time to prepare for a review, and fewer substitute staff to send if key staff are unable to attend the review; they will require more reminders, and need time to implement the recommendations stemming from a review.

- If partners are not currently working on a recommendation, involve those partners in other ways, such as reviewing materials and providing feedback.
- Invite organizations to be part of the homicide review before you actually need their data. Their perspective and input will be valuable even if their organization did not have direct contact with the persons or issue area related to the homicide case.
- Persons or agencies that specialize in particular area should help direct the discussion by helping to frame the nature of the problem, the results of past initiatives, and possible future recommendations.

Related resources

Unless other addresses are specified, resources may be found at <https://www.mcw.edu/departments/epidemiology/people/mallory-o-brien-phd>.

- [Template of Homicide Review presentation](#)
- Sample list of MHRC forms such as the [Victim Form](#), [Suspect Form](#), [Weapon Information Form](#), [MHRC Incident Form](#), [Probation and Parole Information Form](#), and [Confidentiality Form](#)
- [Database Dictionary and Instructions: Homicide and Nonfatal Shootings](#)
- [Sample list of 2010–2011 priority recommendations](#)
- [Project Ujima Referral Form](#) (used to refer the victim's family to victim services)

Module 10. Recommendations

Recommendations are the ultimate goal of an HRC. They represent the policy and practice changes that will hopefully produce the desired public safety result—fewer homicides. This section summarizes the types of recommendations that have been developed through the homicide review process. While data analysis and reports are significant results from a review process, recommendations provide the action plans to reduce homicides and violent crime. Tracking of recommendations that arise through the review provides a measurable outcome for the review process.

Learning objectives:

- Develop a general understanding of the process for beginning and sustaining recommendations.
- Develop an understanding of the different types of recommendations.
- Develop a working understanding of the methods used to track, monitor, and assess the implementation of recommendations.

In the post-CompStat era, all criminal justice agencies are pressed to be responsible for monitoring and evaluating their work. Law enforcement initiatives are increasingly asked to make data-informed decisions, implement evidence-based practices, conduct ongoing assessments of major initiatives, and share the results with the public. Much of the work of any HRC involves thoughtful collection, dissemination, use, and monitoring of crime data, particularly data related to violent crime. The crime data used in a HRC comes from multiple agencies, which lends greater context to the problem.

HRC recommendations work well when all partners approach the process with the same goal—participating in a collaborative process that fosters accountability and transparency to reduce homicides. Because of the collaboration, the identified solutions will usually involve a cross-agency response, with the benefit of reducing duplicative, disparate efforts and information silos.

Following are short summaries of the types of recommendations that have been developed through the homicide review process.

Types of recommendations

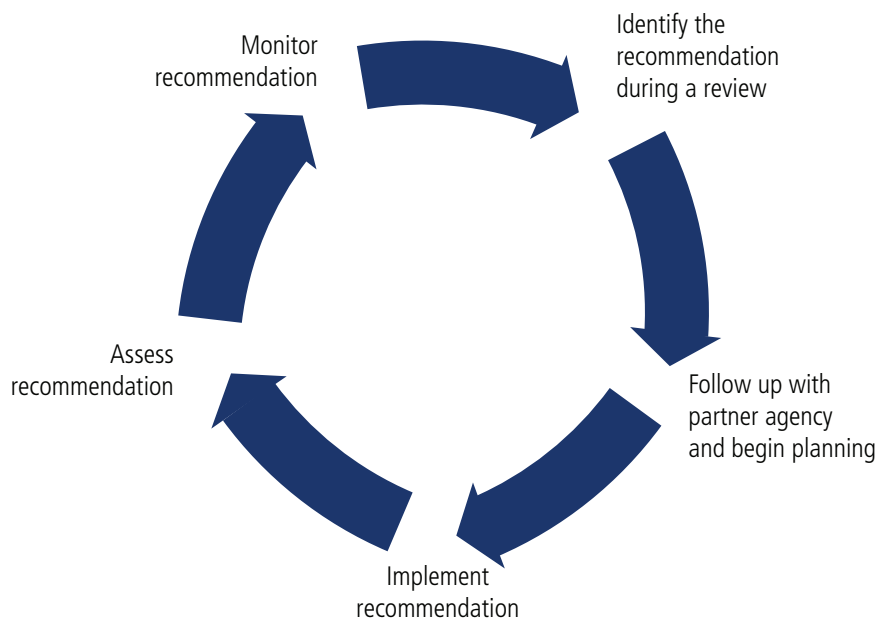
The types of recommendations that come out of homicide reviews are varied. It should be noted that not all recommendations come from the review. Some are identified outside of the review process during follow-up meetings and informal partner discussions. Recommendations are most likely to fall into the following categories:

