



RESEARCH REPORT

A Research-Based Practice Guide to Reduce Youth Gun and Gang/Group Violence

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Glossary

Call-ins. Call-ins are part of focused deterrence strategies that involve law enforcement, community members, faith-based leaders, community-based service providers, and influential leaders in the community who gather together to communicate to a targeted group of people engaged in violence that the next instance of violence will be met with the full impact of the legal system and that services are available to help them leave their current lifestyle (Reichert et al. 2018).

Community violence intervention (CVI). This is an umbrella term for efforts to address community gun violence through means other than incarceration, focusing on relational work with people most likely to commit gun violence, intervening to interrupt and mediate conflicts, connecting people to social and economic services and resources, and addressing intergenerational cycles of poverty, violence, and trauma that give rise to gun violence.¹

Conflict mediation. Interventions often use some form of conflict mediation, whether through credible messengers or other actors, to deescalate situations involving high risk of retaliation or continued violence.

Credible messengers. Credible messengers are people who can motivate and cultivate transformative relationships with people with whom they share similar backgrounds. In the context of this practice guide, credible messengers are people who are trusted by gang/group members or people involved in the criminal legal system. They promote risk reduction through positive relationship building and mentoring. These relationships work because credible messengers are viewed as living examples of change and have relevant shared experience, such as shared community membership and experience with incarceration or general justice involvement.²

Custom notifications. Part of focused deterrence strategies, custom notifications involve intervention partners—usually law enforcement, service providers, and/or outreach workers and credible messengers—visiting people who are at risk of violence and/or legal consequences to notify them of the risk, express concern for their overall well-being, and provide services to help lower their risk of violence or victimization.

Enhanced enforcement. Enhanced enforcement includes increased and targeted arrests, expedited prosecution, and/or more punitive sanctioning for gang/group members.

Enhanced surveillance. Enhanced surveillance includes focused law enforcement surveillance efforts toward a select group of people with ties to gangs/groups in a specific target area, and/or heightened community supervision for those people postconviction.

Focused deterrence. Focused deterrence interventions are aimed at influencing people’s criminal behavior through the strategic application of enforcement and social service resources to facilitate desirable behaviors. These interventions are often framed as problem-oriented exercises where specific recurring crime problems are analyzed and responses are highly customized to local conditions and operational capacities (Braga et al. 2019).

Gang/group violence. There is no universal definition of gang violence in the United States, and the terms gang violence and group violence are often used interchangeably. We define gang/group violence as violence committed by a group of people who collectively identify themselves by adopting a group identity with the intent to enhance or preserve power, reputation, or economic resources.³ We also recognize that group violence in the present is not the same as traditional representations of gangs and that using “gang” to define and label group violence can be harmful to people experiencing gun violence and the systemic factors that are the root causes of violence.

Hospital-based intervention. Hospital-based violence intervention programs are multidisciplinary programs that identify people at risk of violent reinjury and provide them hospital- and community-based services (e.g., case management) to address risk factors for violence and promoting protective factors such as social support, employment, and educational attainment. Hospital-based intervention programs help dissuade victims from retaliatory acts, reduce violent reinjury, and lessen the likelihood of violence (Evans and Vega 2018).

Intervention. Intervention refers to attempts to deliver an immediate response to acute violence or crime problems (Jannetta et al. 2021).

Logic model. This is a graphic formally articulating a program’s theory of change and how it is intended to achieve results consistent with that theory of change. A logic model will include the resources that need to be in place, the activities that need to happen, what changes will ultimately lead to the intended outcomes, and what measurements should be collected to confirm that all of this is occurring (Tatian 2016).

Outreach workers. Outreach workers work directly with gang- or group-involved youth to mentor and assist their clients in various areas. Unlike credible messengers, outreach workers do not necessarily need to previously be trusted within a gang/group community.

Prevention. Prevention is any effort that supports youth who are "at risk" of becoming involved in delinquent behavior and helps prevent young people from entering the juvenile or adult justice system. Prevention includes efforts to prevent youth from penetrating further into the juvenile justice system after committing delinquent acts; these prevention efforts include arbitration, diversionary or mediation programs, and community service work or other treatment.⁴

Public health model. The public health model emphasizes the prevention of violence and classifies efforts by victimization risk level with the understanding that as risk levels increase, fewer people are implicated. Public health interventions use outreach workers who are independent from law enforcement to target high-risk people and behaviors without the threat of punishment (Abt 2017; Jannetta et al. 2010).

Spergel Model of Gang Intervention and Suppression/OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model. The Comprehensive Gang Model provides a framework for coordinating a collaborative multidisciplinary response that leverages community resources, builds capacity, and improves the efficacy of service delivery. It centers on the collaboration of law enforcement, social service agencies, and grassroots and faith-based organizations working together using an integrated, team-oriented approach that aims to reduce youth gang crime and violence and increase the community's ability to conduct prevention, suppression, and intervention through five main strategies: community mobilization, opportunities provision, social intervention, suppression, and organizational change (Jannetta et al. 2010).⁵

Suppression. Suppression is an intensive, concentrated, and frequently collaborative application of routine criminal justice system activities such as police patrol, arrest, prosecution, probation/parole surveillance, and revocation, focused on targeted people, locations, or activities.

Trauma-informed approaches. Trauma-informed approaches recognize the impact of traumatic experience while striving for a physically and psychologically safe environment by understanding, anticipating, and responding to people's expectations and needs while minimizing the chances of retraumatizing people who are trying to heal (Skinner-Osei et al. 2019).

Youth. We consider youth to be young people between the ages of 10 and 25. This differs from the age range used by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention for undertakings such as its Model Programs Guide to reflect the scope of the project and the fact that it is common for efforts focused on youth gun violence related to gangs and groups to define their service populations to include juveniles and young adults.

Executive Summary

This guide contains recommendations for stakeholders in local government, law enforcement, and community violence interventions implementing or refining strategies to reduce youth gun violence connected to gangs or groups in their communities. We derived the strategies and approaches in this guide from research and practice focused on reducing shootings and homicides committed by young people between the ages of 10 and 25 in gangs/groups and with the use of guns.

The practical recommendations laid out in this guide are intended to support approaches specifically focused on reducing the number of lives lost to gun violence and keeping young people at greatest risk of becoming perpetrators or victims of gun violence alive and free from incarceration and other forms of punishment and control. We acknowledge in the recommendations the deep mistrust of the justice system among marginalized youth and communities who have disproportionately borne the costs of incarceration and other consequences of traditional justice system responses to violence. Yet the best approaches to addressing youth gun violence using all available tools may be those in which law enforcement stakeholders, local government stakeholders, and community members collaboratively coproduce safety for those most affected and emphasize community engagement and voices. Many of our recommendations therefore identify the proactive, helpful role that law enforcement can play in antiviolence work of all kinds.

There is no shortage of people that care about this issue and care passionately about this issue and want to reduce gun violence. I'm talking at all levels. I'm talking about the people in the neighborhoods, law enforcement, the political leadership, the media, the religious leaders. –Intervention staff member

We summarize our recommendations in this executive summary and describe them in detail in chapters 2 and 3. We organize them into two sections with five and four practice areas, respectively. The recommendations in the first section (chapter 2) concern how to build antiviolence infrastructure to ensure everything is in place for jurisdictionwide, multicomponent, adaptable, and sustainable strategies to reduce gun violence committed by and victimizing young people. Those in the second

section (chapter 3) concern how to build effective programs and interventions that operate within and benefit from that infrastructure. Box ES.1 defines common job titles in this work. By section, the practice areas are as follows.

