



Leading the Way 2025 Tour

WEST PALM BEACH REPORT

HIGHLIGHTING WHAT WORKS

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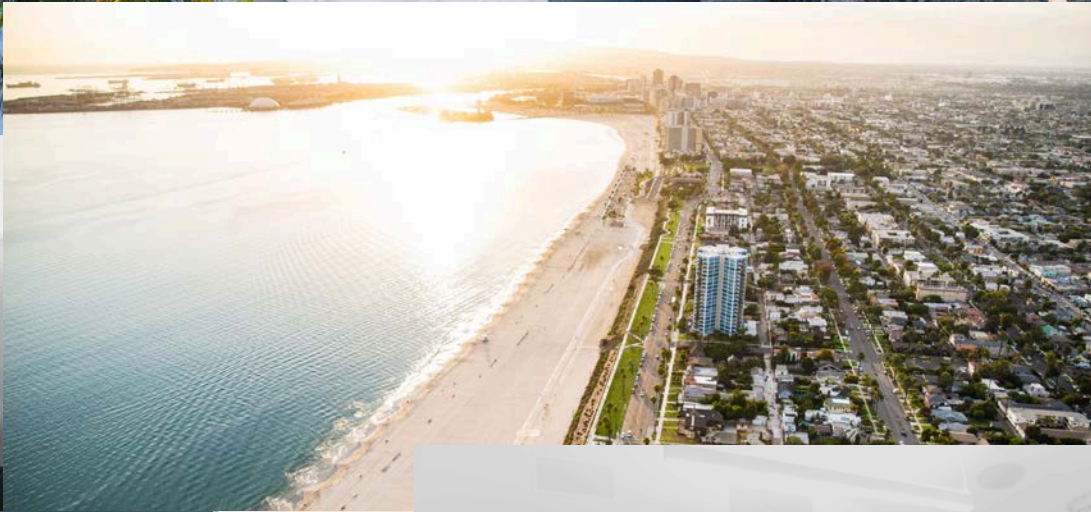
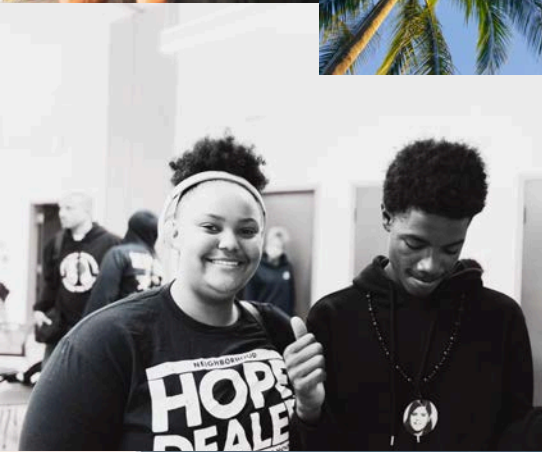
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

OPPORTUNITY IN FRAGMENTATION

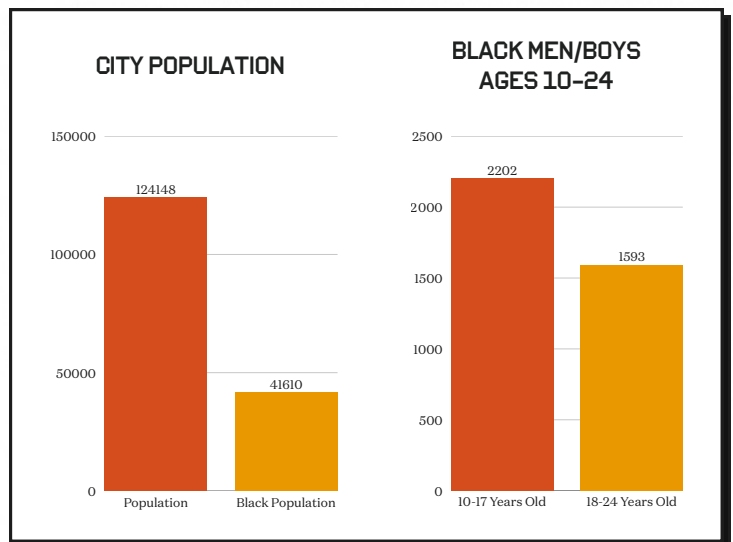
From May 20–22, 2025, Cities United hosted its Leading the Way Tour in **West Palm Beach (WPB)**. The three-day experience brought together **youth leaders, community-based organizations, elected and appointed officials, and law enforcement partners** for a series of learning, relationship-building, and comprehensive public safety strategy development sessions. These included a leadership-focused session with city officials, a community dinner as well as a young leader session. The engagement aimed to strengthen local momentum for a comprehensive public safety ecosystem.