- **Systemic.** The recommendation addresses a gap, weakness, or problem within a particular system or across systems (e.g. lack of witness protection program, lack of information sharing around juvenile charges).
- **Primary prevention.** The recommendation will prevent the overarching circumstances that led up to the homicide (e.g., causes of addiction).
- **Secondary prevention.** The recommendation addresses the immediate circumstances leading up to the homicide or targets real or potential repeat offenders and violence caused by retaliation. (All recommendations that are intervention- or suppression-related are secondary prevention recommendations).
- **Population-specific.** The recommendation affects or targets a specific population, specifically those at higher risk for becoming a victim or suspect of homicide or related violent crime.
- **Agency-specific.** The recommendation affects only one sector or one partner agency.
- **Capacity-building or research-related.** The recommendation is for the provision of technical assistance to a partner agency or a recommendation to research a topic or issue area.
- **Case-specific.** The recommendation addresses a particular homicide case and will not likely lead to the reduction of other homicides. Usually these recommendations are related to an ongoing criminal investigation or court case and involve a referral or provision of social services to an affected individual, family, or neighborhood.
- **Quality assurance-related.** The recommendation is related to strengthening or improving the homicide review process. Note: When MHRC refers to these types of recommendations, they are usually considered “follow-up” items and are not included in the recommendations count.

Implementing recommendations

Implementing a homicide review recommendation is like implementing any other program, activity, or initiative. As shown in figure 3, after the recommendation has been identified in the review process, it can follow a cyclical process through implementation and sustainability.

Figure 3. Recommendation implementation cycle



Planning and implementing recommendations can be challenging because the process is easily impacted by factors outside of the homicide review team. However, it is a very rewarding process with immediate and tangible results. There are three main building blocks to implementing HRC reviews:

1. Holding a planning meeting to develop a work plan.
2. Dividing up roles and responsibilities among project partners.
3. Determining measures of success from the beginning by carrying out the tasks as assigned and during the specified time frames and providing ongoing assessments.

The homicide review process shares much with the highly popular CompStat process, particularly with respect to its emphasis on analysis, follow-up, and accountability. Recommendations are diverse, and some are more easily implemented than others. If a recommendation has a lot of momentum, the process is quicker, but if partners are focused

on their other work and not the recommendation, the process is slower. The MHRC uses several subcommittees to implement and focus a series of recommendations, such as the Gun Reduction Subcommittee, the Licensed Premise Subcommittee, and the Juvenile Justice Subcommittee. The working group and executive committee are also important to the successful implementation of recommendations, including assignment to appropriate subcommittees or ad hoc groups. The more a group participates in the homicide review process and works with the MHRC, the more sophisticated and inclusive the recommendations will be.

The roles and responsibilities of homicide review staff vary with each recommendation. Staff roles will be different if no one is working on the recommendation versus if several agencies are simultaneously addressing issues related to a recommendation. Typical roles and responsibilities the homicide review staff include the following:

