



Leading the Way 2025-26 Tour **DENVER REPORT**

HIGHLIGHTING WHAT WORKS

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LETTER FROM CITIES UNITED EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: **AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Dear Denver Leaders, Partners, and Community Members,

On behalf of Cities United, I want to acknowledge the leadership, commitment, and continued investment demonstrated by the City and County of Denver as it advances a more coordinated approach to community safety. The Leading the Way (LTW) Tour made clear that this work is grounded in both intention and infrastructure; an understanding that sustainable reductions in violence require not only programs, but systems that align across sectors and remain accountable over time.

Denver stands out as a jurisdiction that has made significant strides in building the infrastructure for a comprehensive public safety ecosystem. With the establishment of the Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) in 2024, the expansion of the Office of Social Equity and Innovation (OSEI), and continued investment in community violence intervention, diversion, and alternative response strategies, the city has taken important steps toward a more coordinated, public health informed approach to safety. The tour occurred at a moment when that infrastructure is increasingly in place, but where alignment, coordination, and execution remain critical to achieving sustained impact.

Across three days of dialogue, reflection, and analysis, the LTW Tour engaged city leadership, public safety agencies, community-based organizations, young leaders, and system partners in meaningful conversation about how Denver's comprehensive public safety ecosystem is evolving. These discussions affirmed several foundational strengths, including strong cross-sector relationships, significant investments in prevention and alternative response, and growing alignment around a shared definition of safety. Participants also highlighted momentum around youth engagement, hospital-linked intervention strategies, and expanded approaches to crisis response such as STAR, which has responded to over 25,000 incidents since launch.

Building on this strong foundation, the tour also identified opportunities to strengthen the next phase of work. Participants noted that while infrastructure has expanded, coordination across agencies and partners remains uneven, and the translation of strategy into consistent execution is still developing.

Conversations surfaced challenges related to fragmentation, role clarity, and follow-through, as well as the need to better align data, narrative, and lived experience to strengthen trust and accountability.

Importantly, the tour reinforced that Denver's recent reductions in community violence following a peak of 96 homicides in 2021 and a decline to 70 in 2024 represent meaningful progress, but also underscore the need for sustained, coordinated strategies to maintain and accelerate that trajectory. Stakeholders consistently emphasized the opportunity to strengthen the connective tissue across prevention, intervention, and response, while more intentionally addressing the structural conditions that continue to shape exposure to violence.

This report reflects what was heard and learned during the Leading the Way Tour. It offers both a snapshot of current conditions and a forward-looking perspective on how Denver can deepen alignment, strengthen implementation, and sustain impact over time. The recommendations are organized to support immediate priorities and longer-term system building, with an emphasis on clarity, shared accountability, and coordinated execution.

Cities United is honored to walk alongside Denver in this next chapter; as a partner committed to strengthening coordination, supporting implementation, and advancing a comprehensive public safety ecosystem. The work underway in Denver reflects a broader truth seen across our network: when infrastructure is paired with alignment and accountability, durable progress becomes possible.

Sincerely,

Anthony D. Smith

Executive Director, Cities United



INTRODUCTION

In March 2026, Cities United brought its Leading the Way Tour to Denver, Colorado to listen, learn, and support Denver’s efforts to build a safer, healthier, and more hopeful community. Through a series of meetings and engagements with local leaders, community-based partners, public officials, and young leaders, the tour was designed to better understand Denver’s current public safety landscape and the conditions needed to strengthen it.

Cities United Leading the Way (LTW) Tour came to Denver to listen, learn, and support the city’s continued progress. Across jurisdictions, the Tour is designed to:

THE LEADING THE WAY TOUR SEEK TO:

- Highlight effective, comprehensive public safety practices and models
- Foster cross-sector collaboration
- Amplify community-led solutions
- Enhance local capacity
- Evaluate progress and impact through the Cities United Roadmap Framework
- Assess and foster meaningful young leader engagement

In Denver, these aims are closely aligned with the city’s current priorities. As investments in prevention, intervention, and alternative response have expanded, so too has the need to ensure that these efforts are functioning as part of a coordinated ecosystem. This includes strengthening connections across agencies, aligning community-based work with system-level strategies, and ensuring that young leaders and community voices are meaningfully integrated into decision making.

With the establishment of the Office of Neighborhood Safety, expanded investment in community violence intervention, and the continued growth of alternative response models such as STAR, the city has built a strong foundation for a comprehensive public safety ecosystem. Denver has also cultivated a broad network of partners across government, community-based organizations, public health, and systems serving young leaders. As a result, the city has entered a more complex phase of work, one defined less by determining what to do, and more by ensuring that existing strategies are coordinated, aligned, and consistently implemented across systems and communities.

Over the course of the three-day LTW Tour, participants representing local government, public safety, public health, education, community-based organizations, and young leaders engaged in facilitated discussions, strategy sessions, and reflection activities, including structured SWOT analysis. Together, these engagements provided a comprehensive view into how Denver's public safety ecosystem is currently functioning, where coordination is taking hold, where gaps persist, and where opportunities exist to strengthen alignment and impact.

