

CASE STUDY

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

Deploying a monumental effort in collaboration to reduce violent crime



In 2017, the US Department of Justice (DOJ) invited Memphis, Tennessee, to participate in the National Public Safety Partnership (PSP). The PSP is a DOJ-wide program that helps participating cities address serious violent crime challenges through coordinated training and technical assistance over a three-year engagement. The PSP facilitates the development of data-driven, evidence-based strategies tailored to each city's unique local needs. Memphis participated in the PSP initiative through September 2020.



ABOUT MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

The City of Memphis encompasses an area of 315¹ square miles along the eastern bank of the Mississippi River in southwestern Shelby County. As of 2019, the city has an estimated population of 651,073,² making it the second largest city in the state. The city is the anchor of West Tennessee and the greater Mid-South region, bordering Arkansas, Mississippi, and Missouri.



Its central location has helped make it one of the largest distribution centers in the United States and one of the nation's largest inland river ports.³ More than 60 percent (64.2 percent) of city residents are black, 25.7 percent are white, 7.2 percent are Hispanic or Latino, and 1.6 percent are Asian.⁴ The median yearly household income in Memphis is \$39,108,⁵ which is significantly below the national average (\$68,703⁶). The poverty rates in Memphis (26.8%⁷) appear to be moving in the opposite direction of most of the country, including the rest of the State of Tennessee.⁸

The Memphis Police Department (MPD) is responsible for providing police services for those who live, work, and visit the City of Memphis. The department has 2,736⁹ employees, which includes 2,100 sworn officers spread across six divisions (Administrative, Investigative, Special, Information Technology, and Uniform Patrol I and II). A Deputy Chief commands each unit; the two uniform patrol divisions are the largest, supporting the nine police stations spread across the city.

PSP PARTICIPATION

Upon joining the PSP initiative, Memphis identified three primary focus areas for the engagement:

- Investigations
- Gun Violence
- Criminal Justice Collaboration

1 <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/memphiscitytennessee>
2 <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/memphiscitytennessee>
3 <https://www.britannica.com/place/Memphis-Tennessee>
4 <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/memphiscitytennessee>
5 <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/memphiscitytennessee>
6 <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2020/demo/p60-270.html>
7 <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/memphiscitytennessee>
8 <https://www.memphis.edu/socialwork/research/2019povertyfactsheet.pdf>
9 2018 Annual MPD Report

The PSP helped Memphis establish the capabilities to excel in the identified focus areas, while also establishing effective partnerships to sustain future relationships to successfully reduce and respond to violent crime. The following agencies were actively engaged in the Memphis PSP and remain committed to reducing violent crime:

- MPD command staff, also Raines, Ridgeway, and Airways Stations, and the Multi-Agency Gang Unit commanders
- Shelby County District Attorney General's Office
- Memphis Office of the Mayor
- Memphis/Shelby County Crime Commission
- Tennessee Department of Corrections
- Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF)
- Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
- Homeland Security Investigation (HSI)
- US Attorney's Office for the Western District of Tennessee
- US Marshals Service (USMS)
- US Secret Service (USSS)

PSP STRATEGY AND ACTIVITIES

During the PSP engagement, Memphis made great strides in implementing initiatives and programs designed to reduce violent crime in the city. Because of these programs and initiatives, Memphis saw a decrease in both crime and victimization resulting in an improved quality of life for those who live and work in the city. During the first two years of engagement, and at the close of 2019, violent crime incidents in Memphis were down just over 13 percent.

MPD measures violent crime in Memphis based on eight specific crime categories: Aggravated Assault (Non-Domestic Violence), Aggravated Assault (Domestic Violence), Child Abuse, Murder, Rape, Robbery (Business), Robbery (Individual), and Carjacking.

In 2017, the year Memphis joined PSP, the city had a significantly high number of violent crime incidents (9,855). At the end of the first full year of engagement, this number decreased to 9,330 incidents, which translates to 525 victims. At the end of 2019 again saw a decrease in incidents (8,569). As of August 31, 2020, there were 6,378 violent crime incidents. MPD analysts anticipate that this number will be higher than 2019 incidents because they have seen a recent spike in Aggravated Assault cases.