- **Convener/project manager.** Homicide review staff convene different agencies to discuss the problem and possible recommendations in greater detail than the initial review. Staffing a meeting includes setting the agenda and facilitating the meeting, taking notes, sending reminders, and monitoring follow up activities. MHRC staff are considered neutral conveners, which means that staff are not targeting the same grants or providing the same services as partner agencies. This reduces any “natural” competition with partner agencies.
- **Researcher.** Homicide review staff prepare data reports for the team to use to make policy decisions and explain trends in crime and possible factors for increases, decreases, hot spots, geographic shifts, and other pattern fluctuations. Some of the data comes from the three databases that the MHRC maintains, as well as from other sources such as census data.
- **Supporter.** Homicide review staff provide minimal support to the partner agency or agencies leading the recommendation, providing informal support for implementing the recommendation as needed.
- **Monitor.** Homicide review staff systematically monitor the recommendation after it has been implemented to ensure that it is addressing the problem it was intended to resolve. Homicide review staff follow up with agency partners on occasion to report results and, where necessary, suggest refinements.
- **Champion.** Homicide review staff keep momentum and energy going around a particular problem or solution.

The process of implementing a homicide review recommendation is different from the homicide review itself. Recommendations are vetted and developed more fully in the working group meetings with director level staff from participating agencies. Moving recommendations

forward is collaborative and fluid, requiring a considerable amount of trust in both the process and in the other partners involved and the thoughtful use of agency resources. Homicide review staff must be adept at managing competing agendas, interagency conflicts, and unpopular or criticized recommendations, and at assuring partners that the process is fair, data-driven, and likely to produce results. The only way to operate in this challenging environment is through establishing open communication channels, timely information sharing, and building trust.

Trusted relationships

Developing trust through the process is crucial to the successful implementation of any recommendations. Your homicide review teams must be trusted, knowledgeable, and proficient in multiple areas for partners to consider assisting with a recommendation.

Tracking, monitoring, and assessing recommendations

The plan for tracking, monitoring, and assessment of the homicide review initiative's recommendations must be developed at the start of the initiative, and the overall quality assurance plan must be structured yet nimble. Any successful quality assurance plan requires pre-developed measures of success and the intentional collection of standardized data. Since homicide review recommendations can evolve after the initial homicide review meeting during the planning and implementation stage, tracking and monitoring should be designed in a way that anticipates fundamental changes in the recommendation itself, as well as a complex implementation process.

Since 2005, the MHRC has worked on more than 1,000 recommendations, from micro level (e.g., data analysis to determine the scope of problems identified in review, quick practice change) to macro level (e.g., comprehensive prevention strategy, legislative amendments), using the following processes.

Tracking

After a recommendation is recorded in the meeting minutes, it is entered into the database, along with a more descriptive version that is appropriate for public use. Basic information about the recommendation is also documented, such as the date and type of review, the agency responsible for the recommendation, whether the recommendation is case-specific, and whether it addresses a specific problem or population. Other notes about the recommendation are also tracked, including the specific homicide or homicides that generated it.

- At the next staff meeting, the recommendation is reviewed, and follow-up is coordinated with relevant staff at partner agencies.
- Recommendations are also reviewed and discussed at the working group meeting and, if needed, the following executive committee meeting.
 - The working group, made up of director-level staff from partner agencies, process the recommendations and develop action plans for implementation. For example, a city attorney might work with the working group to get input on an ordinance change (See sample of MCO 105-91.)
- See also Data Dictionary for the MHRC Recommendations Monitoring Database.

Monitoring

Recommendations are monitored using the MHRC's customized Access database. The status of each recommendation is tracked and regularly updated at least annually. The following status types are used:

- **In Progress.** This includes recommendations that are being considered, planned, or implemented. This does not include recommendations that have not been "worked on" by homicide review staff or partners for several weeks.
- **On Hold.** This includes recommendations that are not being considered or worked on by staff or partners for a variety of reasons, such as the following:
 - The recommendation was not considered viable, because of resources or other factors.
 - There was little momentum for the recommendation, despite broad recognition that it should be implemented.
 - The recommendation could wait while more pressing recommendations were addressed.
 - There was strong evidence the recommendation would not be successful until other, related steps could first be taken.
- **Completed.** The recommendation was accomplished and is now being maintained and assessed.

- **Not Yet Started.** The recommendation was never acted upon. Most new recommendations are given this status until significant work required by the recommendation has been carried out.

Anytime the status of a recommendation changes, the date of the change and the reason for the change are documented in a separate memo box within the database.