To build antiviolenace infrastructure,

1. formalize government's role in coordinating antiviolenace work,
2. resource and support a robust community-based antiviolenace strategy,
3. engage the community to establish and maintain peace,
4. calibrate the relationship between law enforcement and community violence interventions, and
5. collect and share data to refine practices and assess effectiveness.

To build effective programs and interventions,

6. assess the problem to focus attention and resources,
7. build positive relationships with and support young people at high risk of gun and gang/group violence,
8. interrupt and mediate conflicts, and
9. use suppression and enforcement precisely and sparingly.

BOX ES.1

Community Violence Intervention Job Titles

The array of common titles given to workers and types of work done by people employed outside traditional justice agencies is a source of potential confusion in the context of practices that address youth gun and gang/group violence. “Outreach workers,” “violence interrupters,” “peacekeepers,” “intervention workers,” and “case managers” are just a few of the terms used by multiple interventions. In addition, people in different communities and jurisdictions share job titles but do different kinds of work or do similar work but have different job titles, and what are distinct roles in one intervention may be combined into a single job title in another. Throughout this guide, we use four common job titles—case managers, credible messengers, outreach workers, and violence interrupters—in the following ways, recognizing that a person may have the responsibilities of more than one of them:

- A **case manager** is someone who carries a caseload of youth enrolled in a program, facilitates and monitors their progress on life plans, or uses other mechanisms to identify their goals and milestones.
 - A **credible messenger** is someone who is trusted by youth affiliated with groups or gangs and promotes risk reduction by encouraging mediation with gang/group members. They have a particular ability to do this relational work because young people view them as living examples of change because of shared experiences, such as community membership and experiences with incarceration or justice involvement in general. Credible messengers may do any or all of the types of work done by the other three positions in this list.
 - An **outreach worker** is someone who works to connect with youth affiliated with gangs or groups in the community to build trust and relationships and to connect them to (and keep them connected to) formal programs and services.
 - A **violence interrupter** is someone who intervenes to prevent retaliation and other modes of violence spreading through communities by responding to shooting scenes and mediating active conflicts, among other means.
-

Section 1: Building Antiviolence Infrastructure

The practice areas and recommendations in this section involve building the antiviolence infrastructure that enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions and programs that reduce youth gun and gang/group violence and supports coordination among them.

Practice Area 1: Formalize Government’s Role in Coordinating Antiviolence Work

Create a strategic plan for antiviolence work that defines partners’ roles. A strategic plan for antiviolence work can describe how different programs and interventions fit into a broader whole, describe how enforcement and community violence intervention components complement one another, and standardize practices and expectations of stakeholders in law enforcement, stakeholders in community violence interventions, and other partners. Such a plan should be grounded in the understanding of gun violence dynamics developed through the problem analysis discussed in practice area 6.

Establish a government entity to coordinate non-law enforcement components of the local violence reduction strategy. Local government can aid a city- or countywide strategy against gun violence and facilitate coordination among partners by establishing an office of neighborhood safety, an office of

violence prevention, or an equivalent office to oversee and represent the needs of non-law enforcement antiviolence programs. Having a government office for coordinating roles is especially important in complex multisite efforts and in efforts involving multiple government and community partners.

Distribute funding and support to community organizations in a manner as objective and as insulated from political interference as possible. Formalizing government's role in antiviolence work increases political influence on that work. Funding community antiviolence work equitably and transparently can make it more effective and can facilitate collaboration rather than competition.

Establish a forum where leaders can routinely discuss the performance of antiviolence efforts and share challenges and needs. Routinely convening to discuss the performance of an antiviolence strategy provides consistency in coordination to help navigate changes in leadership among elected officials and partner organizations, as well as changes in the extent to which a jurisdiction prioritizes the issue of youth gun violence.

Practice Area 2: Fund and Enhance the Capacity of a Robust Community-Based Antiviolence Strategy

Dedicate stable funding to community-based antiviolence work. Such funding, which is often provided through line items in county or city budgets, supports consistency in community-based aspects of a youth gun violence prevention strategy, and relying on intermittent and nonpermanent funding sources undermines that consistency.

Expand the scale of interventions to meet the scale of the problem. Antiviolence work needs to be expanded in most places to serve all the areas of need and engage all the youth in the population of interest. A comprehensive strategy to address youth gun violence will have components addressing all the places where the problem exists.

Invest in community organizations to build their capacity to do antiviolence work. Investing in infrastructure that supports community organizations in implementing effective practices across programs and interventions supports the consistency and quality of antiviolence work throughout a jurisdiction. Examples of such infrastructure include centralized training, common data definitions and systems, and certain business functions (e.g., accounting or payroll) for smaller organizations.

Pay antiviolence intervention staff commensurately with other professionals doing antiviolence work and provide them benefits. Low pay and a lack of benefits drive turnover among community-

based workers that interrupts relationships with clients and communities and may negatively impact implementation fidelity.

Support the mental health and wellness of the violence reduction workforce, including by addressing primary and vicarious trauma. Doing community-based outreach and interruption work and policing communities where gun violence is concentrated are highly demanding, stressful, and frequently expose stakeholders to trauma. Making trauma-informed services available to everyone in this workforce is important for helping them manage challenges and stresses and remain effective.

Provide training and professional development for staff to develop skills they need to implement interventions and grow as professionals. Investing in skill development in the antiviolence workforce is important and can involve cross-agency training and education, support for staff with limited prior workforce experience, and a focus on promoting outreach workers and interventionists to managers and leaders within their organizations. Joint trainings with stakeholders in law enforcement and in community violence interventions on the specific approaches and strategies for addressing youth gun and gang/group violence can build skills and mutual understanding.

Practice Area 3: Engage the Community to Establish and Maintain Peace

Gather community members' perspectives on violence reduction and translate their asks into action from government. This should be done through ongoing engagement and by enabling community members' voices to be prominent in shaping comprehensive youth gun violence reduction strategies. Doing so ensures strategies are better informed and more sustainable.

Include advocacy for community needs in youth gun violence reduction strategies. An intermediary who advocates for what communities and youth need for long-term peacemaking can help translate community priorities into concrete action.

Hold community activities such as pop-up events or peace walks in neighborhoods regularly and after shootings to address trauma and provide support. Events and other means of being present in the community help build and maintain community support for antiviolence work and can be important to community stability after a shooting or traumatic event.

Practice Area 4: Calibrate the Relationship between Law Enforcement and Community Violence Interventions

Clearly distinguish the roles of law enforcement and non-law enforcement antiviolence workers to preserve the perceived and actual independence of non-law enforcement interventions and their staff. Law enforcement and community antiviolence initiatives work alongside one another to address youth gun violence, even if they have no formal relationship. Defining roles and creating norms around communication can maintain the independence that community violence intervention staff need to work effectively with young people and communities, who often do not trust law enforcement. The definitions of roles and the norms of communication can also foster mutual understanding and mitigate tension between people working in different but complementary areas of broader antiviolence strategies.