Across the materials reviewed and discussions held during the tour, Denver appears to be operating in **Phase 2 of the Cities United Roadmap: Constructing a Multi-Year Plan of Action**. The insights gathered through the tour indicate that Denver has moved beyond planning and initial investment and is now focused on how strategies are executed, sustained, and coordinated across partners. The city has moved beyond planning and initial investment, and is now focused on how strategies are executed, sustained, and coordinated across partners. As such, this report serves not only as a reflection of the Leading the Way Tour stop, but as an assessment of how Denver's public safety ecosystem is functioning in practice, highlighting both the progress achieved and the alignment required to move forward.

UNDERSTANDING THE LOCAL LANDSCAPE

Denver's public safety landscape reflects a city that has made meaningful progress in reducing violence while continuing to navigate deeply rooted disparities that shape who is most impacted and how safety is experienced. Additionally Denver has invested significantly in expanding its public safety infrastructure. **The establishment of the Office of Neighborhood Safety in 2024, alongside the Office of Social Equity and Innovation and the Office of Community Violence Solutions, reflects a deliberate effort to build a more coordinated system.** Programs such as STAR, which has responded to more than 25,000 calls since its launch, demonstrate a commitment to alternative response and to matching resources to need. Hospital-linked intervention efforts, including AIM and GRASP, further expand the system's ability to engage individuals at critical moments.

Together, these investments have created a system with multiple entry points for support. Individuals can access services through community-based organizations, crisis response teams, and prevention-focused programs. **However, what emerged consistently across conversations is that the presence of resources does not always translate into accessibility or coordination.**

Key partners and the community noted how the system is both robust and difficult to navigate. For those inside the system, there is not always clear visibility into how efforts connect. For those outside of it, particularly those most impacted by violence, pathways to support can feel unclear or inconsistent.



MOMENT THAT MATTERED

During a cross-sector discussion, one leader reflected on this disconnect, stating,

“We’ve built a lot of strong programs. But if someone needs help, it’s still not always clear where they’re supposed to go.”

This moment underscores a central challenge within Denver's landscape. The issue is not whether resources exist, but whether they function together in a way that is visible, accessible, and responsive.

The SWOT analysis reinforced this reality. Strengths such as innovation, community trust, and collaboration were consistently named, alongside challenges related to communication, coordination, and system navigation. This duality defines Denver's current position. **The city has built significant infrastructure and made important progress, but the alignment of those efforts remains uneven.**

At the same time, there is a clear shift in how safety is being understood. Across sessions, conversations expanded beyond immediate response to include mental health, economic opportunity, and long-term stability. **This broader framing reflects an evolving understanding of public safety as an ecosystem, one that must address both immediate harm and the conditions that contribute to it.**

Taken together, Denver's landscape is defined by both progress and complexity. The infrastructure is in place. The data reflects both improvement and disparity. The challenge ahead is ensuring that the system functions in a way that is coordinated, accessible, and capable of producing sustained and equitable outcomes

Another important strength is the level of collaboration that already exists across organizations. While coordination is not yet consistent, there are strong working relationships and a willingness to partner. Agencies are not operating in complete isolation. There are examples of shared work, informal coordination, and mutual support that can be built upon.

This was reinforced in the SWOT analysis, where collaboration, community connection, and resourcefulness were consistently named as strengths. These qualities reflect real practices that are already happening and can serve as a foundation for more formal alignment.

Young leaders are also an important and growing asset within Denver’s ecosystem. During the tour, young people spoke clearly about their experiences, their needs, and their expectations for the system. Their perspectives added urgency and specificity to conversations that might otherwise remain abstract.



In recent years, Denver has seen a decline in homicides, decreasing from a peak of 96 in 2021 to 70 in 2024. This reduction signals that investments in prevention, intervention, and alternative response are contributing to progress. At the same time, the broader landscape remains complex. The city reported approximately 7,279 violent crimes, with a violent crime rate of 1,016 per 100,000 residents, underscoring that while progress is real, the need for sustained and coordinated strategies remains urgent.

The impact of violence is not evenly distributed. Data shared during the tour indicates that a significant share of non-fatal shooting victims are under the age of 25, reinforcing that young people are disproportionately impacted. That burden is even more concentrated among Black boys and young men, who too often experience violence at the intersection of economic instability, limited access to opportunity, and repeated exposure to trauma. These patterns align with what was heard consistently across sessions, underscoring the need for strategies that are not only focused on Black boys and young men, but informed by their lived experiences, leadership, and voices.

