



The Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission

A NATIONAL MODEL FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION



COPS
Community Oriented Policing Services
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Overview

In 2005, the Mayor of Milwaukee, the Milwaukee Police Department's Chief of Police, and the Milwaukee County District Attorney formed the Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission (MHRC) to address lethal violence in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Modeled after other review processes such as child death or crime incident reviews, homicide reviews were rare and information about them was scarce. Since then, the MHRC has been a central component of the City of Milwaukee's violence prevention efforts.

The MHRC strives to reduce homicides and nonfatal shootings through a multilevel, multidisciplinary, and multiagency homicide review process. 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.

Guiding the creation of MHRC were four tenets that would inform the entire initiative and affect its governance, leadership, and staffing structure; partnership development; collection and use of real-time data; and preference for multilevel and multiagency decision-making. These four tenets were

1. Homicide is preventable;
2. Only a collaborative and well-coordinated effort of community, nonprofit, business, government, academic, legal, and medical partnerships will lead to lasting change;
3. Data-driven strategies are essential;
4. Multi-level responses help ensure meaningful, robust, and sustainable results over the long term.

The MHRC initially began working in three of Milwaukee's seven police districts in order to better focus efforts during the commission's development stages. It conducted case reviews of every homicide in the three districts and supported the development, implementation, and assessment of the prevention-focused recommendations derived from each homicide review. It also tracked and analyzed homicide and nonfatal shooting trends using its own data management system. During this implementation phase, the MHRC was externally evaluated

by researchers at Harvard University with funding from the National Institute of Justice (NIJ). Spurred by encouraging evaluation results, the project teams accelerated the expansion of the MHRC to all seven police districts. Since 2008, all homicides throughout the city have been systematically reviewed.

The MHRC is managed by an executive director and led by its Executive Committee, which is made up of approximately 25 senior-level representatives from city and state agencies and community partner organizations. Core partner agencies include the police department, the city/county district attorney's office, the corrections department, the FBI's local field office, the superintendent of public schools, and a local domestic violence service provider. Milwaukee's Executive Committee is responsible for approving and assisting with the implementation of recommendations.

The second tier of the MHRC's governing structure is the Working Group, consisting of about 10 mid-level representatives from many of the same organizations represented in the Executive Committee. The Working Group does much of the preparation for reviews and also serves as the primary conduit for most recommendations that require executive-level approval and support.

Since its inception, the MHRC has maintained a database in accordance with guidelines similar to those of the National Violent Death Reporting System that tracks homicides and nonfatal shootings in the city of Milwaukee. In addition to serving as an independent resource for data, the MHRC convenes partners to participate in an intensive discussion and examination of homicide and nonfatal shooting incidents through multiple reviews, including criminal justice, community service provider, sexual assault, and sentinel event reviews. These reviews illuminate trends, gaps, assets, and deficits within existing systems, policies, practices, and programs.

For example, over many reviews, partners noticed that many of the homicides and nonfatal shootings were happening near or at taverns. In partnership with the City Attorney's Office, the Department of Neighborhood Services, and members of the Milwaukee Common Council, two ordinances were passed to improve surveillance at licensed premises (taverns, 24-hour establishments, etc.) that are considered nuisance properties by requiring them to install video surveillance systems and to allow law enforcement to target the owners of problem establishments.

In another example, one of the MHRC's community partners realized the prevalence of domestic violence-related homicide cases and the subsequent need to develop strategies to prevent additional homicides. This organization began internal homicide reviews on all

homicide cases related to domestic violence to refine internal practices and procedures. This has improved the organization's advocacy and ability to focus on lethality factors and implement a lethality assessment tool. Several strategies and recommendations from the MHRC became foundational to the 2015 Project Safe Neighborhoods (now the Violent Gang and Gun Crime Reduction Program) grant application and subsequent award to help develop suppression strategies focused on chronic violent offenders.

