



BTAM: THE INTERAGENCY APPROACH

Lauren K. Hagy and Megan K. McBride



In 2014, the US government selected three major cities in which to pilot a local approach to preventing terrorism and targeted violence,¹ predicated on the idea that local community involvement can improve the design of such approaches [2]. Since then, these efforts have become more common as local actors—states, cities, and counties—have passed legislation related to behavioral threat assessment, adopted prevention strategies aimed at terrorism and targeted violence, and implemented programming to address such violence.²

We present this series of papers—informed by a year-long evaluation of the violence prevention efforts underway in Wood County, Ohio³—to shed light on a local effort and assist other actors in building their own networks.

In 2024, the US Secret Service published *Behavioral Threat Assessment Units: A Guide for State and Local Law Enforcement to Prevent Targeted Violence* to provide guidance to communities seeking to prevent terrorism and targeted violence. The guide identified two organizational approaches to implementing community-level behavioral threat assessment

and management (BTAM)⁴ capabilities: (1) a sole-management model and (2) an interagency model [4].

A sole-management model consolidates services and control under a single agency. An interagency model, by contrast, follows many of the same threat assessment principles while also enabling collaboration and resource sharing through partnerships. However, understanding what an interagency approach looks like in practice can be difficult. CNA's evaluation of the Wood County Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services (WCADAMHS) Board Ohio Behavioral Intervention Program provides an opportunity to explore a highly complex interagency network consisting of a community of practitioners with unique areas of expertise contributing to a multidisciplinary and collaborative solution.

As part of the evaluation, CNA conducted 27 interviews with professionals working in the Wood County network. Through the relationships identified in these interviews, we were able to map the interactions among the various organizations in the network (Figure 1).⁵

¹ The US Secret Service defines targeted violence as *a premeditated act of violence directed at a specific individual, group, or location, regardless of motivation and generally unrelated to other criminal activity* [1, p. 12].

² For example, a range of activities is underway in states including Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Ohio, New York, and Texas.

³ Our evaluation focused exclusively on Wood County's efforts serving juveniles.

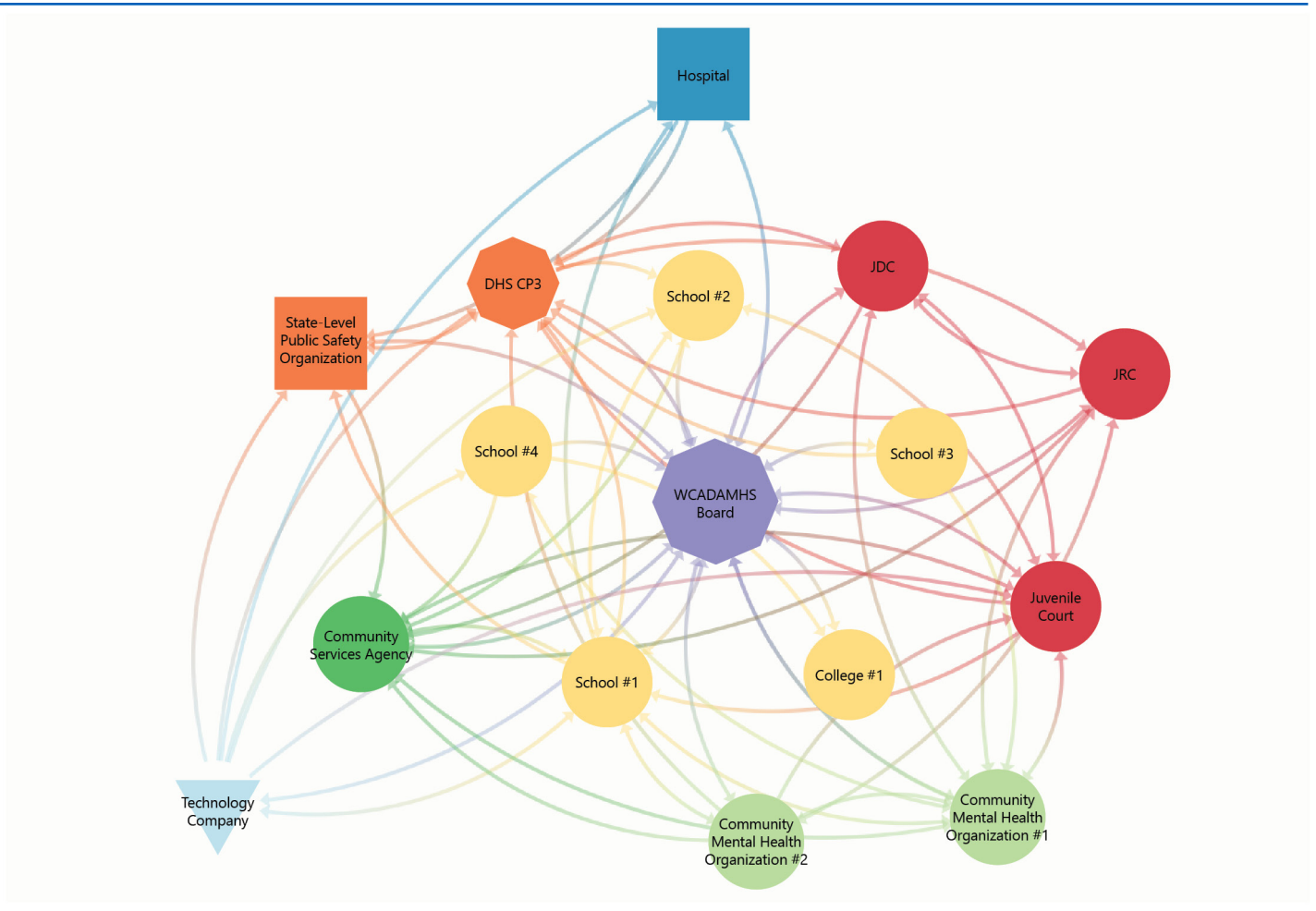
⁴ DHS Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships (CP3) defines BTAM as an *evidence-based and systematic process to identify, inquire, assess, and manage potential threats* [3, p. 2].