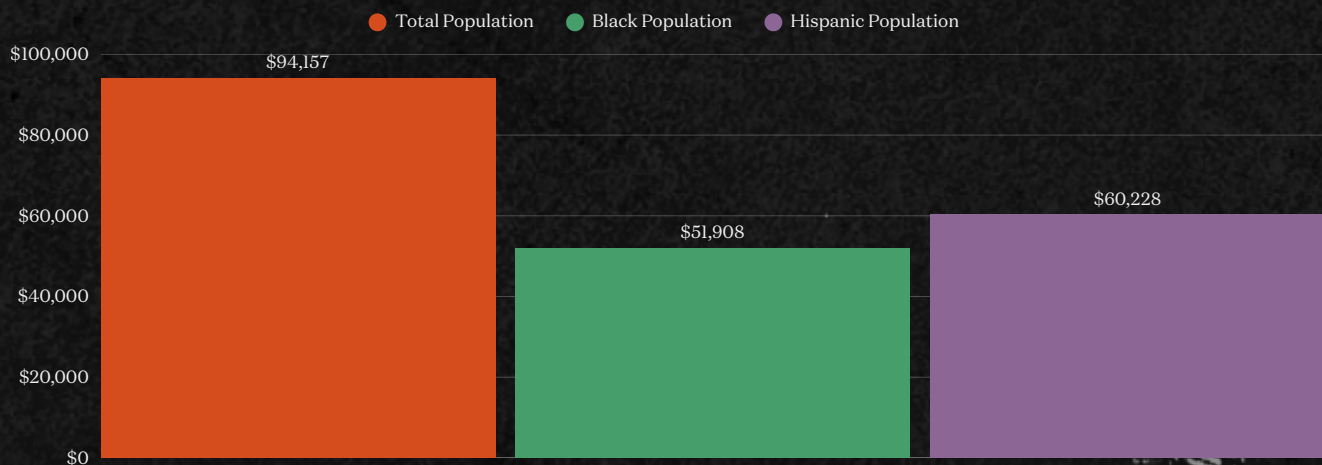
Grounded Strengths: A System with Deep Commitment and Real Assets

Denver’s public safety ecosystem is supported by a set of strengths that are both visible in structure and felt in practice. Across sessions, conversations, and SWOT reflections, what emerged most clearly is that the city is not lacking commitment, relationships, or innovation. Instead, there is a strong foundation already in place that, but if better aligned, can support more consistent and sustained impact.

One of the most consistent strengths is the presence of deeply rooted community-based organizations that are trusted within the neighborhoods most impacted by violence. These organizations are not operating at a distance. They are embedded, accessible, and often serve as the first point of connection for individuals navigating crisis, instability, or harm. Their effectiveness is tied not just to the services they provide, but to the relationships they have built over time.

These organizations are operating in communities where disparities in income and access are defining conditions. The gap between the overall median household income (approximately \$94,000) and Black median household income (approximately \$51,908) reflects a broader pattern of uneven access to economic stability and mobility. As a result, many organizations are not just delivering programs, but working within and responding to structural conditions that shape both risk and resilience.

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME



Across discussions, there was clear recognition that these relationships are one of the most valuable assets within the ecosystem. Trust is not theoretical in Denver. It is held by specific organizations and individuals who have credibility in the community by showing up daily and the ability to engage those who may not interact with formal systems.



MOMENT THAT MATTERED

During a session focused on community response, one organization leader described the role they play in moments of crisis, sharing:

“When something happens, people don’t call the system first. They call us.”

(Community-based organization leader, facilitated discussion)

This moment highlights a critical truth about how the system actually functions. Access to support is often mediated through trusted relationships, not formal entry points. Any effort to strengthen the ecosystem must build from this reality.

In addition to these relational strengths, Denver has made meaningful investments in expanding how safety is approached. The presence of alternative response models, hospital-linked intervention efforts, and community-based programming reflects a system that is actively trying to move beyond a single approach to safety. These efforts create multiple entry points for support and allow for more tailored responses to different types of need.

Participants also pointed to the growing emphasis on mental health and healing-centered approaches as a strength. Across conversations, there was alignment around the importance of addressing trauma, providing emotional support, and creating spaces where individuals can stabilize and reconnect. This reflects an understanding that safety is not only about preventing harm, but also about supporting recovery and long-term wellbeing.



MOMENT THAT MATTERED

During a young leader session, one young person shared:

“A lot of programs are there, but we don’t always know how to get to them or if they’re really for us.”

(Young leader, facilitated session)

This reflection highlights both a strength and an opportunity. The presence of programs is real, but access and clarity remain challenges. Young leaders are helping to surface these gaps in ways that can strengthen system design and ensure programs are reaching and are tailored for those most at risk of community violence.

Finally, there is a shared willingness across the ecosystem to engage in honest reflection. Throughout the tour, leaders and partners spoke candidly about both what is working and what is not. This level of openness is not guaranteed, and it represents an important strength. It creates the conditions for alignment, learning, and course correction.

Taken together, these strengths reflect a public safety ecosystem that is active, committed, and evolving. The key opportunity is not to build from scratch, but to connect and align what already exists in a way that allows these assets to function as part of a coordinated whole.



