



Collaborating across departments to achieve Vision Zero

One of the defining characteristics of Vision Zero is the fundamental focus on breaking down silos and uniting local stakeholders behind common goals. Cross-departmental collaboration isn't simply advisable — its importance cannot be emphasized enough as a critical foundation to a successful Vision Zero commitment. Cities like San Francisco, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C. and New

York City have found ways to bridge unintentional but long-standing gaps between key local agencies and identified innovative means to build new organizational architecture to advance Vision Zero. In this case study, we examine some of the specific ways these Vision Zero cities are restructuring their collaboration in long-lasting ways to take meaningful action for safe streets.

Starting with mayoral leadership

The Mayor plays a critical role in committing a community to Vision Zero, whether through executive order, as a top priority of his or her administration, or in partnership with other city leaders. But once that commitment is made, many mayors have invested resources from their office to mobilize the right agencies — and top leaders — within the city to turn talk into action in a lasting and meaningful way.

In New York City, immediately after the release of the **Vision Zero Action Plan** in February 2014, Mayor Bill de Blasio's Office of Operations held a kickoff meeting at City Hall with agency heads to lay out the framework for the permanent Vision Zero task force, as well as to identify agency leads to participate. But de Blasio didn't simply delegate the work — the Mayor's Office of Operations (Ops) has been the primary convener and consistent catalyst of the Vision Zero initiative since its inception.

"Since the Mayor's Office has oversight and visibility into the agencies, we've found it important to have an active role in overseeing the Vision Zero initiative," says Geraldine Sweeney, Chief Strategy Advisor in the Mayor's Office of Operations.

And New York City publishes an **annual report** tracking progress and sharing upcoming initiatives. This is a key way to hold City leaders — particularly the top-leader, the Mayor — accountable for Vision Zero commitments.

Overall, Mayors play *the* most important role in setting the vision, communicating priorities to the departments carrying out the work, ensuring funding aligns with goals, establishing the structure for collaboration and action, and fostering a climate that both celebrates successes and holds stakeholders accountable to the urgency of achieving Vision Zero.

Coming together as a task force

One of the central avenues to cross-departmental collaboration is the formation of a strong, committed task force that brings the right stakeholders to the table on an organized, consistent basis. The makeup of such task forces (or steering committees) vary by community but representation from four key areas is critical: the Mayor's office, the Department of Transportation, the Police Department and Public Health Department. Ensuring management-level staff participation from various city departments is also essential to galvanize the buy-in and action necessary to achieve Vision Zero goals.

In New York City, the task force is "led" by three agencies — the NYC Police Department, Department of Transportation, and the Taxi & Limousine Commission — but also includes the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Department of Citywide Administrative Services, the Law Department and the Office of Management and Budget, along with representatives from the District Attorney's Offices and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

Other cities have tapped specific agencies or top staff to take on additional leadership. For instance, in Los Angeles, Mayor Eric Garcetti's executive directive on Vision Zero formally established the Vision Zero Executive Steering Committee and appointed the General Manager of the Department



NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio with agency leaders
Photo credit NYC Dept of Transportation

LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE



Mayor's office
Commits the city to Vision Zero and plays a key role in managing the process to achieve it

In New York City, the Mayor's Office of Operations created and continues to convene the Vision Zero Task Force.

When Vision Zero first launched in San Francisco, the Mayor dedicated a full-time staff member to Vision Zero.

Vision Zero Task Force / Steering Committee

Key city agencies — including transportation, police, health and the mayor's office — appointed by the mayor to lead the strategy and implementation of Vision Zero



The NYC Vision Zero Task Force includes the Police Dept, Dept of Transportation, Taxi & Limousine Commission, Dept of Health & Mental Hygiene, Dept of Citywide Administrative Services, Law Dept and Office of Management & Budget.

In LA, the Mayor appointed the General Manager of the Dept of Transportation and the Chief of Police (or their designees) as co-chairs of the Vision Zero Executive Steering Committee.

In D.C., the Mayor tapped the Department of Transportation as the lead agency on the Vision Zero Task Force.

Many cities engage community stakeholders in their Task Forces in some way, too

Vision Zero Working Groups / Subcommittees

Often interdisciplinary groups focused on specific aspects of achieving Vision Zero, like engineering or marketing



San Francisco has standing committees on Engineering, Enforcement, Education, Policy, Evaluation, and Budget.

In Los Angeles, subcommittees include Engineering, Enforcement, Education, and Evaluation.

New York City convenes Marketing and Data Working groups.

of Transportation and the Chief of Police and/or their designees as co-chairs. In Washington, D.C., incoming Mayor Muriel Bowser made Vision Zero a top administration priority and designated the Department of Transportation (DDOT) to lead the effort. DDOT engaged more than 30 city agencies, as well as numerous external stakeholders, in creating the **initiative's impressive Action Plan**.

