Public Safety Anchor Institution Executive Checklist

A ROADMAP FOR BUILDING A PUBLIC SAFETY ANCHOR INSTITUTION

Establishing a Public Safety Anchor Institution (PSAI) requires more than creating a new office or launching individual programs. It requires executive leadership, coordinated planning, dedicated resources, and institutional capacity to sustain a comprehensive public safety strategy.

This checklist outlines 10 key steps mayors, city managers, and other executive leaders can take to move from an initial vision to implementation and long-term institutional development. Cities should adapt the sequence based on their governance structure, budget cycle, existing public safety infrastructure, and stage of readiness. Steps may overlap and cities with established community safety programs or coordinating structures may be able to advance more quickly.

1. Promote a comprehensive public safety vision

Define and communicate the administration's vision for comprehensive public safety that includes prevention strategies, public health interventions, and law enforcement. Establish a shared understanding of the PSAI's purpose, the outcomes it seeks to achieve, and how different agencies and partners contribute to those goals. Educate government officials, agency leadership, community partners, and the public about how a PSAI does not replace law enforcement, but instead complements traditional public safety institutions and strengthens the city's ability to prevent harm, respond to crises, and coordinate services. Consistent messaging and visible executive support can help build the understanding and political commitment necessary to advance institutional change.

Key questions to consider:

- How will we communicate the purpose and value of a comprehensive public safety approach to government agencies, legislators, and residents?
- What misconceptions or concerns about the PSAI framework need to be addressed?
- What public safety priorities and outcomes will be most visible to residents and define the administration's vision?

2. Establish executive leadership and build stakeholder buy-in

Designate a senior official with clear executive authority to lead PSAI development, convene agencies, and coordinate planning. Engage key stakeholders early, including law enforcement leadership and associations, fire and emergency response agencies, public health and behavioral health officials, city council members, community organizations, and other implementation partners. Building trust and securing key stakeholder participation are particularly important to clarifying how traditional and emerging public safety functions will work together. Identify shared priorities, address potential resistance, and establish expectations for collaboration, information sharing, and coordinated training where responsibilities intersect.

Key questions to consider:

- Who has the authority and relationships necessary to lead PSAI development and bring agencies together?
- Which stakeholders are essential to implementation and what concerns, interest, or incentives may shape their participation?
- How can law enforcement, practitioners, and other first responders be engaged as meaningful partners in defining roles, coordinating responses, and developing shared training?

3. Assess existing public safety infrastructure and community needs

Direct an assessment of the city's current public safety programs, services, agency responsibilities, community partnerships, funding, and performance measures. Examine how these functions operate together, where responsibilities overlap, and which needs remain unmet. Use available data, agency expertise, and community input to identify opportunities to strengthen existing approaches, address service gaps, and improve coordination. This assessment should inform the PSAI's initial responsibilities and help determine which existing resources and infrastructure the city can build upon.

Key questions to consider:

- What public safety programs, services, and resources already exist, and how are they currently coordinated?
- Where are the greatest gaps, overlaps, or unmet community needs?
- Which existing programs or partnerships could be strengthened, better coordinated, or expanded?
- Can the jurisdiction's 911 call data be analyzed to inform needs?

4. Design the PSAI's mandate, structure, and authority

Determine the PSAI's initial responsibilities, including which functions it will coordinate, oversee, operate, or strengthen and which will remain within existing agencies. Decide whether it should begin as a coordinating function, mayoral office, department, or another structure appropriate to the city's governance model. Define its relationship with law enforcement and other agencies, including decision-making authority, reporting relationships, and accountability. Identify initial leadership, staffing, and administrative needs, and pursue the appropriate executive, administrative, or legislative authorization and funding to establish the institution.

Key questions to consider:

- What responsibilities should the PSAI assume initially, and which should remain with existing agencies?
- Where should the PSAI sit within the city government to effectively coordinate agencies and influence decisions?
- What authority, staffing, and formal authorization are necessary to carry out its mandate?

5. Establish shared priorities and begin implementation

Translate the PSAI's initial mandate and assessment findings into a manageable set of first-year public safety priorities. Develop an implementation plan with participating agencies that identifies responsibilities, timelines, resources, and measures of progress. Begin implementing priority strategies, using pilots or phased approaches where additional evidence or operational learning is needed before expansion. Establish processes for identifying implementation barriers and making timely adjustments as services develop.