PERSISTENT CHALLENGES: WHERE ALIGNMENT AND CAPACITY STILL NEED STRENGTHENING

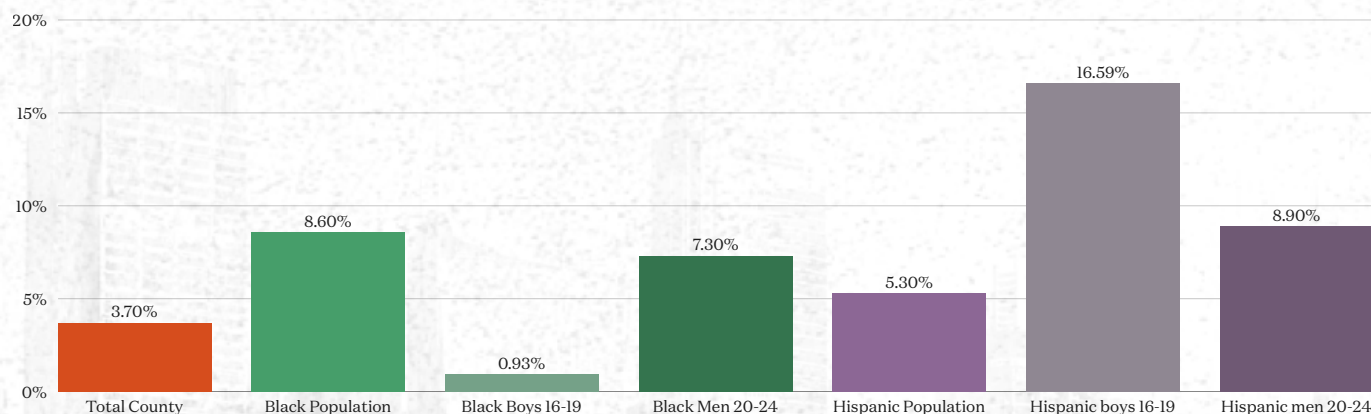
The most consistent and significant finding across the tour is that Denver's public safety ecosystem is not yet functioning as a cohesive system.

Across conversations, a clear pattern emerged. Efforts are often siloed, with agencies and organizations operating within their own structures, funding streams, and priorities.

While there is alignment in intent, that alignment does not consistently translate into coordinated action. As a result, the system functions as a collection of strong individual efforts rather than a unified approach, creating gaps that are most visible to those navigating services in real time.

These coordination challenges are particularly significant when viewed alongside disparities in access to opportunity.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE



While overall unemployment is relatively low, disparities persist. Black unemployment is more than double the city average, and young Black men face additional barriers entering the workforce.

These conditions are not separate from public safety. They shape exposure to risk, limit access to stabilizing opportunities, and influence how individuals engage with the system.

Communication is a central point of breakdown. Information does not consistently flow across agencies and organizations, and there is limited visibility into who is doing what across the ecosystem. This lack of shared awareness reduces efficiency, contributes to duplication, and makes it difficult for community members to access the right support at the right time. What should feel like a connected system often feels fragmented and difficult to navigate.

Closely tied to this is a lack of role clarity. In moments that require coordinated response, there is not always a shared understanding of who is responsible for leading or how different actors should engage. Without clearly defined roles and pathways, response efforts can become uncoordinated, slowing action and weakening accountability.

MOMENT THAT MATTERED

One leader reflected on a recent response effort, stating,

“Everyone showed up, but nobody knew who was supposed to do what.”

This moment captures how gaps in coordination move from abstract challenges to real consequences. When roles are unclear, even strong relationships and shared intent are not enough to produce effective action.

Another consistent theme is the gap between planning and execution. Denver has no shortage of ideas, strategies, or initiatives. What is less consistent is the ability to sustain those efforts over time. There is a pattern of launching new work without fully institutionalizing or following through on what has already begun. This creates a sense that the system is constantly starting over, rather than building momentum.

Trust is deeply intertwined with these dynamics. While strong relationships exist across parts of the ecosystem, trust is not evenly distributed. Skepticism remains in some communities, particularly when engagement is not followed by visible action. Tensions between organizations, often shaped by competition for limited funding, further complicate collaboration and can reinforce fragmentation rather than alignment.

The SWOT analysis brought to the surface the Operational pressures, adding another layer of complexity. Capacity limitations, burnout among frontline staff, and the ongoing challenge of navigating funding instability all affect the system's ability to function effectively. Even where resources exist, they are not always accessible in ways that are clear or consistent for those who need them most.

Finally, gaps in inclusion continue to shape how the system operates. Not all relevant partners are consistently at the table, and some perspectives remain underrepresented in decision-making spaces. While engagement of young leaders is growing, it is not yet fully embedded within the structure of the work. Without sustained pathways for involvement, there is a risk that insight from young people remains intermittent rather than integrated into how decisions are made.

EMERGING MOMENTUM: SIGNALS OF READINESS FOR ALIGNMENT

Even within a landscape shaped by fragmentation and complexity, there are clear signals that Denver is ready to move toward deeper alignment. Across conversations, reflections, and SWOT exercises, a shift is taking place in how leaders and partners understand both the work itself and what is required to move it forward.

One of the strongest signals of this shift is a growing emphasis on shared responsibility. Discussions are moving away from a focus on individual programs and toward a broader recognition that outcomes must be owned collectively. This was evident in how leaders described both success and gaps, increasingly framing challenges not as isolated failures, but as indicators of where coordination across the system is needed.

This shift reflects a deeper understanding that public safety cannot be achieved through parallel efforts alone. It requires alignment in how work is designed, implemented, and measured.

MOMENT THAT MATTERS

During a strategy session, a city agency leader reflected on this shift, stating,

“We’re all doing work that matters. The question is whether it adds up to something bigger.”

(City agency leader, strategy discussion)

This moment signals a move from activity-based thinking toward outcome-based alignment, where the focus is not only on what is being done, but on how those efforts connect to produce shared impact.

The SWOT analysis further reinforced this readiness. Collaboration, resourcefulness, and community connection were consistently named as strengths, alongside a clear desire for stronger coordination and communication. This combination reflects a system that is both aware of its challenges and motivated to address them.