Establish communication and coordination between law enforcement stakeholders and community antiviolence workers at the executive level. On-the-ground communication and working relationships between law enforcement stakeholders and intervention workers can compromise efforts to gain the trust of youth and communities that makes relational components of antiviolence strategies effective. Top-level leadership in law enforcement, local government, and community violence interventions should establish the high-level communication and coordination necessary to maintain roles and understanding, manage issues, and keep different components of violence reduction strategies operating in a complementary way.

Communicate the purpose and value of non-law enforcement antiviolence interventions to all law enforcement officers and staff. Many law enforcement officers will encounter community violence intervention staff as they do their work in the community. This makes it important to ensure that roles and norms are broadly communicated throughout law enforcement agencies and that strategies to get law enforcement to buy in to non-law enforcement antiviolence interventions are implemented at all levels.

Practice Area 5: Collect and Share Data to Refine Practices and Assess Effectiveness

Articulate the logic and desired outcomes of each component of the antiviolence strategy. Any program or intervention that is part of a strategy to address youth gun violence should have a logic model explaining how it reduces violence, and meaningful performance measures should be associated with that logic. Data infrastructure and evaluation approaches should be developed using the foundations created by these logic models.

Invest in data and analysis capacity. To do this, develop data systems that facilitate consistent data entry and reporting across service providers and hire or assign staff with expertise in research, data analysis, and performance measurement.

Feed data analysis back to program staff and have a mechanism for discussing and using data for continuous quality improvement. Consistently monitoring and reevaluating interventions to assess whether they are operating as intended and meeting their goals supports continuous improvement and sustainability.

Include community members, including those directly impacted by gun violence, in data-related activities such as collection and evaluation. Solicit feedback from and involve community members or those directly impacted by gun violence, including frontline workers and program participants, in data-related activities. Enabling these stakeholders to do things like collect data, define performance metrics, and evaluate data will produce more reliable measures of success and increase support for interventions and for broader antiviolence strategies.

Set progress metrics for youth participants that include positive youth development outcomes, and measure success in terms of incremental changes or milestones. Having meaningful and valid measures of progress is necessary for law enforcement agencies and other justice agencies to have confidence in removing young people from their primary population of focus (as discussed under practice area 9).

Evaluate interventions to determine whether they are delivering their intended impacts. Evaluating results at the local level builds confidence and support for interventions that are working and identifies those that are not delivering as intended and need to be improved or replaced. This benefits jurisdictions and contributes to the evidence base for addressing youth gun violence, which has many strengths but also important gaps that everyone will benefit from filling.

Section 2: Building Effective Programs and Interventions

The practice areas and recommendations in this section involve building effective programs and interventions that operate within and benefit from larger violence reduction infrastructures.

Practice Area 6: Assess the Problem to Focus Attention and Resources

Conduct a local problem analysis before developing violence reduction strategies. Addressing youth gun violence effectively requires an understanding of local problems developed through a problem analysis, which should involve analyzing where shootings are concentrated (“hot spots”), what proportion of them is connected to gangs and groups, the characteristics of perpetrators and victims, and the conflicts and alliances between gangs and groups.

Routinely and collaboratively analyze the violence problem so the strategy can be refined when needed. Tools like shooting-specific analyses (shooting reviews) should be used iteratively over the life of an intervention. Doing so provides the insight into evolving violence dynamics necessary to adjust course at the program and strategic levels.

Deploy resources to the people and places identified through the problem analysis. This includes designating neighborhood-level service areas and fielding tools such as checklists or assessment instruments to identify whether a young person needs programming that addresses their risk of involvement in violence.

Be ready to recalibrate strategies based on findings from initial and ongoing problem analyses. When shooting reviews and other ongoing analyses identify mismatches between violence dynamics and strategies, partners must change course to support and maintain effectiveness.

Practice Area 7: Build Positive Relationships with and Support Young People at High Risk of Gun and Gang/Group Violence

Structure engagement with youth at high risk of experiencing gun violence. Stakeholders working with youth at high risk can improve their work and make it more consistent by setting expectations about relational aspects like the frequency and purpose of contact, using tools such as case plans or life plans, and differentiating service pathways appropriate for young people with different levels of risk or need.

Be consistent in relationships with youth engaged in interventions and programs. Consistently following through on commitments is fundamental to building relationships with youth at high risk to engage them in positive change processes. Program structures and parameters, such as caseload sizes, need to be tailored to support that consistency.

Employ people with relevant lived experience to be credible messengers and develop relationships with youth at high risk. A community violence intervention workforce with relevant lived experience can develop the trust that underlies relational work with youth connected to groups and gangs faster and more deeply.

Build in a preenrollment stage to develop trusting relationships with youth when they may not be ready to engage with formal services. Many of the youth whom it is most critical to engage in antiviolence interventions may need time to think and build trust with intervention staff before committing, and having a method for building and maintaining engagement with them through this process can make work with them more successful.

Develop robust service linkages and referral partners and be clear and candid with youth about what needs an intervention can and cannot meet. Referral partners who are not ready for or sensitive to working with youth at high risk of violence involvement can undermine effectiveness because keeping promises and consistently following through are central to working successfully with these young people. It is necessary to identify referral partners who are ready for this work and build the readiness of those who are needed but not ready.

Establish the capacity for hospital-based interventions. Hospital-based interventions are uniquely positioned to engage with people who have been shot and their families to reduce their risk of being revictimized. Ensuring this model of engagement is in place for building relationships with youth at high risk of violence involvement supports overall success.

Practice Area 8: Interrupt and Mediate Conflicts

Routinely alert violence interrupters of shooting incidents that require their response. Routine communication with interrupters formalizes their roles in responding to shooting incidents, ensures they are systematically apprised of where their response may be needed, and establishes concrete communications expectations between them and partners such as law enforcement or hospitals.

Create a working understanding among police at the leadership level and the precinct or local division level about the role of violence interrupters in responding to incidents. Interventionists and law enforcement officers routinely interact at shooting scenes, and community members may mistrust interrupters if they perceive them as being affiliated with law enforcement and passing information to them. Clearly defining the roles of interrupters and law enforcement officers and having law

enforcement leadership communicate it from the top down mitigate conflict that can arise between these parties in the high-pressure environments of shooting scenes.

Develop a staffing approach that helps violence interrupters balance their responsibilities to young people and their need to respond to shooting incidents. Using team approaches to share information and distributing the work of responding to shooting scenes make it more manageable for each interrupter to carry out the routine, proactive, and reactive responsibilities of their job.

Proactively engage with people in all groups in a neighborhood so that trust has already been established when conflict mediation is needed. To be effective and safe, interventionists need to be seen as trying to protect everyone and as not being aligned with one party in a conflict, which can be particularly difficult if they have past ties to a group. Interventionists need to proactively engage and communicate with members of all groups to build this understanding for when conflicts arise.

Build strong working relationships with victim service providers. This allows interrupters to connect shooting survivors and the loved ones of survivors and homicide victims to immediate supports to help meet their needs, reducing the potential for and the harm of retaliation.