In San Francisco, when Vision Zero was first launched in 2014, Mayor Ed Lee's office assigned a dedicated, full-time staff member to assist with convening and mobilizing the city's Vision Zero task force. To ensure the initiative became integral to department operations, that task force is staffed with senior city leaders including the Director of Sustainable Streets at the Municipal Transportation Agency; the Director of the Program on Health, Equity and Sustainability at the Department of Public Health; and Traffic Commander at the San Francisco Police Department. San Francisco released an Action Strategy in 2015 and releases a quarterly progress report to coincide with the quarterly Task Force and Vision Zero Committee meetings, which collectively aims to improve transparency and accountability.

In many ways, the task force is the hub of the multi-agency effort. By providing a structure to create

common goals, share ideas and strategies, problem-solve barriers and build inter-agency trust and new personal relationships, the task force has the ability — and responsibility — to shift the city's fundamental approach to traffic safety in a profound way.

But these groups aren't limited to city government. Many communities engage advocacy organizations and community stakeholders in their task forces, as well. "Our advocacy community played a big role in the initial convening and goal-setting [for Vision Zero]," says Tom Maguire, Director of Sustainable Streets at the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency. "A joint advocacy-agency task force continues to meet, providing transparency into the city's progress."

Going deeper with action-oriented work groups

While the task force provides essential leadership, many communities have established subcommittees — or working groups — to delve deeper into the areas most critical to Vision Zero. These subcommittees not only examine important issues, like data collection or engineering, but also provide opportunities for further cross-departmental collaboration and action by convening additional interdisciplinary discussions.

In Los Angeles, for instance, the full task force split into four subcommittees, each aligning with one of the key Vision Zero Issue Areas: Engineering, Enforcement, Education, and Evaluation. Each subcommittee has an assigned chair who is responsible for convening and reporting on clear **Executive Directive Action Items**, a model practice that lends more accountability and transparency to the work.

San Francisco has a similar approach. “There are six standing committees – Engineering, Enforcement, Education, Policy, Evaluation, and Budget,” Tom Maguire says. “Some meet regularly, while others convene on an ad hoc basis. The six committee chairs meet biweekly as the Vision Zero Core Group, which I chair.”

In New York City, working groups on Marketing and Data respectively have had a big impact. “We have found these to be highly collaborative, producing some innovative deliverables including the **Vision Zero View map**, an interactive tool that shows detailed information on traffic injury and fatality crashes in New York City and highlights how the City is responding every day to make our streets safer,” Geraldine Sweeney says. “Another key deliverable from the Marketing Working Group is the inter-agency marketing plan and unified budget which outlined an educational and marketing strategy to allow us to reach key target audiences effectively. This plan outlines how we will collectively and successfully market the Vision Zero brand and its objectives. And in doing so ensures that all agencies are speaking with one voice.”

Working together to set shared goals

In Washington, D.C., Vision Zero provided a platform for dozens of city agencies to work together – and produce an impressively detailed Action Plan that included input and buy-in from many stakeholders, from transportation planners to people on the street.

“The process of developing an action plan for Vision Zero encouraged a higher level of collaboration among partner agencies,” says Jonathan Rogers, a Policy Analyst with the District Department of Transportation. “The agenda-setting and political will Mayor Bowser provided in committing to Vision Zero motivated the more than 30 agencies in our initiative. Once agencies began discussing particulars and setting specific targets, the real trust and buy-in became necessary. When presented with the question, ‘What can we start doing right now to dramatically accelerate our progress toward zero

traffic fatalities/serious injuries?’ Agency staff worked diligently to have candid conversations about what they could contribute and what they were willing to promise.”

Over the course of a summer, the development of the Action Plan not only included working group meetings that included representatives from 30 government agencies, but also 10 community events in all areas of the city, raising the profile of Vision Zero and soliciting residents’ top concerns around traffic safety.



That process paid off with a strong Vision Zero Action Plan with shared goals and metrics. “Our strategies and goals were informed by our own safety data, public input, and suggestions from advocacy organizations,” Rogers says. “We strived to identify strategies and metrics that with which all partner agencies were comfortable. While staying practical, we wanted to push each other to reflect the urgency and ambition of Vision Zero in our targets and timelines for improved safety.”