The WPB stop of Cities United’s Leading the Way Tour revealed a jurisdiction with **significant assets, promising leadership, and deep-rooted community partners**—yet challenged by strategic fragmentation and underutilized capacity. Momentum for a more holistic public safety ecosystem is growing, driven by a supportive **WPB police chief**, engaged community-based organizations (CBOs), County-led programming and energized leadership from neighboring Riviera Beach.

Inner City Innovators (ICI) played a visible role in supporting the LTW stop and is recognized for its strong youth engagement and mentoring programs. Their services focus on street outreach, peer mentoring, and community-based youth development rooted in healing and leadership. However, ICI does not currently serve as a convener of partners nor is ecosystem coordination its organizational focus. ICI previously served as a key partner in the development of a public safety plan that was co-created with the community. However, the plan was not adopted by the incoming West Palm Beach mayor, creating a **gap in continuity and leadership**.

Based on Cities United’s assessment and on-the-ground findings, the post-stop engagement highlighted the importance of ensuring a **balanced approach**—one that sustains energy around grassroots organizations like ICI without overextending their role beyond their core competencies. Despite West Palm Beach’s considerable philanthropic and structural assets, it has struggled to establish a shared vision or collaborative governance model. This misalignment—compounded by the absence of a strong citywide convener or collaborative space—continues to limit impact.

With focused coordination, deeper stakeholder education, and targeted investment in **community violence intervention (CVI)**, West Palm Beach is well-positioned to evolve its approach to **safety, healing, and justice**. This report elevates ten actionable recommendations and outlines Cities United’s commitment to walk alongside local partners through long-term, relationship-based planning, strategy coaching, and infrastructure development. It reflects post-engagement insights drawn from the stakeholder debrief, pre-tour materials, and community feedback—including reflections submitted after the stop—and is centered on a clear set of recommendations and next-step commitments.



Source: Census, 2023



INTRODUCTION: WEST PALM BEACH IS CHARTING THE PATH FORWARD

Cities United's Leading the Way Tour is a vehicle for advancing **comprehensive, community-driven public safety solutions**. Through each stop, the tour uplifts effective practices, strengthens local ecosystems, and fosters national learning across partner jurisdictions. West Palm Beach, a jurisdiction marked by stark economic contrasts and a history of **underinvestment in high-risk communities**, served as a complex but promising site for the Leading the Way Tour.

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 young leader engagement

The May 2025 engagement brought together **community partners, elected officials, and law enforcement leadership** across West Palm Beach and Riviera Beach and was facilitated by Inner City Innovators. It provided insight into the local safety landscape, surfaced existing tensions, and held open the door for greater **strategic alignment across sectors**.



**Sometimes showing up
is the intervention.”**

FOUNDER, INNER CITY INNOVATORS

The stop also highlighted opportunities to strengthen **engagement strategies across age groups**—particularly for individuals over 25 at higher risk of gun violence—and underscored the absence of a **shared public safety vision**. It revealed a critical need for infrastructure that supports collaboration among city, county, and community stakeholders.