Practice Area 9: Use Suppression and Enforcement Precisely and Sparingly

Concentrate suppression and enforcement efforts in geographically and socially precise ways.

Building on the understanding of gun violence dynamics derived from the problem analysis, suppression and enforcement components of gun violence–reduction strategies should focus on places where gun violence is highly concentrated (e.g., specific street corners) and on people involved in group-based conflicts resulting in shootings. This maximizes the impact of suppression, incapacitation, and deterrence on gun violence while minimizing the burdens of enforcement on communities already negatively impacted by the presence of violence.

Respectfully communicate the risk of sanctions to people at high risk so that they understand and are aware of it. Convincing young people at high risk of involvement in gun violence that they will be subject to legal consequences if they do not desist builds on targeted enforcement efforts and reduces the likelihood of having to employ further targeted enforcement. Risk can be communicated in group or one-on-one settings.

Couple suppression and enforcement strategies with positive engagement strategies to support success for youth. It is difficult to sustain approaches to gun violence that only involve enforcement because such approaches do not address community members' desire for peace and for young people to

receive help. A jurisdictionwide strategy for addressing gun violence should include enforcement and positive engagement and should articulate how they are related.

Scale back focused surveillance and enforcement attention when youth reduce their risk through positive program engagement. Maintaining motivation for change is difficult. If youth who are making progress and reducing their risk of involvement in gun violence continue to be subject to enhanced scrutiny from law enforcement, that progress can be undermined. To avoid conflict between enforcement and youth engagement approaches, partners should establish a mechanism to communicate who is making progress to authorities, and authorities should take that progress into account.

Build trust with communities by reducing the burden of broad-based enforcement strategies.

Establishing lasting partnerships between law enforcement and other justice agencies and communities to coproduce safety will be much more difficult if those communities are subject to heightened enforcement of lower-level offenses. Proactive efforts to reduce overly broad enforcement can build trust and underscore the primacy of the shared goal of reducing gun violence.

Chapter 1. Introduction and Overview

When we began developing this practice guide, rates of gun violence in the United States were well below the peaks seen in the 1990s, though disparities in the prevalence of gun violence remained stark and it was still occurring at levels that would be shocking in many other countries. As we complete it, gun violence seems to be occurring at levels many cities have not seen in decades for the second straight year, coinciding with the second year of a pandemic that has upended social life and economies across the world. We hope that people reading it will have reached a time of relative peace in terms of gun violence. But whereas gun violence rates increase and decrease, inequities in people's risk of experiencing gun violence and in safety more generally persist, and gun violence can occur in outbreaks as can other public health problems like diseases. What we need to build for communities throughout the country is a safety infrastructure with which to establish peace when it is absent and to maintain that peace. This infrastructure must be stable in its resources and design, must be data informed and constantly adaptive to changes in violence dynamics, and must not grow and shrink as violence levels rise and fall. It must also recognize the historical and current highly racialized structural factors that make particular communities more vulnerable to gun violence, and historical and current inequities in policing and punishment that harm youth at risk of violence and cause communities to mistrust the justice system.

To contribute to that infrastructure, the Urban Institute, with support from the National Institute of Justice and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and guided by a multidisciplinary panel of experts, has developed this research-based practice guide that local governments, law enforcement agencies, and organizations intervening in community violence can use to prevent and reduce gun violence committed by youth involved in gangs/groups. The purpose of this guide is to (1) distill the extant research and knowledge about practices for reducing youth gun and gang/group violence, and (2) provide recommendations for implementing violence reduction strategies.

Reducing gun violence among young people in the United States is a moral and practical imperative. Despite the decline in violent crime over the past three decades, group and gun violence remain significant components of the United States' overall crime problem (Howell 2012).⁶ Gun violence perpetrated by young people is a pernicious problem for many communities, particularly those characterized by historically high levels of concentrated disadvantage and disinvestment (Graif, Gladfelter, and Matthews 2014; MacDonald and Gover 2005).⁷ The racialized social structure is

primarily to blame for the conditions that trigger violence, and there are large historical geographic, socioeconomic, and racial inequities in who is most at risk (Peterson and Krivo 2010). The majority of gun homicide victims are Black Americans, who are 10 times more likely to be victims of gun homicides than white Americans.⁸

But it would be inaccurate to say that all disadvantaged neighborhoods are violent and it would be a mistake to assume that disadvantaged communities have not directly confronted the issue of violence (Du Bois 1899; Ralph 2014; Vargas 2016). Indeed, we spoke to people from various walks of life who had routinely pondered, acted, and organized to confront gun violence in their communities. Moreover, research has found that the few people who engage in this type of violence are often both the victims and initiators of conflicts that lead to violence (Jennings et al. 2012). This is especially prevalent among people associated with gangs or groups (Pyrooz, Moule, and Decker 2014), who may affiliate with gangs or groups and carry firearms out of fear of victimization but who thereby increase their risk of experiencing violence (Melde, Esbensen, and Taylor 2009; Melde, Taylor, and Esbensen 2009). In addition, interventions that have honed in on this smaller group of people have been shown to be more effective (Braga et al. 2017; Braga and Weisburd 2012a, 2012b; Meares and Papachristos 2009; Papachristos, Meares, and Fagan 2007; Skogan et al. 2008). This evidence stems from public health and focused deterrence models that shifted toward targeting a smaller group of people who were at risk of both committing harm *and* being harmed. This implies that interventions that focus on this group of people are more valuable than more general blanket approaches, which often involve criminalizing and targeting entire communities.

Alongside the unequally distributed harm of gun violence and complicating efforts to address it is the unequally distributed burdens of police and justice system enforcement. For example, people in predominantly Black neighborhoods experience higher rates of police-initiated contact regardless of local crime rates (Fagan et al. 2010; Haldipur 2018), and police are less responsive when members of these same communities initiate contact, including when they call for service and request protection from harm (Prowse, Weaver, and Meares 2020; Rios, Prieto, and Ibarra 2020). The disparate burdens of enforcement are also glaringly evident in incarceration rates among Black and Latinx people, which are many times higher than among white people (Carson 2020). Young people are particular targets for enforcement because their brains are still developing and their emotions drive them to take risks and behave impulsively much more than in older adults (box 1). These factors contribute to very high levels of distrust of police and other justice system actors among communities where crime and violence are most concentrated (Fontaine et al. 2017; La Vigne, Fontaine, and Dwivedi 2017).

BOX 1

Acknowledging Developmental Differences in Youth between the Ages of 10 and 25

The target population for this project spans a 15-year age range during which youth and young adults experience major developmental changes. This age range spans adolescence and emerging adulthood, when the brain undergoes a neural growth and rewiring process from puberty through one's midtwenties that impacts the prefrontal cortex, which plays a key role in planning and decisionmaking (Arain et al. 2013; Luna 2009). This period of brain development is characterized by significant growth in the prefrontal cortex, followed by the pruning of synapses and the development of myelin around remaining connections to strengthen them and increase integrated brain function.⁹ Over time, these changes facilitate increased control over emotions, increased ability to balance pros and cons when making decisions, and complex thinking that uses multiple areas of the brain.