Curriculum Development and Training Experience

2010 COPS Office funding award

Training development

The U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) Community Policing Development program advances community policing through training and technical assistance, the development of innovative community policing strategies, applied research, guidebooks, and best practices that are national in scope. The MHRC received a 2010 COPS Office funding award (#2010-CK-WX-K018); its goal with the funding was to strengthen the capacity of law enforcement agencies in urban areas by creating a national, multijurisdictional training module to design and establish a homicide review process based on best practices and local needs through in-person and long distance training and technical assistance. This goal was aligned with the solicitation request to increase the capacity of law enforcement agencies to address specific violent crime problems in urban areas through community policing efforts by developing proactive comprehensive programs to reduce levels of concentrated urban violence that include engagement with community and key stakeholder groups.

The training module consists of training and technical assistance manuals and guidebooks on how to establish effective and sustainable components, key considerations, and sample materials. Some of the contents of the module include sample memoranda of understanding, meeting agendas and minutes, slide show templates, operational databases for tracking homicides and nonfatal shootings, analysis reports, confidentiality agreements, example evaluation methodologies, and departmental readiness assessments. The training module was pretested to ensure that the information covered was appropriate and met the needs of participants. In addition to the aforementioned materials, the training module also includes small group activities based on adult learning theory and completion of a training assessment.

The module is presented as a framework and is then tailored through technical assistance, with agency-specific consultation to fit the needs and readiness of jurisdictions to adapt the model. Jurisdictions contact the MHRC directly, and MHRC staff collaboratively plan and address their needs as appropriate. At times, technical assistance involves sharing resources and networks or planning on-site trainings or workshops.

Training implementation sites

Initially, the MHRC worked with the COPS Office to create a list of COPS Office–funded jurisdictions where the training module could be implemented. The MHRC also advertised for the training implementation through its website and at conferences and presentations. Interested jurisdictions directly contacted the MHRC and as jurisdictions across the country became trained in the process, they shared the experience with other colleagues.

2013 COPS Office funding award

With the support of the COPS Office, the MHRC was able to continue developing and training jurisdictions with a 2013 funding award (#2013-CK-WX-K011). Training and technical assistance materials were thoughtfully updated based on evaluation results, lessons learned, and practical use of the materials. Carried forward from the 2010 grant was the goal of delivering a high-quality national training module, including technical assistance manuals, for police departments and criminal justice partners to establish a homicide review process. Throughout the grant’s duration, materials and training were enhanced to focus on preventing violent crime through sustainable community policing activities. Additional capacity became available during this funding cycle to routinely update the MHRC website to include electronic and downloadable training and technical assistance materials as well as important announcements such as annual training dates.

The revised and updated training consisted of a two-day event in Milwaukee. This iteration of the module covered the history of the MHRC, review preparation, data collection, observations of two different types of reviews, testimony from key partners (e.g., police chief, mayor, district attorney), lessons learned, challenges with solutions, and a panel discussion with MHRC agency participants.

Trainings are planned by the MHRC in conjunction with the jurisdiction. It is important to determine what violence reduction strategies are already taking place in a city, what its needs are, and the vision for what the implementation of the homicide review model could look like in the jurisdiction. In some instances, cities are already conducting some type of review, such as child death or community service provider reviews. However, some cities do not have any infrastructure around reviews and require more training.

During each training, the MHRC goes over the training module with the jurisdiction and then tailors the remainder of the training to the needs of the jurisdiction. As such, trainings vary in length.

Examples of Implementation

New Orleans

In November 2011, the City of New Orleans received both training and technical assistance from MHRC staff and partners. Initially, the city sent law enforcement and public health professionals to be trained in Milwaukee. On-site training and technical assistance followed, with more than 50 people participating. Following the intensive training, the mayor of New Orleans developed the Strategic Command to Reduce Murder initiative to convene criminal justice and community partners through multiple working groups and meetings as well as to publicly share analysis of murders and nonfatal shootings. Key successes of this initiative's implementation include strengthened analytic capacity and the establishment of homicide case reviews with law enforcement partners.