⁵ To protect the confidentiality of participants, we have used generic identifiers for several of the involved organizations.

The research in this report was supported by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) under Contract Award No. 70RSAT21G00000002/70RSAT23FR0000115. NCITE logo used with permission.

The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as necessarily representing the official policies, either expressed or implied, of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Figure 1. Wood County, Ohio, Targeted Violence Prevention Network



Source: CNA, created using [5]. Legend: octagon = key partner; circle = county-level resource or partner; square = state- or regional-level resource or partner; triangle = national-level resource or partner; red = criminal justice partner; orange = public safety organization; blue = hospital or medical facility; light blue = technology company; yellow = school; light green = mental health provider; dark green = other service provider; purple = WCADAMHS Board.

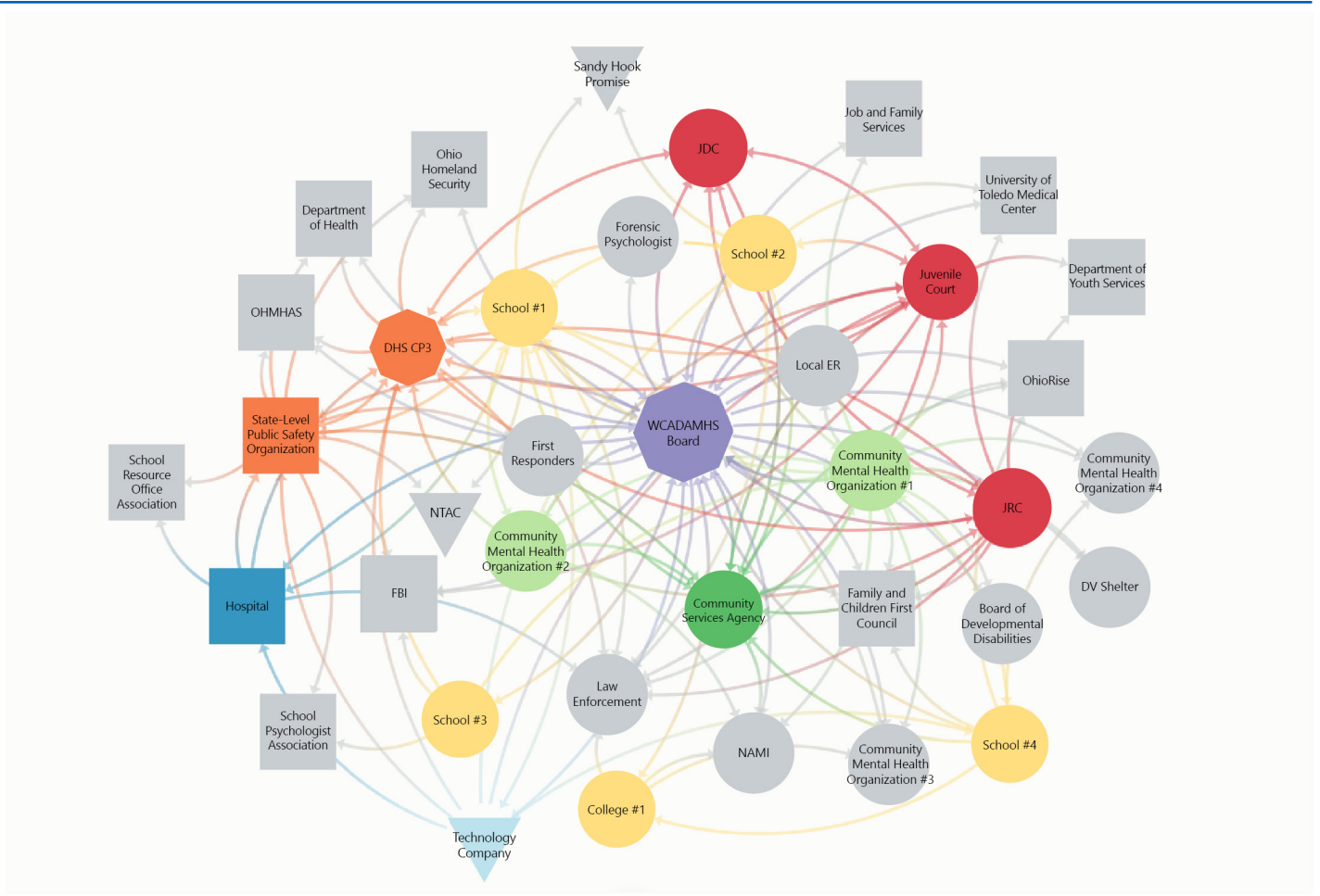
We were also able to map the core network’s engagement with a vast number of supporting peripheral partners (Figure 2).⁶

Although it is easy to underestimate the complexity of interactions within a single jurisdiction, Figures 1 and 2 make clear that the Wood County network is complex and layered. At the county level, network partners include the WCADAMHS Board, several community

mental health organizations, a community services agency, public schools, juvenile detention facilities, the juvenile court, and the Wood County chapter of a national nonprofit mental health organization. State-level partners include a public safety organization, a hospital outside of Wood County, Ohio Homeland Security, and the Ohio Department of Health. At the national level, partners include the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Sandy Hook Promise (a

⁶ Our analysis likely underestimates the number of connections in the network because we were unable to interview every relevant party in the county and were thus unable to capture all existing relationships.

Figure 2. Wood County Targeted Violence Prevention Network (including Peripheral Network)