People's development trajectories differ significantly in this age range. Development is gradual and there are individual differences based on social and environmental contexts (Sakala et al. 2020). On average, the use of concrete thinking is dominant at age 10 and increased use of abstract thinking begins to emerge around age 12, increasing people's capacity to understand cause and effect. By around the age of 15, the capacity to understand cause and effect and subsequent risks mirrors that of an adult, but emotions still drive decisionmaking for many young people who may engage in risk-taking and impulsive behavior, particularly in "hot cognition" situations (those in which thinking is influenced by one's emotional state) (Icenogle et al. 2019; Sakala et al. 2020). Changes in hierarchies of relationships (such as those with significant others, parents, or friends) also occur in this age range (Rosenthal and Kobak 2010). Additionally, our experiences influence brain development, and exposure to trauma, particularly prolonged exposure, can impact which pathways in the brain get strengthened and pruned and the development of the higher executive functioning, concentration, and processes related to self-control and decisionmaking. This can result in difficulties with learning and relationships and an increase in risk-taking and impulsive behavior (North Carolina Division of Social Services and UNC Family and Children's Resource Program 2012).

There are also many social and environmental differences to consider in addition to the cognitive differences across this age range. Teenagers more often than younger children have increased exposure to activities, social situations, and substances that prompt risky behavior and affect their brain development. Young people can obtain drivers' licenses at age 16, compulsory schooling ends between ages 16 and 18, and they can begin working as young as 12 in some states. For some, an 18th birthday also means increased independence and possibly diminished familial or guardian support, particularly among youth in the foster care system. The age of criminal liability also falls between ages 16 and 18, depending on the state. As brain development progresses and people mature, most people grow out of antisocial and dangerous behaviors (Steinberg, Cauffman, and Monahan 2015). For these reasons, it is crucial to consider the developmental, social, and environmental differences experienced by youth during this developmental time when considering the implementation and efficacy of interventions discussed in this guide.

Legitimacy in policing can be defined as the belief that “the police ought to be allowed to exercise their authority to maintain social order, manage conflicts, and solve problems in their communities” (Tyler 2004, 9). When this belief is present, it is associated with greater compliance with the law and willingness to help authorities reduce crime and maintain order (Tyler, Goff, and MacCoun 2015). Regarding youth gun and group violence, this can mean reporting violent crimes to police and being willing to identify shooting suspects. High-profile incidents of police violence can reduce community members’ willingness to engage with police in immediate and evident ways (Desmond, Papachristos, and Kirk 2016). Evidence that deliberate trust-building efforts can change police practice and improve police-community trust in a lasting way is mixed at best (Fontaine et al. 2019; Lawrence et al. 2019), and the pervasive mistrust of police in places and communities where youth gun violence is prevalent impacts every aspect of attempts to address that violence. But there is evidence that satisfactory treatment in police encounters, as perceived by youth, mitigates negative youth outcomes arising from police contact (Slocum and Wiley 2018).

What Is the Audience for This Guide?

The audience for this guide includes local government officials, law enforcement stakeholders, and community violence intervention stakeholders, and we provide recommendations for which each can lead efforts. But we developed the recommendations with a primary focus on local government leaders, such as mayors, county executives, county commissioners, members of task forces that address youth violence, and local officials overseeing communities’ or cities’ strategic planning. This is because even for recommended practices that local government will not lead, priorities and decisions made by local government leaders in areas like public messaging, political support, strategic planning, and funding will greatly influence whether the practices will be successfully implemented or sustained. We frame our recommendations with this in mind, although we expect they will be of use and general interest to policymakers, professionals, community stakeholders, and researchers working on youth group and gun violence.

What Is the Scope of This Guide?

Violence reduction and working with youth involved in, or at risk of being involved in, groups and gangs are broad areas of practice (box 2 discusses our use of the terms group and gang throughout this guide). Consistent with the interest of the National Institute of Justice and OJJDP, this guide focuses on

strategies and approaches derived from research and practice focused explicitly on reducing gun-related violence committed by young people between the ages of 10 and 25 who may also be associated with gangs/groups,¹⁰ including interventions that solely serve youth and those that primarily serve youth. We do not attempt to address all efforts designed to reduce youth violence, nor gang prevention and intervention efforts not expressly intended to reduce gun violence. Additionally, this guide does not focus on general efforts to reduce gun violence, such as gun market interventions (for instance, efforts to address straw purchases or prevent diversion of legally purchased firearms to illegal markets) or general crime prevention efforts. The guide also focuses primarily on interventions that are immediate responses to an acute problem (intervention and secondary and tertiary prevention), rather than programs and interventions that address risk factors associated with violence within a broad population (primary prevention).

BOX 2

A Note on Language: Gangs and Groups

Though there are various definitions of gangs in federal and state statutes, there is not a universal definition of the term used throughout the field. We approach the use of the word gang with caution because our interviews with practitioners surfaced concerns about its detrimental and labelling aspects (including real impacts such as being included in gang databases or subject to gang enhancements in sentencing and the impacts of framing young people as dangerous threats to be controlled). Furthermore, some prominent organizations in the youth gun violence prevention field, like the National Network for Safe Communities, avoid the term gang in favor of group because many collections of people that contribute to violence are excluded by the statutory definition and they find that using gang as an umbrella term is therefore unnecessary and unhelpful.^a In recognition of this, we use the term group in lieu of or alongside “gang” in this guide where appropriate. We use the term gang, however, when referencing specific interventions that use it (e.g., the Gang Reduction Initiative of Denver) or characterizing areas of research and practice that are oriented toward it, such as OJJDP’s Comprehensive Gang Model. We also seek to use people-first language throughout this guide to foreground the humanity of young people involved in gangs and groups and at high risk of committing and being victimized by gun violence.

Note:

^a See page 2 of Community Oriented Policing Services’ Group Violence Intervention: An Implementation Guide at https://nnscommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/GVI_Guide_2016.pdf.

Though various place- and person-based interventions have been designed and implemented to prevent, reduce, and control youth group and gun violence, articulating a clear summary of “what

works” for whom and in what contexts to address this violence is difficult for several reasons. The evidence about interventions and models is mixed, and the extent of that evidence varies by approach. Further, although many group and gun violence interventions can be classified into three primary, well-specified models—focused deterrence, public health, and the Spergel Model of Gang Intervention and Suppression/OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model—on the ground in local contexts they are often characterized by innovation on top of and hybridization between these models, which is possible in part because the models share many characteristics. In addition, there are many places where two or more models operate, sometimes as part of larger antiviolence strategies and sometimes with informal, minimal, or even no coordination. Many approaches are emergent and have not yet been studied well. There are also interventions that are not aligned with any of the three models mentioned above.

There are guides and sources of information that provide concrete recommendations and guidance on how to develop particular approaches. We identify and link to these resources throughout this guide. Fewer resources guide local decisionmakers in determining how to shape their overall approaches to addressing youth gun and gang/group violence, including how to support effective work at the program or intervention level, but also how to build broader infrastructure that facilitates the coordination and success of different partners playing their parts in the complex and difficult work of protecting youth and communities from youth gun violence. That is the purpose of this practice guide.

What Methods Were Used to Develop This Guide?