Wilmington

In November 2014, two participants from Wilmington, Delaware were sent to Milwaukee for homicide review training. Following the Milwaukee training, a larger, inclusive on-site training was conducted with local leaders and agencies. Using the MHRC training module as a framework, the Wilmington Police Department's investigation branch developed an adaptation of the model in June 2015, including both a criminal justice and community services provider review. Wilmington has since seen a reduction in homicides as well as an improvement in clearance rates, which has been partially attributed to the implementation and execution of the homicide review process.

Seattle

A training in early 2016 in Seattle yielded interested participants primarily from the public health sector, leading to the formation of a review commission based on partnerships around the Suburban King County Coordinating Council on Gangs and child fatality reviews. This team began work by focusing on a sentinel event review process to review homicide cases and learn about the involved individuals' life courses.

Washington, D.C.

Members of the Community Stabilization Protocol (CSP) group, which focuses on strengthening law enforcement tools and acting on trauma in the community, were trained in June 2016 in Washington, D.C. Coordinated through the Office of Victim Services, the CSP group is working to develop a process that builds on current homicide response and child fatality reviews.

Pittsburgh

More than 70 law enforcement, city leaders, and public health professionals attended a training in Pittsburgh in September 2016. The University of Pittsburgh's Center for Health Equity facilitates regular community service provider homicide reviews. During these reviews, community organizations participate and only closed cases are reviewed. However, the center is expanding the review process to include a criminal justice homicide review in which both open and closed cases can be discussed, as these are attended by law enforcement and criminal justice partners. Pittsburgh is also hoping to develop working groups to oversee and follow through on recommendations. Ongoing technical assistance is being provided.

Process Evaluation

Following each training, participants completed an evaluation via online survey. Survey results indicated what went well with trainings and what could have improved. Approximately 80 percent of the participating jurisdictions have participated in child death reviews or other crime incident reviews. Having been exposed to the public health process of fatality reviews, the participants were able to better relate the homicide review process to their specific jurisdiction and existing partnerships.

Respondents largely reported that they were following the best practices taught in the training. The majority of respondents—weighted average range of 4.24–5.94 on a 0–10 scale—reported they were currently using real-time data to inform their work. Respondents fell within that same range regarding partnering with other criminal justice practitioners and thinking about violence prevention. A larger majority—weighted average range of 7.43–8.56—reported understanding the homicide review process and implementation steps.

The participating jurisdictions were able to share feedback on two areas: the training itself, and the current review process. Feedback regarding the training helped to shape the case studies and presenters selected for future training implementations. Feedback on the community service provider review portion of the current review process was focused on youth participation. In response to this feedback, the MHRC team is working with youth-serving agencies to select a small group of youth to help review data and recommend prevention strategies. This new project is currently in progress, and developers are mindful of the age group and consent of any partnering youth.

Transferability

Through COPS Office funding, the MHRC has systematically been able to document, assess, and improve homicide review methodology and build violence-prevention capacity across the country. The improvements made were jurisdiction-dependent and ranged from developing new partnerships to improving information sharing to prevention strategy development. Whether the training and technical assistance was conducted in Milwaukee, on site, or via electronic means, COPS Office support has been invaluable in adapting and sustaining the MHRC.

In September 2017, the MHRC hosted a lessons learned event in Washington D.C. with 12 jurisdictions that had been previously trained in the homicide review model or had expressed interest in participating in a future training. It was an opportunity to share how the homicide review model has impacted cities' violence prevention efforts, learn from each other, and advance connections. It was evident from cities' experiences that the success of implementing and sustaining the homicide review model has been driven by building trust and 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.

The sustainability of the MHRC model, framework, and process has been the strength of collaboration and the value placed on the work. The review process strengthens partnerships, increasing the capacity of participating systems, agencies, and individuals to identify not only gaps and deficits but also assets and opportunities to build and sustain positive social change. The result, and the ultimate goal, is the reduction of homicides and the improved health and safety of communities.

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 (MHRC) 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.

The MHRC received a COPS Office grant to develop a training on how to establish and run a homicide review commission; this training has been published by the COPS Office as *National Homicide Review Training and Technical Assistance Project: Homicide Review Training Manual*. This white paper reviews the development, implementation, and assessment of the site-based trainings on which the manual is based.



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U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services
145 N Street NE
Washington, DC 20530

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