If the MHRC is not involved in the recommendation or the implementation process, it will follow up with partners to learn the status of the recommendation and assess the recommendation.

Assessment

The assessment process takes place through collaborative discussions between agencies participating in the recommendation and the MHRC Working Group and Executive Committee. Where needed, formal evaluation methods are used, including the collection and analysis of primary data such as crime trends. In the assessment of the recommendations, the following learning questions are asked:

- Has the recommendation addressed the problem it was intended to resolve or made significant progress in addressing the problem?
- Was the recommendation implemented as planned? If not, why?
- Did the recommendation uncover another area that must be addressed?

Avoiding pitfalls: Dos and don'ts

Because the homicide review process generates a large volume of recommendations, it is very challenging to track, monitor, and evaluate them all. Here are some suggestions to help put things into perspective when evaluating your homicide review program for the first time:

- **Reinforce the idea that any recommendations, large or small, can be achieved through the homicide review process.**
- **Begin tracking recommendations immediately, using the template database provided in the appendix or some other tracking mechanism such as a spreadsheet. Ensure that recommendations are formally memorialized and not accidentally omitted, forgotten, or transformed.** At the end of the day, the quality of recommendations and the progress made on them is the best assessment of your homicide review program.

- **Do not attempt to track every aspect of a recommendation.** Only document information needed to monitor progress and completion and objectively assess the recommendation.
- **Store meeting agendas and minutes, handouts or presentations, data reports and other materials, and technical assistance activities related to the recommendation by uploading them onto the database or by storing this information in an electronic file system.**
- **Some recommendations will never be realized, especially if there is little to no community support.** The homicide review staff's job is to create a forum to discuss possible recommendations and to push recommendations that are likely to work and to have far-reaching effects. Remember that trying alternative solutions and identifying which ones work best is part of the SARA problem-solving approach described in Module 1. Being a champion for viable and promising recommendations is key.
- **Aim to update the status and records of each recommendation after each working group meeting.**
- **Be sure to document the role of your homicide review team.** Documentation helps you demonstrate the value and benefits of your homicide review initiative to outside stakeholders, including funders and new partners. This will also make it easier to disseminate your work to the community and other practitioners.

Related resources

Unless other addresses are specified, resources may be found at

<https://www.mcw.edu/departments/epidemiology/people/mallory-o-brien-phd>.

- [Sample list of MHRC recommendations](#)
- [MHRC Prevention Model, Achievements, and Future Directions](#)
- [Data Dictionary for the MHRC Recommendations Monitoring Database](#)

Appendix. Homicide Database Template

The Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission uses the following template to enter information into a homicide database. This template is provided as a suggested model which agencies can adapt to suit their own needs.



Homicide Database: Data Dictionary

Incident Information

- **Incident Number.** The number the police department assigns to an incident.
- **Homicide Number.** The current year and the count of homicides. For example, Milwaukee utilizes the following format: "2011099."
 - 2011 - Indicates the homicide took place in 2011
 - 099 - Indicates the homicide is the 99th homicide of the year.
- **M Number.** The number assigned by the homicide unit for each UCR (Uniform Crime Reporting) and Non-UCR homicide. M4257 indicates this was the 4,257th homicide.
- **Incident Date.** The date the incident occurred using this style: MM/DD/YYYY.
- **Incident Time.** The time the incident occurred using military time: 16:50.
- **Temperature.** The temperature at the time of the incident.
- **Death Date.** The date the victim was pronounced deceased.
 - The incident date and the death date may be different.
- **Determined Homicide Date.** The date the death was declared a homicide.
 - The incident date and the determined homicide date may also be different, as the cause of death may be established later due to Medical Examiner's findings, etc.