Source: CNA, created using [5]. Legend: octagon = key partner; circle = county-level resource or partner; square = state- or regional-level resource or partner; triangle = national-level resource or partner; orange = public safety organization; blue = hospital or medical facility; light blue = technology company; yellow = school; light green = mental health provider; dark green = other service provider; purple = WCADAMHS Board; grayscale = peripheral network (named by core partners—shown in color—as partners they interact with and rely on). Other acronyms: DV Shelter = domestic violence shelter; NAMI = National Alliance on Mental Illness; FBI = Federal Bureau of Investigation; NTAC = National Threat Assessment Center (Secret Service); OHMHAS = Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing gun violence), and a technology company working on a data-sharing solution for practitioners.

Far from relying on a sole managing entity, the participants in the network leveraged existing local resources and relationships (and built new ones) to strengthen the community's targeted violence

prevention capabilities. Although there are multiple ways to assess the role of an organization in a network, we chose to focus on two features. First, we used a measure of how well-connected an organization is to other well-connected organizations to identify leaders in the network.⁷ Second, we looked at each organization's number of connections to other

⁷ This measure is eigenvector centrality. Elements with high eigenvector centrality are typically the "leaders" of the network [6, p. 79].

organizations to identify local hubs in the network.⁸ Both measures are important to consider; the first pinpoints leaders in the network as a whole, while the second locates local hubs. As illustrated in Table 1, the WCADAMHS Board is both the most influential and the most connected organization in the network. However, both School #1 and the DHS Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships are also among the top five most influential and connected organizations in the network.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL POLICY-MAKERS

1. LEVERAGE RELATIONSHIPS AND BUILD CONNECTIONS

In the case of Wood County, the targeted violence prevention capability did not develop through the establishment of a single controlling body but, rather, through active efforts to build on existing relationships and form new connections. Although it may be tempting to create a central hub, in many cases doing so may not be the best approach because it might duplicate existing efforts or require additional work for the new entity to establish relationships with local partners. Furthermore, by building relationships and leveraging existing resources, it is possible to start building a terrorism and targeted violence prevention capability without a large influx of funding.