There is also momentum in how safety is being defined. Across sessions, conversations expanded to include mental health, economic stability, and healing as core components of public safety. This broader framing creates opportunities to align efforts across systems that have not consistently been connected, including workforce development, education, and health.

Taken together, these signals point to a system that is ready for its next phase. The willingness to collaborate is present. The recognition of shared responsibility is growing. The opportunity now is to translate that readiness into structures and practices that support sustained alignment.

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS: WHAT COULD SLOW OR UNDERMINE PROGRESS

As Denver works to strengthen alignment across its public safety ecosystem, several strategic considerations emerge that could slow progress or limit long-term impact if not addressed intentionally.

One of the most significant considerations is sustainability. While Denver has made meaningful investments in building infrastructure and expanding programming, there is concern about how these efforts will be sustained over time. Reliance on time-limited funding, combined with uncertainty around future resources creates conditions where even effective strategies may struggle to continue without interruption.

⚠️ MOMENT THAT MATTERS

A community-based organization leader spoke to this directly, stating,

“We build something that works, and then we have to figure out how to keep it going every year.”

(Community-based organization leader, facilitated discussion)

This dynamic creates instability that can undermine both trust and effectiveness.

Another key consideration is the impact of competition for resources on collaboration. While increased investment is essential, the way funding is distributed can create tension between organizations. When resources are limited or inconsistently aligned, organizations may be forced to prioritize sustainability over coordination, making it more difficult to maintain shared efforts.

This tension was visible in SWOT reflections, where both collaboration and competition were named as defining features of the current landscape.

There is also a significant risk related to capacity and burnout. Much of the work within Denver's ecosystem is being carried by a relatively small group of organizations and individuals who are deeply committed but operating under sustained pressure. The emotional and operational demands of this work are high, particularly for those closest to violence and crisis response.

MOMENT THAT MATTERS

During a reflection session, a community partner shared,

**“We’re doing everything we can, but it’s a lot. And it’s not slowing down.”
(Community partner, facilitated reflection)**

This moment underscores the importance of building systems that support not only outcomes, but the people responsible for achieving them.

Another strategic consideration is the balance between immediate response and long-term investment. The urgency of addressing violence in real time often requires significant attention and resources, which can limit the ability to invest in upstream strategies such as economic opportunity, education, and prevention.

This tension creates a cycle where systems remain focused on response, even as there is recognition that long-term safety requires addressing underlying conditions and investing in healing, recovery, and sustained support.

A system partner described this challenge, noting,

“We’re always responding to what’s happening right now, and that makes it harder to build what could change things long term.”

(System partner, strategy discussion)

Finally, alignment between data, narrative, and lived experience remains a critical consideration. While data is increasingly available, it is not always used in ways that support shared understanding or inform coordinated action. When data feels disconnected from what communities are experiencing, it can weaken trust and limit its usefulness.

A community-based leader reflected this concern, stating,

“If the numbers don’t match what people are living, it’s hard to know what to trust.”

(Community-based organization leader, facilitated session)

At its core, the risk facing Denver is not a lack of effort or innovation. It is the possibility that, without intentional alignment, the system does not fully realize the potential of what has already been built.

The opportunity moving forward is to address these considerations directly, ensuring that the ecosystem is not only active, but coordinated, sustainable, and positioned for long-term impact.

DENVER: SAFETY & EQUITY SNAPSHOT

Denver is a city of approximately 716,577 residents with a growing and evolving public safety ecosystem shaped by expanded investment in prevention, intervention, and alternative response. The city has experienced a decline in homicides since its peak in 2021, reflecting progress across multiple strategies. At the same time, violence remains concentrated among young people and within specific neighborhoods that have experienced long-standing economic and structural inequities. Disparities in employment, income, and access to opportunity continue to intersect with safety outcomes, reinforcing the need for coordinated, ecosystem-level approaches. Denver's expanding infrastructure, combined with a strong network of community-based organizations and increasing engagement of young leaders, positions the city to deepen alignment and strengthen long-term impact.

- **Population:** ~716,577 residents
- **Black Population:** ~10.6%
- Increasing diversity across neighborhoods, with uneven distribution of resources and opportunity
- **Median Household Income:** ~\$94,000
- **Black Median Household Income:** ~\$51,908
- **Unemployment Rate:** ~3.7% overall
- **Black Unemployment Rate:** ~8.6%
- Higher unemployment among young adults, particularly Black young people

Education

- **High school graduation rate:** ~80–85% overall

Violence & Safety Trends

- **Homicide Trend:** 96 (2021 peak) → 70 (2024), with continued decline trends observed into 2025 Violent Crime: ~7,279 incidents annually
- **Violent Crime Rate:** 1,016 per 100,000 residents
- Overall violent crime trends show stabilization or decline, with uneven impact across communities

Impact on Young People

- Violence is concentrated among young people in specific neighborhoods with repeated exposure

Geographic Concentration

- Violence and safety concerns remain concentrated in specific neighborhoods experiencing historical disinvestment
- Repeated exposure to violence impacts young people, families, and community stability
- Place-based inequities continue to shape both risk and access to resources

Economic Context

- Economic instability continues to intersect with safety, housing, and workforce access
- Disparities in economic stability and upward mobility opportunities influence exposure to violence and long-term outcomes
- Access to living-wage employment and career pathways remains uneven across communities