- **Intimate Partner Violence (IPV).** This box is checked if the incident resulted from intimate partner violence.
- **Incident Address.** The building/house number where the incident occurred.
 - The MHRC database is set up to use this information for geocoding.
- **Direction.** Street direction of the incident location: “E” East, “N” North, “S” South or “W” West.
 - The database should be revised to reflect local naming conventions. For example, the District of Columbia has four quadrants: “NW” for Northwest, and so on.
- **Street.** The name of the street where the incident occurred.
- **Street Type.** “AV” Avenue, “BL” Boulevard, “CR” Circle, “CT” Court, “DR” Drive, “LA” Lane, “PK” Parkway, “PL” Place, “RD” Road, “SQ” Square, “ST” Street, “TR” Terrace or “WA” Way. Other cities may have additional street types.
- **Unit/Apt.** The unit or apartment number or letter of the incident location.
- **ZIP.** The ZIP code of the incident location.
 - USPS.com can be used as a reference to determine an incident’s ZIP code.
- **District.** The police department district number where the homicide occurred.
 - Milwaukee has seven districts; other police departments might use zones, etc.
- **Primary Factor.** The term that best describes the reason the incident occurred. Choices include the following, based on the National Violent Death Reporting System:
 - Argument/Fight
 - Child Abuse/Neglect
 - Shaken Baby
 - Elder Abuse/Neglect
 - Commission of Other Crime
 - Domestic Violence
 - Drug Related

- Gang Related
- Retaliation
- Robbery
- Negligent – No Count
- Per UCR – No Count
- Police Related – No Count
- Self Defense – No Count
- Other
- Unknown
- **Secondary Factor.** A secondary reason for the event. Choices are the same as primary factor.
- **Cause/Weapon.** The weapon or method used in the incident. Choices include the following, based on the National Violent Death Reporting System:
 - Arson
 - Asphyxiation/Strangulation
 - Bodily Force
 - Firearm Unknown
 - Handgun
 - Knife / Edge Weapon
 - Long Gun
 - Motor Vehicle
 - Poison
 - Other
 - Unknown

- **Event.** The number of victims and offenders in the incident; for example, “Single Victim / Single Offender” if one person was shot by one offender, or “Multiple Victim / Multiple Offender” if there was more than one victim and more than one offender.
- **Narrative.** A short synopsis of the event (250 letters or less).
- **UCR.** “Yes” if the homicide is reportable by the Uniform Crime Reporting system, or “No” if the homicide is not reportable.
 - Homicides that are considered justifiable, self defense, or negligent are non-reportable homicides.
- **Case Status.** “Pending” if the case has no known suspect, or “Cleared” if there is a known suspect.
- **Last Update.** The last date information or data is added, deleted, or changed in the incident.
- **Tavern.** “Yes” if this incident occurred in or around a tavern, pub, bar, or night club, etc., or “No” if it did not.
 - **If yes, tavern name.** The tavern, pub, bar, or night club’s name.
- **Nuisance Property.** “Yes” if incident location is a nuisance property, or “No” if it is not.
 - In Milwaukee, a property can be considered a nuisance if police have received three or more calls for service in a month.

Victim Information:

- **Victim Last Name.** The victim’s last name.
 - Do not use “Jr” for junior, “Sr” for senior, or “III” or any other suffix.
- **Victim First Name.** The victim’s first name.
- **Victim Middle Name/Initial.** The victim’s middle initial.
 - Using only the middle initial makes it easier to query.
- **Victim Date of Birth.** The victim’s date of birth (DOB) using this style: MM/DD/YYYY.

- **Victim Age.** The victim's age at the time of the incident.
 - Enter "0" if the victim is less than one year old.
- **Infant age in months.** Complete this field if the victim is under the age of one.
- **Victim Race.** The victim's race. The choices include "Asian," "Black," "American Indian," "White," or "Other."
- **Victim Hispanic.** "Yes" if the victim is of Hispanic/Latino heritage, or "No" if the victim is not.
- **Victim Sex.** "M" if the victim is male, or "F" if the victim is female.
- **Victim MPDID Number.** A unique number assigned to anyone who has been arrested by the Milwaukee Police Department.
- **Victim Prior.** A special coding system that reflects the types of crimes for which a victim/suspect has been arrested. It provides a snapshot of the victim/suspect's criminal arrest history. The codes are as follows:
 - **Motor Vehicle.** OAR, OAS, Operating without a license, missing lights, display unauthorized vehicle registration, seat belt violation, etc.
 - **Property.** Trespassing, Burglary, Receiving stolen property, Criminal damage to property, Retail theft, Entry to locked vehicle, Operate motor vehicle without consent, Theft, Vandalism, Fraud by check, Noise nuisance, Forgery, Graffiti, Worthless checks, Obtain/Sells CDs in public.
 - **Court/Police Interference.** Failure to appear, Bail jumping, Probation violation, Flee from officer, Resisting arrest, Obstructing, Harboring/Aiding a felon, Contempt, Violate restraining order
 - **Drug.** POCS w/Intent, POCS-THC, POCS-Cocaine/base, Maintain drug trafficking place, M/D cocaine.
 - **Alcohol.** DUI, OWI, Possession of alcoholic beverage, Operating under the influence, Public drinking.
 - **Disorderly Conduct**