The presence of **youth-serving nonprofits, public defenders, and cross-sector leaders** affirmed the potential for broad-based solutions if anchored in a **unified strategy**.

UNDERSTANDING THE LOCAL LANDSCAPE: WEST PALM BEACH

Grounded Strengths: What West Palm Beach Is Building On

The Leading the Way Tour convened several trusted, community-based organizations with direct experience in youth development, gun violence prevention, and reentry support—including Inner City Innovators (ICI), Love, Hope & Healing Inc., and Pathways to Prosperity. Their participation reinforced the **depth of local expertise** and affirmed that West Palm Beach’s grassroots infrastructure, while underutilized, is capable of contributing meaningfully to a **coordinated public safety strategy**.

West Palm Beach’s foundational strengths lie in its **trusted youth engagement**, philosophical alignment with law enforcement, and emerging cross-sector leadership. Inner City Innovators (ICI) demonstrated deep credibility with young people across the risk spectrum—from youth who have survived gun violence to those preparing for graduation. This trust is a **key asset for future prevention strategies**. ICI’s peer mentorship, outreach, and life skills programs offer a powerful youth-focused foundation, though the organization is not structured to lead multi-sector coordination.

The city’s new police chief, formerly the county sheriff, has publicly recognized **community-based contributions to violence reduction** and voiced alignment with **community violence intervention (CVI) values**—acknowledging that arrests alone are insufficient. This signals a hopeful shift following a period of undervalued community leadership and limited CVI understanding.

However, **narrative alignment and public education** remain necessary to move from symbolic buy-in to sustained investment. Additionally, West Palm Beach benefits from neighboring leadership in Riviera Beach, where the mayor and chief of staff are **proactive champions of regional CVI strategies**.

The local philanthropic landscape also holds **untapped potential** to support narrative campaigns and ecosystem coordination. These assets present a meaningful opportunity to shift from **siloed intent to integrated infrastructure**.



“We’re not here to save anyone. We’re here to stand with them — and build something lasting, together.”

**— Anquan Boldin,
Players’ Coalition**

MOMENT THAT MATTERED

During the Leading the Way Tour stop in West Palm Beach, Cities United partnered with former NFL star Anquan Boldin and the Players’ Coalition for a powerful gathering at a local community church. This moment symbolized a **shared commitment to healing and opportunity** for youth most impacted by violence. The church, a trusted community space, became a place where national advocates, local leaders, and residents came together to envision a **safer, more equitable future.**

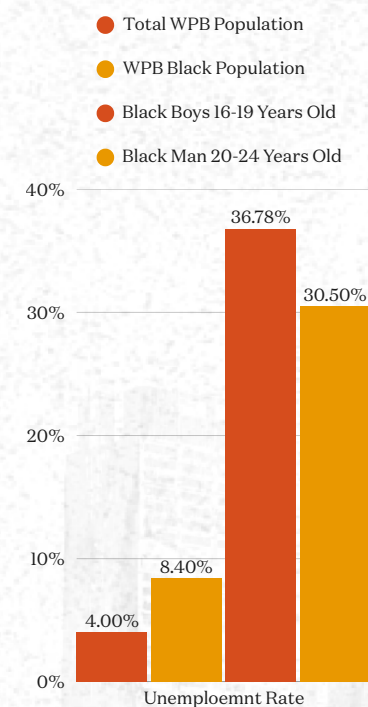
This gathering showed the strength of combining **high-profile influence with grassroots leadership**, reminding us that true public safety **requires community empowerment and collective action.**