Governance & Coordination

- Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) leads coordination of violence prevention and intervention strategies
- Office of Social Equity & Innovation (OSEI) supports alignment of equity-focused initiatives
- Office of Community Violence Solutions (OCVS) contributes to strategy and implementation
- Cross-sector coordination includes partnerships with community-based organizations, public health, and public safety agencies
- Coordination structures are expanding, with ongoing need for clearer alignment, role definition, and shared accountability

Public Safety Infrastructure

- STAR alternative response program (25,000+ calls responded)
- Hospital-linked intervention programs (AIM, GRASP, REACH Clinic)
- Expanding community-based ecosystem focused on prevention, intervention, and healing
- Growing investment in mental health and trauma-informed approaches

Young Leader Engagement

- Young leaders are increasingly present in conversations related to safety, prevention, and community wellbeing.
- During the LTW Tour, young leaders contributed as active participants shaping dialogue and insight
- Opportunities remain to scale, formalize and sustain young leader engagement within decision-making structures

Equity Consideration

Disparities across race, age, income, and geography continue to shape:

- Risk of exposure to violence
- access to opportunity and services
- how safety is experienced across communities

Community Assets

- Strong network of community-based organizations with deep neighborhood trust and credibility
- Grassroots partners and credible messengers serving as key connectors to individuals most impacted by violence
- Organizations serving young people providing mentorship, prevention programming, and workforce pathways
- Faith-based and community anchors offering consistent support and safe spaces
- Hospital-linked intervention efforts, including AIM /GRASP, engaging individuals at critical moments
- STAR alternative response program expanding non-law enforcement crisis response
- City-led infrastructure, including ONS, OSEI, and OCVS, supporting coordination across prevention, intervention, and response

Data & Equity Considerations

- Homicides declined from 96 (2021) to 70 (2024), though overall violent crime remains significant (~7,279 incidents)
- Violence is concentrated in specific neighborhoods experiencing long-term disinvestment
- Economic disparities, including higher unemployment among Black residents and young adults, shape exposure to violence
- Gaps in access and system navigation limit the reach of existing resources
- Data and lived experience are not always fully aligned, impacting trust and coordination

Source: City and County of Denver Leading the Way Tour Briefing Materials; Denver Public Safety Data; Cities United Tour Analysis (2026)

RECOMMENDATIONS & OPPORTUNITIES

FOR CITIES UNITED SUPPORT

The Leading the Way Tour surfaced a clear set of priorities to support Denver as it continues to strengthen alignment across its public safety ecosystem. These recommendations are intentionally prioritized based on urgency, feasibility, and the patterns identified through sessions, interviews, and SWOT analysis. They are organized across two implementation horizons to support sequencing, focus, and accountability.

As reflected throughout the tour, the work ahead is not about introducing new programs. It is about strengthening how existing efforts connect, function, and sustain impact over time. The recommendations below reflect that orientation and are designed to support Denver in moving from strong activity to coordinated execution.

IMMEDIATE ACTION STEPS (3-6 MONTH PRIORITIES)

1. CLARIFY ECOSYSTEM ROLES, OWNERSHIP, AND DECISION-MAKING ACROSS PARTNERS

Establish clear ownership across prevention, intervention, and response efforts, including defined roles for city agencies, community-based organizations, and system partners. This includes identifying who leads in moments requiring coordination and how shared decisions are made.

Why it matters: Directly addresses role confusion, duplication, and delays in coordinated response.

2. ESTABLISH A CROSS-SYSTEM COORDINATION STRUCTURE FOCUSED ON EXECUTION

Create a consistent, action-oriented coordination table that brings together key partners across ONS, OSEI, OCVS, community-based organizations, and public safety agencies. This structure should focus on implementation, not just information sharing, with clear expectations for follow-through.

Why it matters: Moves coordination from relationship-based to system-supported.

3. STRENGTHEN COMMUNICATION AND SYSTEM NAVIGATION PATHWAYS

Develop shared communication protocols and accessible pathways that clarify how individuals connect to services across the ecosystem. This includes improving visibility of available resources and strengthening referral and handoff processes between partners.

Why it matters: Addresses gaps in access and confusion navigating the system.

4. IDENTIFY AND EXECUTE A SMALL SET OF SHARED PRIORITY ACTIONS

Align partners around 3 to 5 near-term priorities with clear timelines, ownership, and measurable outcomes. Focus on actions that demonstrate visible progress and reinforce shared accountability.

Why it matters: Responds directly to the gap between planning and execution.

5. FORMALIZE ENGAGEMENT OF YOUNG LEADERS WITHIN ONGOING STRUCTURES

Create consistent roles for young leaders within planning, implementation, and decision-making spaces. Ensure engagement is sustained, compensated, and connected to real influence.

Why it matters: Moves engagement from episodic to embedded and strengthens relevance of strategies

6. CREATE A SHARED IMPLEMENTATION TRACKER FOR THE PUBLIC SAFETY ECOSYSTEM

Develop a simple shared tracker that identifies priority actions, lead owner, supporting partners, timeline, progress status, barriers, and proof points. This should be used by ONS, OSEI, OCVS, community-based partners, and other system leaders to move from conversation to execution.