Los Angeles is also building its Vision Zero Action Plan on a strong multi-agency base. Now six months into its initiative, each Vision Zero sub-committee is required to submit a Quarterly Report to the Mayor’s Office to track respective timeline and deliverables. “It’s an action-oriented progress report that keeps each department accountable towards Vision Zero’s ultimate goal,” says Nat Gale, a Senior Project Coordinator in the Los Angeles Department of Transportation. “We’re currently working to turn those Quarterly Reports into a Vision Zero Action Plan, which is scheduled to be released in August 2016, on the one-year anniversary of the launch of Vision Zero.”

REGULAR MEETINGS



- In NYC, the Mayor's Operations team convenes biweekly Task Force meetings — and also has regular scheduled calls with all Vision Zero agencies.
- In San Francisco, the "Vision Zero Core Group" meets biweekly — which includes the chairs of each of the six subcommittees and is led by the Municipal Transportation Agency.
- In Los Angeles, each subcommittee meets monthly and has an assigned chair responsible for convening and reporting on Executive Directive Action Items.
- In D.C., a Traffic Records Coordinating Committee, comprised of multiple agencies, meets quarterly in-person to improve crash and medical records data collection.

TRACKING PROGRESS



In New York City, biweekly Task Force meetings review fatality numbers and key trends, and each agency leader reports out on key progress made toward Vision Zero goals. The Ops team prepares a monthly Vision Zero dashboard that provides the opportunity for in-depth analysis on fatalities by mode, by vehicle and compares the current year over the past year as well as a three-year average.

In San Francisco, the Core Group meets biweekly to manage city agencies and their progress by strategically reviewing the city's Action Plan to identify barriers and improve project delivery.

In LA, each subcommittee submits Quarterly Reports to the Mayor's Office, which will be used to create a Vision Zero Action Plan, to be released one year after the launch of the initiative.

The D.C. Department of Transportation convenes bi-weekly safety "TranStat" meetings to check progress on 30+ DDOT-led Vision Zero strategies.

Meeting regularly to ensure collaboration

In March 2016, the NYC Vision Zero initiative passed a notable milestone: the 50th meeting of its Vision Zero task force. As Geraldine Sweeney explains, those convenings have been central to the city's progress.

It starts with robust planning and facilitation from the Mayor's Office of Operations (Ops). To help with inter-agency coordination, Ops set up a Microsoft SharePoint site for document sharing across agencies — and ensures their time together face-to-face is strategic and productive.

"Prior to each bi-weekly task force meeting, Ops distributes an agenda to the group," Sweeney says. "Generally we'll have one of the agencies give a presentation on projects that are in-progress or completed. Recent presentations have included the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene findings from the Data Linkage project which showed the linkage of traffic crash data with injury-specific data in hospital records, and the New York City Police Department presented their plan to implement the Data Driven Approaches to Crime and Traffic Safety."

"During the bi-weekly task force meetings, along with reviewing fatality numbers and key trends, each agency lead will report out on key progress

made toward our Vision Zero goals — this allows for inter-agency collaboration and feedback," Sweeney continues. "In addition, the Ops team prepares a monthly Vision Zero dashboard for review at the task force, which provides the opportunity for in-depth analysis on fatalities by mode, by vehicle and compares the current year over the past year as well as a three-year average. In addition, the dashboard provides visibility into the various agency activities, such as enforcement (broken out by NYPD, TLC and DOT), engineering improvements, outreach and education activities, as well as looking at interventions with City drivers and vehicles. Depending on what the data reveals, it allows the group to make course corrections on their initiatives." "We also ensure that there is time on the agenda for inter-agency discussion, and these often led to lively and interesting dialogue, along with ideas for new initiatives that help move the Vision Zero agenda forward," she adds. "This also provides a forum to hash out any disagreements among the agencies, which very often leads to greater opportunity for collaboration."

Such meetings are vital in other cities, as well, providing a consistent forum for cross-departmental collaboration. As in New York City, San Francisco's Vision Zero Core Group meets biweekly. "The

meetings are structured, with running logs of action items, and accountability for deliverables in our two-year action strategy,” Tom Maguire says. “A senior planner at MTA manages the agenda, tracks and produces deliverables, coordinates and troubleshoots.”

But such meetings go beyond simple number crunching. “Complete transparency has been a key contributing factor in our early cross-departmental collaboration,” say Nat Gale. “While each department may have its own targets, building rapport among the departments has been very beneficial. The meetings have always been inclusive invitations to the participating departments, and membership has been fluid along the way. For example, while the Department of City Planning was not mentioned in the Executive Directive, it became quickly apparent that Planning staff would play a critical role in our success.”

Tracking progress and building accountability

How do cities maintain momentum beyond face-to-face meetings? How do they ensure Vision Zero moves beyond ideas to implementation? Tracking progress and maintaining accountability are imperative.