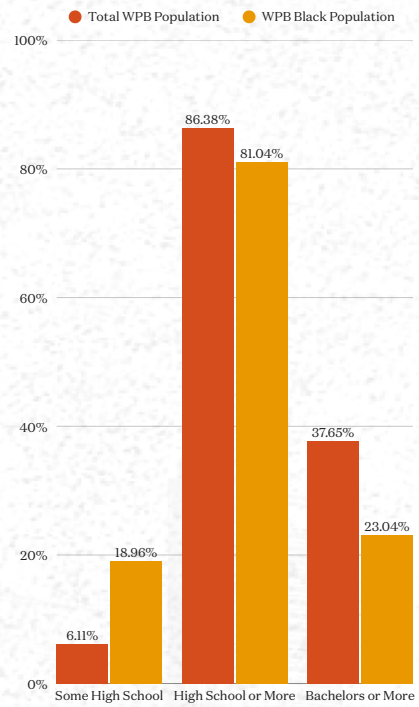
PERSISTENT CHALLENGES: WHERE GAPS CONTINUE

Despite notable strengths, **persistent systemic gaps** continue to undermine coordination and long-term impact in West Palm Beach. While **youth engagement** emerged as a clear strength, the visit revealed **no evidence of a defined strategy** for engaging older individuals (ages 25–30), who are among the **highest-risk populations** for gun violence. Conversations also surfaced the need for **stronger intergenerational engagement** which limits the community’s ability to anchor present-day strategies in historical context and a unifying sense of purpose. At the organizational level, many CBOs continue to operate in **silos** and often defer to government leadership, with **no designated entity** currently positioned to drive sustained collective action or serve as a backbone institution for the broader ecosystem.

CITY UNEMPLOYMENT RATE



EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

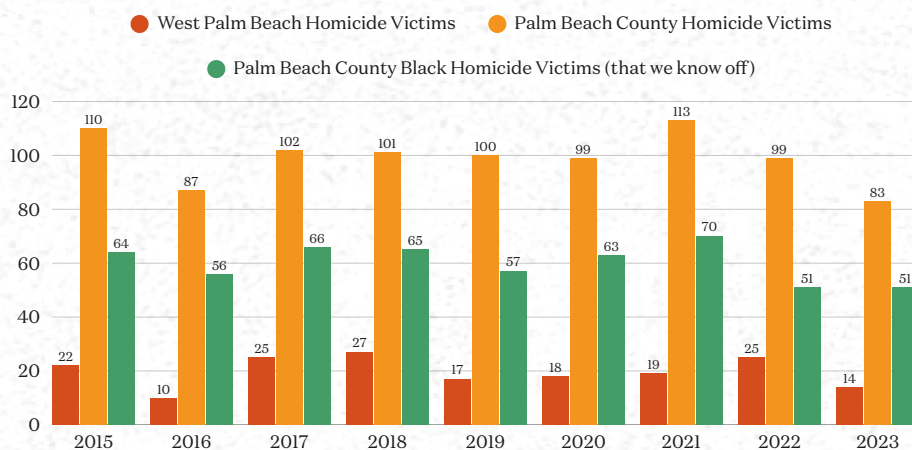


MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME



Source: Census, 2023/2021

WEST PALM BEACH & PALM BEACH COUNTY HOMICIDE VICTIMS



Note: Black people make up

19.81%

of the county population but are

60.7%

of the homicide victims.

Note: These percentages are based on the county since homicide victim race data was not publicly accessible for the city.

Number of people "At Highest Risk" of being directly impacted by gun violence

124

(0.1% of the city population)

Number of violent crimes

Violent crime rate per 100,000 residents

Murder Rate per 100,000 residents

County	858	691	8
State	65,621	290	5
Country	1,253,813	374	6

Source: FBI UCR, MyPalmBeachPost, Macrotrends, and Neighborhood Scout

Leadership alignment continues to pose a significant challenge. While the West Palm Beach police chief has shown openness to partnership with **CVI-aligned strategies**, the mayor has not advanced or embraced a comprehensive approach to reducing gun violence, leaving a gap in **citywide vision, coordination, and follow-through**. In contrast, leadership in neighboring Riviera Beach has demonstrated **stronger momentum**, with both the mayor and chief of staff actively supporting the development of a **regional safety infrastructure**. Misunderstandings about the role of CVI persist among key city officials, further complicating alignment efforts.