Why it matters: It was uplifted during the tour that there is a consistent gap between planning and follow-through. A shared tracker would help Denver make progress visible, support accountability, and reduce duplication across partners.

7. STRENGTHEN CRISIS RESPONSE AND COMMUNITY VIOLENCE INTERVENTION COORDINATION PROTOCOLS

Develop clear protocols for how city agencies, hospital-linked intervention partners, credible messengers, community-based organizations, and public safety partners coordinate after incidents of violence. This should include who leads, who is notified, how families and survivors are supported, and how follow-up happens.

Why it matters: The tour surfaced role confusion during moments requiring coordinated response. Clear protocols would help ensure that people most impacted by violence experience the system as connected, responsive, and rooted in care.

LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

(12+ MONTH PRIORITIES)

1. DEVELOP A FULLY INTEGRATED PUBLIC SAFETY ECOSYSTEM FRAMEWORK FOR DENVER

Align prevention, intervention, interruption, and response efforts into a clearly defined system with mapped pathways, shared goals, and coordinated implementation across agencies and community partners.

Why it matters: Addresses fragmentation and strengthens long-term system coherence.

2. STRENGTHEN AND SUSTAINING COORDINATED FUNDING STRATEGY

Build on existing philanthropic and cross-sector funding efforts to create a more coordinated and sustainable investment strategy that aligns public, philanthropic, and private resources. Supporting long-term investment in community-based organizations and ecosystem coordination. Reduce competition that undermines collaboration and prioritize flexible funding that supports stability.

Why it matters: Responds to funding instability and competition identified in SWOT analysis.

3. CREATE AN INTEGRATED DATA AND LEARNING SYSTEM ACROSS PARTNERS

Develop shared data practices that connect system data with lived experience, support real-time decision-making, and strengthen accountability. Position data as a tool for learning and coordination, not just reporting.

Why it matters: Addresses misalignment between data, narrative, and community experience.

4. STRENGTHEN WORKFORCE CAPACITY AND SUSTAINABILITY ACROSS THE ECOSYSTEM

Invest in support structures for frontline organizations and leaders, including training, wellness resources, and pathways to scale staffing capacity.

Why it matters: Addresses burnout and over-reliance on a small group of actors.

LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

(12+ MONTH PRIORITIES)

5. EXPAND PATHWAYS FOR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ALIGNED WITH SAFETY STRATEGIES

Strengthen connections between workforce development, education, and violence prevention efforts to ensure young people have access to meaningful employment pathways.

Why it matters: Directly responds to root causes identified by young leaders and stakeholders.

6. BUILD A PLACE-BASED STRATEGY FOR NEIGHBORHOODS MOST IMPACTED BY VIOLENCE

Use data, community voice, and lived experience to identify priority neighborhoods where prevention, intervention, healing, workforce, youth development, and family supports can be aligned. This should not be a one-size-fits-all approach, but a targeted strategy shaped with residents, young leaders, and trusted community partners.

Why it matters: Violence and disinvestment are not evenly distributed. A place-based strategy would help Denver align resources where they are most needed and where community trust is essential.

7. EMBED YOUNG LEADER POWER WITHIN DENVER'S PUBLIC SAFETY ECOSYSTEM

Create a formal structure for young leaders to advise, co-design, and evaluate public safety strategies. This should include compensation, leadership development, feedback loops, and direct connection to decision-making tables.

Why it matters: Young leaders named clear gaps in access, communication, opportunity, and trust during the tour. Embedding their power within Denver's ecosystem ensures that public safety strategies are shaped by the people most impacted and remain grounded in what young people actually need to be safe, supported, and hopeful.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CITIES UNITED SUPPORT

Cities United is well positioned to support Denver through targeted technical assistance, strategic facilitation, and peer learning that strengthens coordination, implementation, and sustainability across the ecosystem.

1. ECOSYSTEM ALIGNMENT AND ROLE CLARIFICATION

Facilitate ecosystem mapping and alignment processes that clarify roles, responsibilities, and connections across prevention, intervention, and response efforts, with a focus on strengthening coordination and reducing duplication.

2. IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY COACHING

Provide coaching and tools to support execution, including defining priority actions, tracking progress, and strengthening accountability across partners.

3. YOUNG LEADER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Support the design of sustainable structures for engaging young leaders in decision-making, including models for compensation, leadership development, and integration into system planning.

4. COMMUNICATION AND SYSTEM NAVIGATION SUPPORT

Share tools and strategies to improve communication across partners and strengthen how individuals access and move through the system.

5. SUSTAINABILITY AND FUNDING STRATEGY SUPPORT

Facilitate conversations and share models that support aligned funding strategies, including approaches to reducing competition and strengthening long-term investment.

6. PEER LEARNING AND CROSS-CITY EXCHANGE

Cities United can connect Denver with peer jurisdictions working through similar challenges around public safety ecosystem alignment, young leader engagement, funding sustainability, data use, and implementation accountability.