Violent Crime Incidents Percentage Change	
2016 Part 1 Violent Crime Incidents (Jan. 1 - Dec. 31)	9,124
2017 Part 1 Violent Crime Incidents (Jan. 1 - Dec. 31)	9,855
2018 Part 1 Violent Crime Incidents (Jan. 1 - Dec. 31)	9,330
2019 Part 1 Violent Crime Incidents (Jan. 1 - Dec. 31)	8,569
2020 Part 1 Violent Crime Incidents (Jan. 1 - Aug. 31)	6,378
Percentage Change 2016 - 2017	8.01%
Percentage Change 2016 - 2018	2.26%
Percentage Change 2016 - 2019	-6.08%
Percentage Change 2017 - 2018	-5.33%
Percentage Change 2018 - 2019	-8.16%
Percentage Change 2017 - 2019	-13.05%

INVESTIGATIONS

During their PSP engagement, the Memphis PSP team focused on improving their investigative capabilities and enhancing their processes.

Working with three focus precincts

In the first year of engagement, PSP worked with Raines Station, one of the nine MPD precincts, to provide a positive impact on violent crime in that area. Weekly meetings with the station commanders were held to discuss crime trends and patterns as well as possible solutions to combat these trends. In year two, the meetings expanded to include two other MPD precincts, Airways and Ridgeway Stations. This allowed the three precincts to collaborate weekly on common patterns, offenders, and cases. The discussions focused on identifying



issues (i.e., areas of need to discuss with the PSP federal partners). The investigative bureau often attended these calls and took the opportunity to highlight specific cases and discuss prosecution efforts. Members of the Multi-Agency Gang Unit and command staff often attended these meetings and provided not only additional insight involving cases, but also assistance and collaboration in investigating some of the cases. As a result of these weekly conversations and sharing of best practices, Airways Station produced a form that officers use to assist in Aggravated Assault cases. The form captures basic demographic information and has space for victims to write a statement at the time of the initial investigation. This form proved useful for investigators and prosecutors, particularly when victims attempted to recant their initial statements. Airways Station also implemented a “call back” program, contacting victims of violent crimes after reporting to ensure cooperation and to answer questions. To date, Airways Station has made calls to over 500 victims, thus improving communications between the community and investigators.

MPD also increased its capacity to investigate homicides by creating efficiencies in processes and procedures by standardizing the case file. It became clear that recording interviews with suspects and providing the recordings as evidence greatly increased the successful prosecution of homicide cases. MPD identified a funding source and ultimately installed recording equipment in each interview room. Now all homicide interviews are recorded.

GUN VIOLENCE

Gun Violence Reduction

MPD and its local and federal partners made significant advances to improve collaboration and communication in the investigation and prosecution of gun cases. MPD worked hard to take guns off the streets of Memphis, showing a consistent number of gun recoveries since 2016. To assist in linking guns to crimes, MPD began its own National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) processing in 2015 due to unusually lengthy processing delays in the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation state lab. MPD now enters firearm information in to NIBIN within 48 hours of recovery. Since 2017, MPD has refined the process and found further efficiencies through PSP assistance. MPD hosts a regional Crime Gun Intelligence Center (CGIC), and the results since implementation have been impressive. Violent crime is recognized and investigated more efficiently than by many other agencies in the country because of MPD's focus in this area. MPD allows 18 surrounding agencies to

Gun Recoveries by MPD since 2016

2016	2,768
2017	3,280
2018	3,297
2019	3,325
As of August 2020	2,597

access and use the CGIC resources, including two centrally located NIBIN machines. This collaborative effort has been recognized by other cities as they strive to emulate this model.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE COLLABORATION

PSP strives to build strong collaborative relationships. PSP Memphis has been a model site when it comes to collaboration with other state and federal law enforcement and judicial partners.