- **Other Non-Violent Crimes.** Gambling, Loitering, Pedestrian or ride soliciting, Lewd & lascivious behavior, Curfew violation, Conspiracy, Littering, Prostitution, Larceny, Commercializing sex, Animal law violation, Possession of body armor, Prowling, Truancy, Bigamy, Gambling, Fireworks violation.
- **Terroristic Threats & Bomb Threats**
- **Weapons** (any arrest/charge relating to possession of a weapon). If weapon is used against a person, code under Other Violence Against a Person: CCW (also Possession of dangerous weapon), FIPOF, Possession of short-barreled shotgun/rifle.
- **Sexual Violence.** Sexual assault of a child, Sexual assault.
- **Homicide**
- **Other Violence Against Person.** Assault, Abuse of children, Aggravated battery/intent harm, Battery, Robbery with UOF, Armed robbery, Domestic abuse, RES (also Reckless use of weapon), ESBUDW (also Use of dangerous weapon), intimidate, abduct, false imprisonment, stalking.
- **Held Over.** Extradition, Confinement in jail, Taking juveniles into custody.
- **Arson**
- **Gang related**
- **Victim Gang.** Name of gang affiliation, if any.
- **Victim Address.** The house/building number of the victim's current residence or last known address.
 - The MHRC database is set up to use this information for geocoding.
- **Victim Direction.** Street direction of the victim's address: "E" East, "N" North, "S" South or "W" West.
 - The database should be revised to reflect local naming conventions. For example, the District of Columbia has four quadrants: "NW" for Northwest, and so on.
- **Victim Street.** The name of the street where the victim resides.
- **Victim Street Type.** Type of street where the victim resides: "AV" Avenue, "BL" Boulevard, "CR" Circle, "CT" Court, "DR" Drive, "LA" Lane, "PK" Parkway, "PL" Place, "RD" Road, "SQ" Square, "ST" Street, "TR" Terrace or "WA" Way. Other cities may have additional street types.

- **Victim Unit/Apt.** The unit or apartment number or letter where the victim resides.
- **Victim city.** The city where the victim resides.
- **Victim state.** The state where the victim resides.
- **Victim ZIP.** The ZIP code where the victim resides.
 - USPS.com can be used as a reference to determine ZIP code area.

Suspect Information:

(Data fields available for up to five suspects, S1, S2, S3, S4, S5)

- **S1 Last Name.** The suspect's last name.
 - Do not use "Jr" for junior, "Sr" for senior, or "III" or any other suffix.
- **S1 First Name.** The suspect's first name.
- **S1 Middle Name/Initial.** The suspect's middle initial.
 - Using only the middle initial makes it easier to query.
- **S1 Date of Birth.** The suspect's date of birth (DOB) using this style: MM/DD/YYYY.
- **S1 Age.** The suspect's age at the time of the incident.
- **S1 Race.** The suspect's race. The choices include "Asian," "Black," "American Indian," "White," or "Other."
- **S1 Hispanic.** "Yes" if the suspect is of Hispanic/Latino heritage, or "No" if the suspect is not.
- **S1 Sex.** "M" if the suspect is male, or "F" if the suspect is female.
- **S1 MPDID Number.** A unique number assigned to anyone who has been arrested by the Milwaukee Police Department.
- **S1 Prior.** A special coding system that reflects the types of crimes for which a victim/suspect has been arrested. It provides a snapshot of the victim/suspect's criminal arrest history. The codes are the same as for Victims, above.
- **S1 Address.** The house/building number of the suspect's current residence or last known address.
 - The MHRC database is set up to use this information for geocoding.