To develop this guide, Urban researchers used three methods: (1) we engaged 16 leading experts, including law enforcement leaders, gun and gang/group violence reduction practitioners, and researchers, through multiple convenings to inform this guide’s scope and development; (2) we reviewed the current literature on the efficacy and implementation of youth gang/group and gun violence reduction strategies and interventions and synthesized key findings on effective strategies; and (3) we conducted a scan of practices for preventing and reducing gun and gang/group violence, which included discussions with key stakeholders and staff in 14 youth gang/group and gun violence interventions about the design, development, funding and resources, implementation, challenges, facilitators of success, and sustainability of their models and interventions. Our research review and scan of practices, which we link to in box 3, provide more details on methods we used for data collection and analysis. In translating the findings from both of those efforts into recommendations, we sorted themes identified in each by whether they applied most directly to practices at the program/intervention level or to developing a jurisdictionwide infrastructure to support a multifaceted

antiviolence strategy, and then grouped them by subareas of practices derived from the themes; we developed recommendations by drawing on challenges to success, facilitators of success, and specific practices and general approaches that facilitate interventions or help practitioners meet identified challenges.

BOX 3

The Research Review and the Scan of Practice

Urban's research synthesis is available at <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/implementing-youth-violence-reduction-strategies-findings-synthesis-literature-gun-group-and-gang-violence>, and our scan of practice is available at <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/implementing-youth-violence-reduction-strategies-findings-scan-youth-gun-group-and-gang-violence-interventions>; these reports provide details about our methods and full findings of both data-collection efforts.

How Is This Guide Organized?

This introductory chapter concludes with a brief overview of the most common program and intervention models in this area. In the next chapter we present practice-related recommendations by synthesizing knowledge about research and practices gleaned from our research review and scan of practices at the *infrastructure level*; we detail the key ingredients of strategy development, governance, staffing, community engagement, and data and evaluation required to build the capacities of youth gun and gang/group violence reduction interventions and coordinate among them. We do the same in the third chapter at the *programmatic level*, including problem analysis, identification of populations of focus, relational work, incident and active conflict response, and enforcement and suppression.

At the beginning of each practice area, we provide a box containing recommendations based on findings from research and the scan of practices synthesized across the topical focus of the practice area, followed by a more detailed treatment of the themes from the research review and scan of practices. We end each practice area with a list of additional resources that provide more detailed information relevant to the practice area.

The Most Common Types of Intervention Models

Our practice-related recommendations are intended to be model agnostic and broadly relevant. That said, much of the extant literature on this subject focuses on the three program models represented in our scan of practices: the focused deterrence model, the public health model, and the Comprehensive Gang Model. We found many commonalities between these models, hybrid versions of these models, and other models in terms of core activities and approaches that have supported effective implementation of those activities, and these commonalities were the basis of our recommendations. But because all three models are prominent and because we refer to them in the next two chapters, we briefly describe them here.

The Focused Deterrence Model

The focused deterrence model includes enforcement and resource-driven responses. In focused deterrence interventions, partners demand that identifiable groups of people desist from behaviors harmful to their communities (e.g., gun violence, intimate partner violence, open air drug market activity) and promise to support them if they desist and to use enhanced, targeted enforcement if they do not. In the Group Violence Intervention, a focused deterrence approach applied to gun violence, community organizations, social services providers, and law enforcement stakeholders deliver this message before any intervention actions are taken. This can be done at meetings with people in groups involved in active conflicts where entire groups are threatened with sanctions, or in one-on-one meetings with particularly high-risk people. The robustness of service provision and support can vary considerably in focused deterrence efforts; some have robust outreach, case management, and service connection components, whereas others have more modest service provision involving referrals to community-based organizations and other resource avenues.

For more information about the focused deterrence approach, see [the National Network for Safe Communities website](#).

The Public Health Model

The public health model for preventing gun violence builds from the insight that gun violence in many ways spreads like a virus. In public health interventions, community members, leaders, service providers, and other critical stakeholders are deployed to do key activities (Skogan et al. 2008), which include denormalizing violence in the community through public campaigns and messaging, providing

direct conflict mediation, and dialoguing with people at highest risk of gun violence about the potential consequences of their actions. Public health interventions focus on a select few people whom outreach workers identify. This model centers people most at risk not just of being shooters but also of being shot (Skogan et al. 2008, 4). Various outreach workers work in communities to stop conflicts that can lead to violence. These workers work in real time and often come from the same communities as, and share experiences with, the people they work with. This model is considered a promising alternative to law enforcement–based strategies. Notably, unlike the Comprehensive Gang Model and the focused deterrence model, the public health model does not involve suppression or other enforcement components.

Hospital-based violence interventions are another prominent type of public health intervention. Their staff usually work in, and their programs are usually housed administratively in, hospitals with trauma centers. They are based on the recognition that violence is recurrent and that someone hospitalized after a shooting or similar traumatic incident is at high risk for further victimization (NNHVIP n.d.). Interventionists working for such interventions meet with potential clients in the hospital, assess their risk/need factors, work with them and their families to plan for their discharge and safety, and connect them to services. In some places, the distinction between community-based public health interventions and hospital-based interventions can be somewhat blurry; the former can include responses in hospitals, and the latter can involve going into the community to work with clients after they are discharged from the hospital.

For more detailed information about public health interventions, see [Cure Violence Global](#), and for more on hospital-based violence interventions, see [the Health Alliance for Violence Intervention](#).

The Comprehensive Gang Model

This model is based on the assumption that violence committed by people affiliated with gangs is a product of social disorganization and provides a framework for coordinating a collaborative multidisciplinary response that leverages community resources, builds capacity, and improves the efficacy of service delivery. The model is team oriented and centers on the collaboration of law enforcement agencies, social service agencies, and grassroots and faith-based organizations. Its framework is highly adaptive and has multidisciplinary and cross-system case management and outreach at its core. It is intended to reduce serious and entrenched youth gang crime and violence by making a community better able to conduct effective prevention, intervention, and suppression through

five main strategies: community mobilization, opportunities provision, social intervention, suppression, and organizational change.

The Comprehensive Gang Model includes suppression and intervention activities for gang members already involved in serious and chronic crime and prevention activities for gang members who are likely to have such involvement.

For more information about the Comprehensive Gang Model, see [the National Gang Center](#).

Chapter 2. Building Antiviolence Infrastructure

In this chapter we provide recommendations that go beyond programs and interventions—even complex ones with multiple components—to discuss how to build and maintain jurisdictionwide youth gun violence reduction infrastructure. This includes giving attention to local government coordination across varied components of a comprehensive antiviolence strategy, developing the capacity of the antiviolence workforce and community organizations engaged in antiviolence work, engaging the community in the coproduction of safety, managing relationships between law enforcement and non-law enforcement stakeholders in antiviolence work, and having the data and evaluation required to build the capacities of youth gun and gang/group violence reduction interventions. Considerations include supporting intervention staff, garnering political support for interventions, obtaining sufficient resources and funding, and supporting the evaluation and routine measurement of outcomes.

Practice Area 1: Formalize Government’s Role in Coordinating Antiviolence Work

Local government has an important role to play in funding, coordinating, and supporting antiviolence work, although much of that work may be carried out by nongovernmental organizations. Robust collaborative work done to reduce youth gun violence related to groups and gangs requires a varied toolkit that includes enforcement, intervention, prevention, and community engagement, and government is best positioned to situate each of these within an overall strategy. In addition, in certain ways only other government agencies, such as police departments, can relate to justice agencies as intragovernmental peers, which has benefits that we address more fully in practice area 4. Box 4 provides recommendations for formalizing government’s role in coordinating this work.

