

# DEFINING COMMUNITY SAFETY CONCEPT MAP

The Community Safety Concept Map is a tool that communities can use to facilitate conversations around the meaning of safety and to identify local priorities. When viewed holistically, the map describes community safety as a collective responsibility in which all members of the community have a role to play.



The Community Safety Concept Map, which was developed with input from residents of three U.S. counties (Missoula County, Montana, St. Louis County, Missouri, and Mecklenburg County, North Carolina), has 11 unique components that fall into five different broad domains. Each of the components are described below.



## Region: Personal Safety and Security

---

### Freedom from Violence and Other Harms

This component of safety includes ideas related to traditional conceptualizations of public safety (e.g., low rates of crime and victimization). It also contains harms that many people of color and other marginalized groups, like LGBTQ+, experience daily, such as discrimination.

- There are low rates of violent crime.
- People are not injured or killed by stray bullets.
- Children are safe from harm both inside and outside of school.
- There are low rates of property crime such as theft, vandalism, or car theft.
- There are low rates of drug use, including public drug use, and drug-related harms (e.g., overdoses).
- People do not stereotype, discriminate against, or harm others based on their race, ethnicity, or other personal characteristics.

### Day-to-Day Feelings of Safety

Statements that capture people's perceived ability to move through their daily lives without worrying about harm make up this component of community safety. Many of the statements capture emotions and feelings of security.

- People can travel freely anytime, anywhere, including late at night without being on alert.
- People feel safe and secure in their homes.
- People aren't worried they will be a victim of a crime.
- People are not harassed when walking down the street.



## Region: Thriving and Socially Connected Community

---

### Sense of Community

Many people described a safe community in terms of their relationships with others. It is a place where people watch out for one another and provide support and assistance when needed. In addition, people trust one another and work together to address common problems, and neighbors are friendly and welcoming to all.

- Community members trust one another.
- People watch out for each other and provide support and assistance for neighbors in need.
- Neighbors know one another and talk regularly.
- There is a lot of activity, with people out in the community and children playing outside.
- People in the community are welcoming and respectful to all regardless of their identity or personal characteristics, such as age, sexuality, gender, or race.
- Community members work together to solve local problems.

### Investments in Infrastructure, Businesses, and Programming for a Thriving Community

This component of safety encompasses thriving businesses and local organizations that are invested in the community. A safe and thriving community also includes well-maintained and developed infrastructure. People also associated this aspect of safety with access to amenities—like restaurants and childcare—and recreational opportunities. Safe communities were described as clean, with little physical disorder, such as overgrown lots and abandoned buildings.

- Business owners are invested in the community and businesses are thriving.
- There are programs youth can participate in outside of school.
- There are grocery stores and people have access to healthy food.
- There are shops, restaurants, and entertainment venues.
- There are public libraries and institutions that support the arts.
- There are well maintained parks and access to outdoor recreational activities.
- Infrastructure, such as roads, sidewalks, lights, and signs are well-maintained.
- There is adequate lighting, including lights on the streets and roads.
- Infrastructure allows for people to walk and bike safely.

- There is reliable and safe public transportation.
- The community is clean and there are no run-down, boarded up, or empty buildings or overgrown lots.

## Region: Resources and Services for a Socially and Economically Just Community



### Access to Supportive Services

This component includes statements related to access and quality of supportive services and aid for people in need.

- Everyone who needs it has access to comprehensive mental health services and treatment for substance use problems.
- Resources and support are available for all victims of crime and violence regardless of the circumstances in which they were harmed.
- Resources are available to help support vulnerable populations, including people experiencing homelessness.
- Social services agencies are adequately staffed by competent and compassionate people.
- When natural and man-made disasters occur —such as flooding, hurricanes, tornadoes, and fires —there is aid for people who have been affected.

### Social and Economic Justice

The statements in this cluster reflect what a community looks like when fairness, equality, and human dignity are upheld for all individuals.

- A quality education is free and accessible to all.
- Affordable, quality housing is available for people of all income levels.
- People do not need to worry about where their next meal will come from
- Everyone has access to quality healthcare and healthcare providers.
- There are good job opportunities, and everyone can earn a living wage.
- There are low rates of income inequality.
- People are financially secure.
- There is clean air to breathe and clean water to drink.

## Region: Responsive Government and Public Safety Agencies

---



### Responsive, Ethical, and Transparent Government

This aspect of safety describes a well-functioning government that acts in the community's best interests. Statements also focus on government transparency, information sharing, and communication.