Conclusion:

A Call for Aligned Action

Denver moves forward from the Leading the Way Tour with **a strong foundation, a clear understanding of its challenges, and a growing readiness to strengthen how its public safety ecosystem functions in practice.**

The tour affirmed that Denver **is not lacking in effort, innovation, or commitment.** The city has invested in building infrastructure, expanded its approach to safety, and cultivated a network of partners who are deeply engaged in prevention, intervention, and response. **Community-based organizations bring trust and proximity to the work, city agencies are advancing new strategies, and young leaders are increasingly shaping how safety is understood and experienced.**

At the same time, what emerged consistently across sessions, reflections, and analysis is that the next phase of work is defined by alignment. The system is active, but not always coordinated. Resources exist, but are not always accessible or connected. **Relationships are strong, but not yet supported by the structures needed to sustain shared execution.**

These dynamics point to a central opportunity. **Denver is at a moment where strengthening coordination, clarifying ownership, and improving follow-through can significantly increase the impact of what already exists.** Doing so will require continued attention to how prevention, intervention, and response efforts are connected, how decisions are made and communicated, and how accountability is shared across partners.

The tour also reinforced the importance of centering those most impacted in shaping the work moving forward. **Young leaders, community-based organizations, and frontline practitioners offered critical insight into how the system is experienced on the ground.** Their perspectives highlight both the strengths of the current ecosystem and the gaps that must be addressed to ensure that safety is felt consistently across communities.

Cities United's role moving forward is to support Denver in translating this readiness into sustained action. This includes strengthening alignment across the ecosystem, supporting implementation and accountability, and facilitating opportunities for shared learning and connection with peer jurisdictions.

The progress ahead will not be defined by the addition of new initiatives, but by how effectively existing efforts are aligned and sustained. Denver has built a strong and evolving system. The work now is to ensure that it functions as one.

APPENDIX

REFERENCED QUOTES & ATTRIBUTION

- “We have a lot of good things happening. The problem is they don’t always connect in a way people can feel.” *(System leader, facilitated discussion)*
- “We’ve built a lot of strong programs. But if someone needs help, it’s still not always clear where they’re supposed to go.” *(City agency leader, cross-sector discussion)*
- “Everyone showed up, but nobody knew who was supposed to do what.” *(Community partner, strategy session)*
- “We’re not effective because we show up once. We’re effective because we keep showing up.” *(Community-based organization leader, facilitated discussion)*
- “There are programs out there, but if you don’t already know someone, you might not even know they exist.” *(Young leader, facilitated session)*
- “I don’t need something just to keep me busy. I need something that actually leads somewhere.” *(Young leader, facilitated session)*
- “We talk a lot about working together. The next step is figuring out how we actually do that every day.” *(Community-based organization leader, facilitated discussion)*
- “We’re doing everything we can, but it’s a lot. And it’s not slowing down.” *(Community partner, facilitated reflection)*
- “If the numbers don’t match what people are living, it’s hard to know what to trust.” *(Community-based organization leader, strategy discussion)*

KEY DATA POINTS REFERENCED IN REPORT

- **Population:** ~716,577 residents

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2023 (5-Year Estimates); Denver Tour Briefing Materials

- **Black Population:** ~75,788 (10.6%)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2023; Denver Tour Briefing Materials

- **Poverty Rate:** ~11–12% of residents live below the federal poverty line

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2023

- **Median Household Income:** ~\$94,000

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2023; Denver Tour Briefing Materials

- **Education:** High school graduation rate ~80–85% overall

Source: Colorado Department of Education; Denver Public Schools data summaries

KEY DATA POINTS REFERENCED IN REPORT

- **Homicide Trend:**

- **2021:** 96 homicides (recent peak)
- **2024:** 70 homicides (decline)
- **2025:** Continued stabilization trends reported

Source: Denver Police Department crime statistics; City and County of Denver public safety briefings; LTW Tour materials

- **Violent Crime:** ~7,279 incidents annually; rate of 1,016 per 100,000 residents

Source: Denver Police Department crime reports; Denver Tour Briefing Materials

- **Geographic Concentration:** Violence remains concentrated in specific neighborhoods experiencing long-standing disinvestment, with repeated exposure impacting young people and families

Source: Denver Police Department hotspot analyses; LTW Tour discussions and SWOT reflections

- **Economic Context:** Disparities in employment and income, including higher unemployment among Black residents and young adults, intersect with safety, housing stability, and workforce access

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2023; Denver Tour Briefing Materials; LTW discussions

Public Safety Infrastructure:

- Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS)
- Office of Social Equity & Innovation (OSEI)
- Office of Community Violence Solutions (OCVS)
- STAR alternative response program (25,000+ calls)
- Hospital-linked intervention (AIM, GRASP, REACH Clinic)

Source: City and County of Denver; LTW Tour Briefing Materials

Young Leader Engagement:

- Young leaders engaged through LTW sessions, including facilitated discussions and youth-centered convenings; demonstrated interest in sustained roles in shaping safety strategies
- **Source:** LTW Denver session transcripts (Young Leader Sessions); CU field notes

APPENDIX

SOURCES OF CU TEAM & LTW JURISDICTION MEMBER FEEDBACK

- Denver Leading the Way Tour session transcripts (cross-sector sessions, young leader sessions, strategy discussions)
- SWOT reflection posters completed by participants across sessions
- Facilitated session notes and working documents
- Cities United team debrief notes and internal reflections
- Interview with local system leader (Preston Adams)
- Denver Leading the Way Tour Briefing Materials
- Public Safety Values Session notes and outputs
- Community and stakeholder discussion summaries
- Youth-centered session transcripts and reflections





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