BOX 4

Recommendations for Formalizing Government’s Role in Coordinating Antiviolence Work

Create a strategic plan for antiviolence work that defines partners’ roles. A lack of clarity on broad strategy impedes specific partners from defining their roles within a larger violence reduction effort. A strategic plan for antiviolence work can describe how different programs and interventions fit into a

broader whole, describe how enforcement and community violence intervention components complement one another, and standardize practices and expectations of stakeholders in law enforcement, stakeholders in community violence interventions, and other partners.

- *Who's involved:* Local government is usually best positioned to lead this, and developing the plan with collaborative input from key partners, including those from communities most directly impacted by gun violence, will facilitate their buy-in.

Establish a government entity to coordinate non-law enforcement components of the local violence reduction strategy. Local government can aid a city- or countywide strategy against gun violence and facilitate coordination among partners by establishing an office of neighborhood safety, an office of violence prevention, or an equivalent office to oversee and represent the needs of non-law enforcement antiviolence programs. Consolidating contracts related to violence prevention in a single government agency can make the provision of those services more consistent across neighborhoods. Having a government office for coordinating roles is especially important in complex multisite efforts and efforts involving multiple government and community partners.

- *Who's involved:* Local government is responsible for doing this.

Distribute funding and support to community organizations in a manner as objective and insulated from political interference as possible. Formalizing government's role in antiviolence work increases political influence on that work. Among other things, this can increase tensions and rivalries among community organizations involved in the work.

- *Who's involved:* Local government leads this.

Establish a forum where leaders can routinely discuss the performance of antiviolence efforts and share challenges and needs. Local elected leadership can convene routine forums for examining outcomes either with that leadership or via a steering committee charged with guiding and supporting the work. Ensuring the long-term stability of coordinated approaches to violence reduction will require leadership to maintain support during periods when the gun violence problem is higher or lower on the local policy agenda, and routinely convening around the performance of an antiviolence strategy provides consistency in coordination to help navigate this. It can also help mitigate the concentration of non-law enforcement antiviolence work in a single person in smaller jurisdictions, which can be a threat to sustainability because of the difficulty in transferring trust and relationships if there is turnover in that key person.

- *Who's involved:* All partners should be involved, but local government should lead this.

Many jurisdictions address gun violence through municipal government, often by developing government entities to handle gun violence. Some have created dedicated departments, such as the Office of Neighborhood Safety in Richmond, California, the Mayor's Office to Prevent Gun Violence in

New York City, or the City of Los Angeles Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD). Some entities are housed in larger public safety offices, as is the Gang Reduction Initiative of Denver, which is in the Denver Department of Public Safety. Other jurisdictions, like Milwaukee, situate this work in health departments. In smaller jurisdictions and places where coordination across multiple smaller cities and towns within a county can be more common, government's role might need to be played by coalitions of government agencies. This may start with law enforcement or other justice agencies, but a strong role for other government functions can assist with obtaining the benefits seen by dedicated offices in larger cities.

City agencies and offices coordinating work to address gun violence play a number of important roles. They keep this work on the agendas of elected officials to ensure it gets the attention it needs when other priorities compete for attention. They can serve as buffers between staff doing outreach and violence interruption work and the police. They can represent the needs of community organizations, youth at highest risk, and communities most affected by violence. To do this well, local government must prioritize having culturally competent staff who are invested in the antiviolence work and understand it. This can be especially important when engaging government agencies that may have much to contribute to a collaborative effort to address gun violence but have not previously considered addressing this issue as part of their mission.

It ... gives an opportunity for young people to see government in a different way. Changing the face of the government to say this is actually you and it should be serving you. Here are some of the folks in your neighborhood who are doing mentoring and violence prevention and they are a part of the government. —Research stakeholder

A government agency or office dedicated to addressing gun violence can play a central role in developing and sustaining a broad antiviolence strategy, such as the Milwaukee Office of Violence Prevention with the city's Blueprint for Peace, and the City of Los Angeles GRYPD office with its comprehensive strategy (figure 1). Developing a strategic plan that articulates partners' varied roles and how they fit together facilitates effective antiviolence work by providing a framework for bringing complementary skills into a coordinated effort. Developing such a plan with opportunities for input from partners and residents, as Milwaukee did in creating its Blueprint for Peace, ensures it reflects knowledge and insight from across a community and fosters support for the plan. A good plan can guide

funding decisions and support collaboration rather than competition among partners. The plan and the partnership should respect different roles and lanes in violence reduction work across all partners.

FIGURE 1

An Overview of the City of Los Angeles Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development Comprehensive Strategy



Source: Courtesy of the City of Los Angeles Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development.

We're proud of what we've seen in reduction of gun violence. The department working in both suppression and intervention is what works in communities.

—Law enforcement stakeholder

Local government can use its convening power to set up an inclusive process for developing a comprehensive strategy to address youth violence and to bring partners together around it in an ongoing collaborative structure. State or federal partners such as US attorneys' offices have also played this convening and coordinating role. The breadth of needs among youth at high risk of violence and communities dealing with high levels of gun violence necessitates developing broad partnerships that respect and leverage different skills and expertise and promote collaboration rather than competition. The Comprehensive Gang Model, for example, requires a very high level of stakeholder collaboration, which can be one of the biggest hurdles in implementation. Conflicting interests and personal, professional, and organizational loyalties among very different stakeholders can hamper efforts to implement these and other interventions in accordance with particular models.

Partnership meetings are an obvious but nonetheless important form of partner coordination. They can be task forces, steering committees, or other broad coalition meetings. They can be used to build the partnership referral networks used in almost all violence reduction efforts and can ensure relationships among partners actually exist, rather than merely existing on paper. They also provide venues for difficult conversations about system barriers or partners' practices that may be blocking the collective effort to protect youth and reduce gun violence. At the same time, they are venues for sharing credit and acknowledging everyone's contributions to shared success. Failure to do this has impeded the sustainability of initially successful efforts to reduce youth gun violence in multiple places. In addition, these meetings can help address the difficulty of managing the different lines of communication within broad partnerships and multisite interventions, creating a space for building relationships and facilitating communication among government and law enforcement agencies and among partners operating in different neighborhoods. Lastly, they can be used to carry out different components of a comprehensive strategy (e.g., suppression, intervention and prevention).

Clearly tasking a government agency or office with handling gun violence also creates lines of accountability and oversight. This applies to municipally employed outreach workers and interrupters and to community-based organizations that may be funded by local government to do various aspects of antiviolence work. These sorts of contractual relationships create opportunities to set common

expectations for program aspects, such as data reporting and use of common curricula or evidence-based practices. This can also be done at the state level, as in Connecticut, where focused deterrence efforts like Project Longevity in New Haven are funded and overseen by the state. Accountability and oversight venues in antiviolence efforts we reviewed in the scan of practices where there was such oversight at the government level ranged from regular performance reviews with the mayor to regular reports to an intervention steering committee.