2. CREATE MECHANISMS FOR COORDINATION AND INFORMATION SHARING

Wood County has ongoing efforts to improve coordination between the network partners and ensure that cases are not overlooked or missed. For example, the WCADAMHS Board is working on a threat assessment data-sharing platform to facilitate information sharing in the network. In addition, administrators at several Wood County schools are working together to share promising practices, provide support, and improve their behavioral threat assessment and management capabilities. There are benefits to the networking approach to behavioral threat assessment and management. However, this approach requires greater effort to establish proper coordination between network partners, including investment in mechanisms to enable interagency communication (e.g., liaison roles, shared data systems), ensuring consistency in approach, and providing accountability. At the same time, policy-makers should create a clear information-sharing framework to facilitate sharing case data while guaranteeing confidentiality and proper data security to protect individuals' privacy.

Table 1. Top organizations in the network

Most influential organizations in the network		Most connected organizations in the network	
1	WCADAMHS Board	1	WCADAMHS Board
2	Community services agency	2	Community mental health organization #1
3	School #1	3	State-level public safety organization
4	DHS CP3	4	School #1
5	Juvenile court	5	DHS CP3

Source: CNA, analysis conducted using [5]. CP3 is the DHS Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships.

⁸ This measure is degree centrality [6, p. 76].



REFERENCES

- [1] National Threat Assessment Center. 2024. *Behavioral Threat Assessment Units: A Guide for State and Local Law Enforcement to Prevent Targeted Violence*. US Secret Service, Department of Homeland Security. <https://www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2024-10/Behavioral-Threat-Assessment-Units-A-Guide-for-State-and-Local-Law-Enforcement-to-Prevent-Targeted-Violence.pdf>.
- [2] Savoia, Elena, Megan McBride, Jessica Stern, Max Su, Nigel Harriman, Ajmal Aziz, and Richard Legault. 2020. "Assessing the Impact of the Boston CVE Pilot Program: A Developmental Evaluation Approach." *Homeland Security Affairs* 16, Article 6. https://www.hsaj.org/resources/uploads/2022/04/hsaj_V16_AssessingtheImpactoftheBostonCVEPilotProgram_Aug2020_v2.pdf.
- [3] Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships. 2025. *Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM) in Practice*. Department of Homeland Security. https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2025-02/2025_0214_cp3_behavioral-threat-assessment-and-management-in-practice.pdf.
- [4] Nguyen, Tin L., Mario J. Scalora, and Denise Bulling. 2024. "Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management Programs: Practitioner-Informed Baseline Capabilities." University of Nebraska at Omaha. <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/ncitereportsresearch/100>.
- [5] Kumu Relationship Mapping Software. 2025. Los Gatos, California: Kumu. <https://kumu.io>.
- [6] Iacobucci, Dawn, Rebecca McBride, Deidre L. Popovich, and Maria Rouziou. 2017. "In Social Network Analysis, Which Centrality Index Should I Use?: Theoretical Differences and Empirical Similarities Among Top Centralities." *Journal of Methods and Measurement in the Social Sciences* 8, no. 2: 72–99. <https://journals.librarypublishing.arizona.edu/jmss/article/847/galley/842/view/>.

ABOUT CNA

CNA is a nonprofit research and analysis organization dedicated to the safety and security of the nation. It operates the Institute for Public Research—which serves civilian government agencies—and the Center for Naval Analyses, the Department of the Navy's federally funded research and development center (FFRDC). CNA develops actionable solutions to complex problems of national importance. With nearly 700 scientists, analysts, and professional staff, CNA takes a real-world approach to gathering data, working side by side with operators and decision-makers around the world. CNA's research portfolio includes global security and strategic competition, homeland security, emergency management, criminal justice, public health, data management, systems analysis, naval operations, and fleet and operational readiness.