In Washington, D.C., the Vision Zero Action Plan provides a road-map for each agency, assigning specific strategies and setting distinct benchmarks. “The Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development recently hosted our first multi-agency Vision Zero implementation meeting to check progress on all 67 strategies in our action plan,” Rogers says. “We plan to continue these meetings regularly. Likewise, within DDOT, a bi-weekly safety ‘TranStat’ meeting is held to check progress on the more than 30 DDOT-led strategies in the action plan.”

In New York City, the Ops team also checks in with each Vision Zero agency with regular calls. “During the call, agencies will report out on the progress on their individual agencies’ initiatives as well a current snapshot of their identified program metrics,” Sweeney explains. “Ops maintains a master spreadsheet of all 125 Vision Zero initiatives across all agencies and diligently tracks the progress against each one. Ops also created and maintains the [Vision Zero website](#) where we publicly report out on the progress of each initiative.”

That’s true in San Francisco, as well, where city agencies strive to be accountable not only to the Mayor but the wider community. “Because the advocates who spurred San Francisco to adopt Vision Zero are such important partners, we continue to meet with a joint advocacy-agency task force quarterly, to discuss progress and look for opportunities to improve the City’s output,” Maguire says. “Our County Transportation Authority’s Vision Zero Committee, composed of members of our Board of Supervisors (our City Council), holds a quarterly public meeting to hear progress reports, question staff about program status, and take testimony from the public on Vision Zero.”

And that diligence is paying off. “We challenged ourselves to complete 24 high-profile safety projects in the first 24 months of the Vision Zero commitment,” Maguire adds. “We completed 30, thanks to the collaboration among city agencies on the Core Group, and the oversight and accountability provided by the Task Force and Vision Zero Committee.”

Using data to drive collaboration

Shared goals and inter-agency conversations are fundamental in creating cross-departmental collaboration. But numbers can bring partners together, as well.

As we explored in our [public health case study](#), expanded data collection is building new bridges between agencies and institutions in cities. “Data can really be an organizing principle when you sit down and roll up your sleeves to share and brainstorm the uses of that data,” says San Francisco’s Maguire.

That’s been true in Washington, D.C., too. “Our Traffic Records Coordinating Committee is one example where many of the agencies represented from our evaluation/data work group will continue to meet quarterly in-person to improve our crash and medical records data collection,” Rogers says.

In Los Angeles, Vision Zero has catalyzed the creation of a new transportation database. As Nat Gale explains: “This database is being used to inform our technical collision analysis, which will inform our collision profiling and ultimately counter-measure pairing. It’s already being used in other divisions of our department to help develop grant applications, inform engineering warrant analyses, and prioritize the clearing of our speed survey backlog (to name a

few). While this is all work that would have occurred in the normal operation of our department without Vision Zero, it is typically done on a reactive basis. This database has allowed our department to take a proactive approach to the development of safety countermeasures that would not have occurred without the Vision Zero-led data collection effort.”

Pursuing joint funding to advance Vision Zero

In addition to data, dollars are an essential asset to advance Vision Zero. But not just in funding projects and programs; budgeting can also unite departments behind a common goal.

Two years ago, the Mayor of Los Angeles created a template for multiple departments to come together and request resources for joint initiatives. Though they only had three months from when Vision Zero was announced and budget requests were due, Vision Zero leaders took advantage of the collaborative option and submitted a joint proposal from the Police Department, Department of Transportation, and Department of Public Works Bureaus of Engineering, Street Services and Street

Lighting to advance Vision Zero strategies. Even on such an abbreviated timeline, the \$7 million request won \$3.6 million in funding in the 2016-17 budget — money that likely wouldn't have been available without that cross-departmental ask.

And that was just dipping a toe in the water. Because Vision Zero was so new at the end of 2015, Gale explains, many agencies weren't able to easily identify strategic intersections for a joint budget proposal. But once the city finalizes a Vision Zero Action Plan this summer there will be a wealth of specific projects and programs that departments will be able to work toward together. So, Gale forecasts a much more robust use of joint budgeting moving forward.

“This is the right strategy to get the right departments at the table together to think about how our efforts support one another,” Gale says. “It's a really good framework to continue to message why we all need to work together and when you fund an initiative rather than a department you can have a greater impact.”

Top Take-Aways

The importance of meaningful cross-departmental collaboration can't be overstated; it is an essential and central tenet of Vision Zero. As we've seen in this case study, instilling that collaboration requires mayoral leadership in appointing — and ideally even facilitating — a strong, interdisciplinary task force empowered

to take action. To maintain the momentum and institutionalize that key organizing principle requires consistent and structured meetings of key stakeholders; action-oriented working groups with accountable representatives; the creation of shared goals with buy-in across agencies; and active tracking of progress toward those goals.

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