80% OF YOUTH SURVEYED SAID THEY HAD NEVER SPOKEN TO A POLICYMAKER

Youth Listening Session, West Palm Beach

Beyond leadership and coordination gaps, several core components of a comprehensive safety ecosystem remain **underdeveloped or missing**. These include **strategic investments in summer youth employment, hospital-based violence intervention programs, individualized healing-centered engagement**, and formalized **Group Violence Intervention (GVI)** strategies. The absence of these foundational supports leaves **high-risk populations, particularly youth directly impacted by gun violence, without structured alternatives** or pathways to safety and opportunity. Addressing these **programmatic and infrastructural gaps** will be critical to realizing a **unified, citywide approach** to violence reduction.

EMERGING MOMENTUM: OPPORTUNITIES TO LEVERAGE

Key signals of forward movement and **partnership potential** surfaced consistently throughout the tour stop. Though **fragmentation persists**, early signs of **cross-sector alignment** began to take shape. CBOs expressed appreciation for being invited to strategy discussions and showed a **willingness to build trust across organizations**. This openness presents a **critical window for strengthening coordination**, especially as grassroots partners seek clarity around their roles and responsibilities within a broader safety framework.

The West Palm Beach police chief and his leadership team demonstrated a **sincere interest in expanding their understanding of CVI**, exploring models like **Group Violence Intervention (GVI)**, and learning from peer jurisdictions like Toledo. Their engagement signals readiness to **redefine law enforcement's role** in a more holistic infrastructure, one that emphasizes **alternatives to arrest** and proactive collaboration with community leaders. Riviera Beach's leadership, including its mayor and chief of staff, continues to model **strong commitment**, with plans to establish a **formal office dedicated to community safety**. This momentum at the regional level, if supported and sustained, could serve as a **springboard for a shared framework** across jurisdictions.

Faith leaders are also positioned to play a powerful role in **narrative change and community healing** but remain underutilized. Combined with law enforcement's growing recognition of CBO contributions, these dynamics present a **brief but meaningful opportunity** to reshape the public narrative, deepen alignment, and elevate the role of **community-driven solutions** in defining public safety. To capitalize on this momentum, stakeholders will need to **invest in continued cross-sector relationship-building, clarify shared goals, and establish the leadership structures** necessary to carry collaborative strategies forward.

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS: POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO LONG-TERM PROGRESS

Even with **promising momentum**, West Palm Beach's progress is unfolding within a landscape still shaped by **systemic risks and unresolved questions**, factors that must be addressed to sustain forward movement. The city's long-term success hinges on building the **political, organizational, and infrastructural maturity** needed to support a comprehensive, CVI-centered public safety strategy. While there is clear energy among community stakeholders and early signals of leadership alignment, several **foundational barriers persist**.

The jurisdiction currently lacks a **mature ecosystem backbone**. There is no high-capacity coordinating institution, and while the CBO landscape is active and passionate, it is still defining its roles within a larger strategy. In the absence of a strong backbone or co-convenor model, leadership responsibility may default to unprepared or misaligned actors—potentially derailing progress. Although multiple stakeholders expressed willingness to support the work, **no single entity is positioned to activate and sustain cross-sector alignment**. This highlights an urgent need for **capacity-building, clear governance models, and shared ownership** of strategy execution.

Moreover, the current momentum is **regional, not just municipal**—requiring thoughtful coordination between West Palm Beach, Riviera Beach, and other Palm Beach County stakeholders. This broader scope presents both an opportunity for collaboration and a risk of fragmentation if jurisdictions fail to align timelines, language, and investment strategies.