Focus on Carjacking Offenses

Throughout 2018, carjacking offenses in Memphis rose at an alarming rate. By midyear, carjackings were up citywide by 87 percent. As a result, carjackings became a major focus of the PSP engagement. The PSP partners frequently discussed how to combat this trend. By the end of 2018, carjackings were 60 percent higher than the same period in 2017. The US Attorney and the District Attorney General's Office took a specific interest in this rising crime pattern and joined other partners in starting a monthly carjacking meeting. Numerous partners attended these meetings, including MPD's violent crime and gang unit investigators, key prosecutors and other personnel as needed. Key cases were highlighted, with some selected for federal prosecution. Over several months, numerous media releases regarding carjacking offenses and solved cases increased the attention to carjackings. This had a positive result with a decline of cases throughout 2019. At the end of 2019, carjackings were down 13 percent from the previous year. The weekly carjacking meetings continue in Memphis today.

Focus on Operation Grizzly Bear

In 2019, after experiencing over 30 shootings along the interstates running through Memphis, MPD partnered with the Tennessee Highway Patrol (THP) over a six-week period to target aggressive drivers and reduce traffic-related deaths. During Operation Grizzly Bear, troopers issued 2,016 citations and made 83 arrests. Reports also indicated that only one incident of shots fired occurred on the interstate during the targeted time period. Although the operation has ended, MPD continues to assist THP on the interstates within the Memphis city limits. Between January and October 2019, MPD made 82,179 stops, issued 54,911 citations, and made 1,833 arrests on the interstates.

Focus on Operation Relentless Pursuit and Operation Legend

In late 2019, Memphis was one of seven cities awarded additional resources under DOJ's Operation Relentless Pursuit (ORP).¹⁰ Working with ATF, FBI, DEA, HSI, USMS, the Shelby County Sheriff's Office, and the Shelby County District Attorney General's Office, the Memphis Police Department apprehended 434 fugitives in the Memphis area. In August 2020, Memphis was added to the list of cities participating in Operation Legend,¹¹ which resulted in an additional 106 arrests and the seizing of 85 firearms, 6.3 kilograms of methamphetamine, 4 kilograms of heroin, and \$191,645 in US currency.

Focus on Prosecution

To increase the capacity for successful prosecutions, the Shelby County District Attorney General's Office implemented a vertical prosecution model. In this model, one prosecutor is assigned a case and remains on the case throughout its progress through the court system. This allows increased communication and less confusion for all parties involved. During this transition, a large backlog of case summaries from MPD investigators was considerably cleaned up within a short time, allowing prosecutors to have the full details of cases needed to continue the prosecutorial process.

¹⁰ ORP involved increasing the number of federal law enforcement officers, as well as federal task forces, through collaborative efforts with state and local law enforcement partners. The federal agents were complemented by a financial commitment in federal grant funding that could be used to hire new officers, pay overtime and benefits, finance federally deputized task force officers, and provide mission-critical equipment and technology.

¹¹ Operation Legend is a sustained, systematic, and coordinated law enforcement initiative across all federal law enforcement agencies, working in conjunction with state and local law enforcement officials, to fight violent crime in America's cities in 2019 and 2020.

Focus on Juvenile Reform Efforts

The PSP team worked with numerous key personnel to discuss how to effectively combat juvenile crime. It was apparent early on that communicating with Juvenile Court personnel (specifically, the head magistrate) was necessary to make progress in the right direction. A meeting was held that included the PSP team, members of the magistrate's office, officials from the Department of Children Services (DCS), juvenile probation officials, the lead juvenile prosecutor in Shelby County, District Attorney General, and MPD commanders. Significant progress was made toward reform—specifically, offering services to and monitoring youth who were recently released from a long-term detention facility. PSP additionally held follow-up conversations with DCS officials, representatives from juvenile court, and the Shelby County District Attorney's Office. DCS continues communication with MPD, offering a weekly list of releases from detention. A new program titled “Helping Hands for Youth Coming Home” was created for youth released from a long-term detention facility at a high risk of recidivism. Similar to a focused deterrence initiative for youth, social service organizations offer resources, and criminal justice personnel explain monitoring by DCS and MPD via at-home visits. These visits are to ensure success with the post-incarceration period and ultimate release from any sanctions. These positive relationships continue to flourish in Memphis.

CONCLUSION

During PSP participation, the City of Memphis made great strides in instituting practices and procedures to reduce the likelihood that individuals who live and work in Memphis will become victims of violence. While violent crime does still occur within the city, the Memphis Police Department and its federal law enforcement counterparts and criminal justice partners have done—and will continue to do—all they can to make Memphis a truly great city.