Key questions to consider:

- Which priorities can realistically be advanced during the first year, and what would meaningful progress look like?
- What roles, resources, and timelines are necessary to implement each priority?
- Which approaches are ready for implementation, and which would benefit from testing or phased expansion?

6. Operationalize cross-agency coordination and community partnerships

Establish regular executive-level convenings, interagency working structures, and clear processes for shared decision-making and resolving operational challenges. Work with law enforcement, emergency response agencies, and other service providers to develop coordination protocols, referral pathways, and cross-training where responsibilities intersect. Formalize opportunities for residents and community-based organizations to participate in implementation and provide ongoing feedback. These structures should make collaboration an established part of government operations rather than an informal or occasional activity.

Key questions to consider:

- What governance structures and processes, including cadence, will enable agencies to coordinate services and resolve challenges?
- Where are shared protocols, cross-training, or clearer responsibilities needed between law enforcement, alternative responders, and other service providers?
- How will the government track responses, progress, and results?
- How will community partners and residents participate meaningfully in implementation, feedback, and decision-making?

7. Align funding and establish an implementation budget

Map existing public safety investments and funding streams to identify resources that already support the PSAI's priorities and determine where additional investments are needed. Develop an initial budget covering leadership, staffing, operations, programs, community partnerships, training, and data infrastructure. Incorporate these needs into annual and multiyear financial planning, distinguishing one-time startup costs from recurring obligations. Identify potential funding sources and address procurement, contracting, reimbursement, and grant-management barriers that could impede implementation.

Key questions to consider:

- What existing funding and resources can support the PSAI's initial responsibilities?
- What additional investments are needed and which costs will require recurring funding?
- What financial or administrative barriers could delay implementation or threaten sustainability?
- What deadlines are currently in place?

8. Evaluate progress and refine the strategy

Conduct a first-year executive review that brings together PSAI leadership, participating agencies, budget officials, and community partners to assess implementation and emerging outcomes. Use shared data, performance measures, service demand, and community feedback to determine which strategies should be sustained, modified, expanded, or discontinued. Identify lessons learned, operational challenges, and opportunities to strengthen coordination and service delivery. These findings should inform adjustments to the PSAI's priorities and the next phase of implementation.

Key questions to consider:

- What progress has been made toward the administration's initial public safety priorities and benchmarks?
- What do implementation data, agency experience, and community feedback reveal about what is working and what needs improvement?
- Which strategies should be sustained, changed, expanded, or discontinued?

9. Institutionalize the PSAI and secure long-term sustainability

Assess whether the PSAI's authority, staffing, budget, governance structure, and placement within government are sufficient to fulfill its responsibilities. Work with city council and other relevant authorities to formalize institutional responsibilities through ordinances or other legislative mechanisms where appropriate. Address expiring funding, forecast future costs, and pursue dedicated, recurring resources for essential functions and services. The goal is to embed successful approaches and coordinating structures within government so they can endure beyond individual initiatives, funding cycles, and political administrations.

Key questions to consider:

- Does the PSAI have the authority, staffing, and organizational capacity necessary to sustain its responsibilities?
- What legislative, administrative, or budgetary commitments are needed to make the institution and its services permanent?
- How can the city secure stable funding and protect essential functions from changes in political climate or temporary funding?

10. Establish the next phase of growth and public accountability

Develop a two- to three-year strategic plan identifying which successful approaches should be scaled, what additional responsibilities the PSAI is prepared to assume, and what resources and partnerships will be required. Establish milestones for institutional growth and communicate progress publicly and regularly, including what has been implemented, what results are emerging, and what changes are planned. Continued transparency and community engagement can strengthen public understanding, maintain accountability, and reinforce the city's commitment to comprehensive public safety.

Key questions to consider:

- Which programs, services, or institutional functions should be expanded or strengthened over the next two to three years?
- What additional partnerships, investments, and organizational changes and buy-ins will be needed to support that growth?
- How will the administration communicate progress, challenges, and future priorities to residents and stakeholders? Can a common language be established?

© Vera Institute of Justice 2026. All rights reserved.

The Vera Institute of Justice is powered by hundreds of advocates, researchers, and policy experts working to transform the criminal legal and immigration systems until they're fair for all. For more information about this toolkit, contact Hans Menos, director, Redefining Public Safety, at hmenos@vera.org.