Lastly, **public investments continue to prioritize law enforcement over community-based approaches**, reinforcing existing imbalances in strategy and perception. Combined with **inconsistent messaging** and limited understanding of CVI across city leadership, this misalignment poses a significant threat to sustainability. Without a trusted convener or cross-sector infrastructure to guide and unify efforts, these structural gaps risk **stalling progress despite the momentum** at hand.

RECOMMENDATIONS & CITIES UNITED COMMITMENTS

West Palm Beach stands at a pivotal moment—momentum, energy, and early alignment are all present. But turning this promise into sustained impact requires shared vision, deeper coordination, and clear leadership structures. These ten recommendations reflect what is needed to build a truly community-centered safety ecosystem. Each is paired with a concrete commitment from Cities United, outlining how CU will walk alongside local partners to turn momentum into strategy.

1. ADVANCE SHARED VISION AND GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

Cities United Commitment: Support the development of a shared safety vision and co-designed governance plan through facilitated sessions with key city, county, and community stakeholders. This includes peer learning exchanges with cities like Toledo.

2. BUILD ECOSYSTEM BACKBONE CAPACITY

Cities United Commitment: Assist in identifying potential co-conveners and co-design a co-leadership model that blends grassroots leadership with institutional infrastructure.

3. STRENGTHEN CVI EDUCATION AND STRATEGIC MESSAGING

Cities United Commitment: Coordinate and facilitate a CVI 101 session with West Palm Beach Police Department leadership to build understanding around roles, values, and opportunities for coordination.

4. COORDINATE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION EFFORTS

Cities United Commitment: Partner with local stakeholders to map existing efforts, align resources, and elevate youth engagement as a core prevention strategy—especially through groups like Inner City Innovators (ICI).

5. DEVELOP A PUBLIC NARRATIVE AND STORYTELLING STRATEGY

Cities United Commitment: Collaborate with local partners to design a narrative strategy that uplifts lived experience, builds public support, and repositions community-led solutions at the center of public safety dialogue.



RECOMMENDATIONS & CITIES UNITED COMMITMENTS

6. SUPPORT REGIONAL ALIGNMENT ACROSS JURISDICTIONS

Cities United Commitment: Facilitate strategy alignment between West Palm Beach, Riviera Beach, and Palm Beach County leaders to lay the foundation for a shared ecosystem approach.

7. MAP THE LOCAL SAFETY ECOSYSTEM

Cities United Commitment: Conduct an ecosystem and political alignment scan to assess capacity, stakeholder positioning, and strategic opportunities or gaps before larger-scale investment.

8. PRIORITIZE CAPACITY BUILDING FOR COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Cities United Commitment: Provide strategic coaching and technical assistance to Palm Beach County leaders and partners such as ICI to clarify services, strengthen internal operations, and increase funding readiness.

9. INCREASE ACCESS TO SUMMER YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND PEER LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Cities United Commitment: Connect local partners to national models that elevate lived experience and leadership development.

10. LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR A LOCAL SAFETY OFFICE OR COORDINATING ENTITY

Cities United Commitment: Guide long-term planning efforts toward establishing a dedicated office or infrastructure to coordinate violence prevention efforts and funding.

Conclusion:

A Call for Aligned Action

West Palm Beach has the **energy and partners to lead**—but **alignment is the critical next step**. Stakeholders across sectors, including law enforcement, have voiced a commitment to **solutions beyond policing**. The next step is operationalizing that commitment by building **real, resourced alternatives**. A shared language around CVI, coordinated leadership, and **political courage** are essential to the city's transformation. Riviera Beach provides a glimpse of what committed leadership can achieve; now is the time for West Palm Beach to build the **infrastructure needed** to match its community momentum with sustained, systemic support.

Cities United remains committed to walking alongside local leaders in this process—**refining strategy, elevating community voices**, and helping to ensure the next chapter of public safety in Palm Beach County is defined by **equity, healing, and hope**.



THIS ISN'T A MOMENT — IT'S A MOVEMENT.

— Local partner, Riviera Beach







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