- **S1 Direction.** Street direction of the suspect's address: "E" East, "N" North, "S" South or "W" West.
- **S1 Street.** The name of the street where the suspect resides.
- **S1 Street Type.** Type of street where the suspect resides: "AV" Avenue, "BL" Boulevard, "CR" Circle, "CT" Court, "DR" Drive, "LA" Lane, "PK" Parkway, "PL" Place, "RD" Road, "SQ" Square, "ST" Street, "TR" Terrace or "WA" Way. Other cities may have additional street types.
- **S1 Unit/Apt.** The unit or apartment number or letter where the suspect resides.
- **S1 city.** The city where the suspect resides.
- **S1 state.** The state where the suspect resides.
- **S1 ZIP.** Enter the ZIP code where the suspect resides.
 - USPS.com can be used as a reference to determine ZIP code area.
- **S1 Relationship to Victim.** The term that best describes the suspect's relationship to the victim. Choices include the following:
 - Acquaintance
 - Intimate
 - Parent
 - Child
 - Spouse
 - Family Member
 - Stranger
 - Unknown

Witness Information:

(Data fields for up to five witnesses-W1, W2, W3, W4, W5)

- **W1 Last Name.** The witness's last name.
 - Do not use "Jr" for junior, "Sr" for senior, or "III" or any other suffix.
- **W1 First Name.** The witness's first name.
- **W1 Middle Name/Initial.** The witness's middle initial.
 - Using only the middle initial makes it easier to query.
- **W1 Date of Birth.** The witness's date of birth (DOB) using this style: MM/DD/YYYY.

About the COPS Office

The **Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)** is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing begins with a commitment to building trust and mutual respect between police and communities. It supports public safety by encouraging all stakeholders to work together to address our nation's crime challenges. When police and communities collaborate, they more effectively address underlying issues, change negative behavioral patterns, and allocate resources.

Rather than simply responding to crime, community policing focuses on preventing it through strategic problem-solving approaches based on collaboration. The COPS Office awards grants to hire community policing officers and support the development and testing of innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders, as well as all levels of law enforcement.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has invested more than \$14 billion to add community policing officers to the nation's streets, enhance crime fighting technology, support crime prevention initiatives, and provide training and technical assistance to help advance community policing. Other achievements include the following:

- To date, the COPS Office has funded the hiring of approximately 130,000 additional officers by more than 13,000 of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies in both small and large jurisdictions.
- Nearly 700,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office-funded training organizations.
- Almost 500 agencies have received customized advice and peer-led technical assistance through the COPS Office Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center.
- To date, the COPS Office has distributed more than eight million topic-specific publications, training curricula, white papers, and resource CDs and flash drives.
- The COPS Office also sponsors conferences, round tables, and other forums focused on issues critical to law enforcement.

COPS Office information resources, covering a wide range of community policing topics such as school and campus safety, violent crime, and officer safety and wellness, can be downloaded via the COPS Office's home page, <https://cops.usdoj.gov>.

Since 2005, the Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission has combined the efforts of criminal justice, public health, and community stakeholders to gain a better understanding of homicide through strategic problem analysis, develop innovative and effective responses and prevention strategies, and help focus prevention and intervention resources. Driving this work is the understanding that homicides are preventable.

This training manual lays out a series of steps, grouped into ten modules for law enforcement and community service agencies to follow in creating homicide review commissions in their own communities. The recommendations, methods, and strategies provided can be adapted for different contexts, locations, and for other crime and public health problems.



COPS
Community Oriented Policing Services
U.S. Department of Justice

U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services
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To obtain details about COPS Office programs,
call the COPS Office Response Center at 800-421-6770.

Visit the COPS Office online at cops.usdoj.gov.

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