- Elected officials with different viewpoints work together to solve community problems.
- Government agencies are transparent and act in an ethical manner.
- People in power make fair, just, and unbiased decisions.
- The government is responsive to the needs of all and acts in the community's best interest.
- Information about how to access government services and the legal system is easily available.
- There is consistent and open communication from public officials.
- Community members have a voice in decisions that affect the community.
- People can reach out to local officials, and they know they will be respected.

### Comprehensive and Effective Emergency Response

Some survey respondents described community safety in terms of well-prepared and effective emergency response systems, including those traditionally associated with public safety (e.g., police, fire department, and emergency medical services). They also discussed first responders who are part of a “re-imagining” of public safety, such as mental health workers and alternate responders.

- First responders—including the police, fire department and emergency medical technicians—arrive quickly when they are called and are well-trained and equipped to handle an emergency.
- People aside from the police, such as mental health workers, are available to respond to emergencies and provide help.
- The local government invests in crime prevention and solutions that do not involve the police.
- People are educated about and prepared to handle natural disasters, including flooding and fires.

## Gun Violence Prevention

In addition to low rates of gun violence, some people indicated that they feel safer when efforts are in place to ensure that guns are used responsibly and safely and kept out of the hands of people who could use them to harm themselves or others, such as children and people struggling with mental health issues. However, there was general agreement that gun violence prevention is a highly nuanced concept, and the meaning varies across people and communities.

- Children do not have access to guns without the supervision of a responsible adult.
- Guns are kept out of the hands of people who are not allowed to own them.
- People are educated about owning and operating firearms safely.

## Region: Systems for Preventing and Addressing Harm



### Fair and Ethical Policing

This component of safety captures various aspects of fair and ethical policing, including freedom from harm at the hands of the police; community preferences regarding the visibility of police; and police and the public working together to make safe communities. Many indicated that this is what ideal policing looks like, but some, particularly people of color, questioned whether this vision would ever be realized in their communities.

- Police treat people in a way that is fair, just, and respectful.
- Law enforcement is trustworthy and acts in the community's best interests.
- People in the community respect and support local law enforcement.
- Police and community members work together to solve problems, prevent crime, and address concerns.
- Police officers know the members of the community.
- Law enforcement visibility and activity are aligned with community needs and preferences.
- People do not fear getting harassed, harmed, or killed by the police.
- No one has to worry about being stopped by law enforcement or federal immigration authorities because of their race, ethnicity, or immigration status.

## Accountability for Harm

This aspect of safety includes ideas related to holding individuals, institutions, and businesses accountable for harm. It encompasses fair and consistent courts, and well-trained police and prosecutors who take violent crimes seriously. Some participants pointed out how research and lived experiences show that traditional forms of punishment, such as keeping people in jail while awaiting trial and incarceration, do not enhance community safety and, in fact, can increase offending and make communities less safe. Others argued that if the criminal legal system does not hold people who cause harm accountable, it can compromise community safety, especially if these individuals harm again, or if victims believe they needed to take responsibility for their own safety (e.g., through retaliation). Still, others suggested a potential common ground between these two views—focusing on effective alternatives to incarceration and keeping jails “useful.” Statements regarding government and business accountability emerged in the interviews with stakeholders and were added to provide a more comprehensive conceptualization of accountability that recognizes those in power also cause harm.

- Individuals who commit violent crimes & felonies are held accountable.
- Effective alternatives to incarceration are available when people have caused harm.
- Police and prosecutors take violence, including domestic and sexual violence, seriously and have significant training in how to handle reports and investigations.
- Police enforce laws in accordance with community needs and preferences.
- The courts can be trusted to uphold the law in a fair and just manner, giving out consistent and appropriate penalties for breaking the law.
- Police are held formally accountable for their actions.
- Governments and businesses are held accountable for harm they have caused.

This research was supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation through the Safety and Justice Challenge Research Consortium (Consortium). Launched in 2019, the Consortium advances criminal justice research, grounded in the efforts and data of Safety and Justice Challenge sites, to expand the field’s collective knowledge of how to safely reduce the overuse and misuse of jails and racial and ethnic disparities through fair and effective pretrial reforms. The Consortium is comprised of research organizations who develop and are granted projects under independent review by a panel of academic, policy, and practice experts, including individuals with lived experience. The Consortium is managed by the CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance.

We are in debt to the residents of Missoula, St. Louis and Mecklenburg Counties who played an integral role in the development of the Community Safety Concept Map. This map reflects their views and perspectives, and it could not have been created without them. We would also like to acknowledge the assistance of our Redefining Community Safety Advisory Board members and our partners at Mecklenburg County Criminal Justice Services, who provided guidance throughout all stages of the project