The creation of government agencies and offices focused on addressing youth gun and gang/group violence is a sign of political support for that work, but it cannot be assumed that that support will be maintained. Priorities shift, and attention to antiviolence work in moments of crisis may wane during calmer times. Conversely, spikes in violence in places with established antiviolence interventions may be seen as evidence that those interventions are not successful. With political support and engagement can also come political interference in how the work is done or who gets funding to do it. There may also be criticism of specific components of the overall strategy, whether it be the use of enforcement actions or of the nonenforcement approaches to people at high risk of engaging in gun violence, particularly efforts that work with people actively involved in such violence and provide them things like job opportunities or stipends. A formalized government lead on work against youth gun and gang/group violence can help stakeholders in a collaboration address this criticism with one voice.

Resources for Formalizing Government’s Role in Coordinating Antiviolence Work

- The [National Offices of Violence Prevention Network](#) is a national learning community of local government agencies tasked with reducing violence.
- Examples of strategic plans for reducing violence include the City of Los Angeles GRYD program’s [comprehensive strategy](#) and the [Milwaukee Blueprint for Peace](#).
- [This paper](#) on Oakland’s successful gun violence reduction strategy discusses the governance model for the violence reduction approach there.
- Chapters 5, 7, and 8 of the [OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model implementation manual](#) cover structuring a partnership at various levels.
- The National Network for Safe Communities’ [Group Violence Intervention: A Guide for Project Managers](#) outlines how to structure governance and partnerships within a focused deterrence intervention.

Practice Area 2: Fund and Enhance the Capacity of a Robust Community-Based Antiviolence Strategy

Executing a robust community-based antiviolence strategy requires investing in the people and organizations that do antiviolence work, just as government at all levels has invested in traditional justice agencies and professionals. This investment starts with adequate funding and includes building broad and sustained antiviolence partnerships and investing in the antiviolence workforce and community violence interventions. Box 5 summarizes our recommendations for funding robust community-based antiviolence strategies.

BOX 5

Recommendations for Funding and Enhancing the Capacity of a Robust Community-Based Antiviolence Strategy

Dedicate stable funding to community-based antiviolence work. Such funding, which is often provided through line items in county or city budgets, supports consistency in community-based aspects of youth gun violence prevention strategies, and relying on intermittent and nonpermanent funding sources undermines that consistency.

- *Who's involved:* This is primarily the role of local government, although state government funding for efforts to address youth gun and group violence plays an important role in some places.

Expand the scale of interventions to meet the scale of the problem. Non-law enforcement antiviolence initiatives are relatively small and siloed in many communities, and the footprint of law enforcement agencies' efforts to target the highest-risk people and places can also be small. Interventions need to be expanded to serve all the areas that need antiviolence work and to engage all the youth in the target population. This may require engaging new partners in the work and ensuring they have (or can develop) the capacity to do that work in a manner consistent with the standard established by current partners.

- *Who's involved:* Local government may lead in this area, but state, federal, and philanthropic funding can also play significant roles.

Invest in community organizations to build their capacity to do antiviolence work in areas such as centralizing training, providing some oversight of the antiviolence workforce, developing common data infrastructure, and assuming responsibility for some business functions (e.g., accounting or payroll) for smaller organizations. Community organizations that can do the functions needed for effective antiviolence work may not have the capacity and experience to compete for and administer grants or government contracts. This can be a barrier to funding for smaller and more grassroots organizations that really understand their neighborhoods. Navigating the bureaucracy and red tape that comes with

government involvement and funding can increase the burden on community organizations and create issues such as community organizations not getting paid promptly, which disproportionately burdens smaller organizations whose services are interrupted when they have to wait on payment. Finding ways to make it easier for organizations implementing effective community violence interventions to meet their obligations to government will support their success.

- *Who's involved:* Local government generally plays a leading role in this area.

Pay antiviolence intervention staff commensurately with other professionals doing antiviolence work and provide them benefits. In many cities, staff at antiviolence interventions lack benefits and are paid less than other antiviolence professionals like police officers, which is a serious challenge to maintaining and growing the workforce of outreach workers and interventionists. This contributes to staff turnover among community-based workers that interrupts relationships with clients and communities and may negatively impact implementation fidelity.

- *Who's involved:* Community violence interventions determine levels of pay, but local government and other sources of funding affect this because interventions' leaders operate within the constraints of available funding.

Support the mental health and wellness of the violence reduction workforce, including by addressing primary and vicarious trauma. Doing community-based outreach and interruption work is highly demanding, with committed workers feeling tremendous responsibility to be available at all times. Community-based interventionists and law enforcement officers experience regular exposure to trauma (such as community members and/or clients losing their lives), and exposure to risky situations such as intervening in potentially violent conflicts. Practices such as making trauma-informed services available to community violence intervention staff in addition to youth program participants and taking team approaches within interventions to allow staff to collaboratively problem-solve and provide mutual support are critically important to helping the workforce manage the challenges and stresses of the work. Law enforcement agencies should likewise ensure that trauma-informed health and wellness services are available for their officers.

- *Who's involved:* Community violence interventions are responsible for this and should receive support from local government. Law enforcement can deliver this support to officers, who also deal with serious challenges in this area. Victim services providers and behavioral health stakeholders can provide community violence interventions and law enforcement agencies trauma-informed resources and expertise.

Provide training and professional development for staff to develop skills they need to implement interventions and grow as professionals. Investing in skill development for the antiviolence workforce is important and can be done by community-based organizations or via cross-agency training and education. In addition, joint trainings can be provided for law enforcement personnel and community violence intervention staff on specific approaches and strategies for addressing youth gun and gang/group violence. Many interventions hire people with limited workforce experience, and they should be provided professional development to help them navigate workplace challenges. Lastly, promoting outreach workers and interventionists to managers and leaders in their organizations

provides a pathway for professional advancement and helps ensure leaders understand the needs of the communities and youth they serve.

- *Who's involved:* Community violence interventions and law enforcement lead this and should be supported by their funders and partners.

Sufficiently Fund Antiviolence Interventions to Meet the Scale of the Problem with High-Quality Work

To address youth gun and group violence effectively, sufficient and consistent funding is necessary. Consistency and follow-through are fundamental to the success of relational work with youth at high risk of shooting and being shot, as is the threat of sanctions in focused deterrence approaches. When funding for interventions based on this premise ebbs and flows, it creates inconsistency regardless of the dedication of people doing the work. And even if established funding levels are maintained, the near-universal sentiment among stakeholders in interventions included in our scan of practice was that the scale of antiviolence investments was not commensurate with the problem and was insufficient for engaging all the youth who needed to be engaged and being present in all the neighborhoods the work was needed in.

Although work done outside of traditional justice agencies to address youth gun and group violence in some places is directly funded through local budget line items, in others it is supported by grants and other temporary funding sources. Grant funding plays an important role in developing antiviolence interventions: many now-well-established initiatives supported through stable funding sources started as grant-funded initiatives. That said, people working in interventions that had secured line-item budget funding or other stable sources of support whom we interviewed emphasized what a huge milestone and accomplishment this was and how important it was for carrying out their work consistently and sustaining it over the long term. Even successful and promising approaches can fall by the wayside at the conclusion of grant funding if local government does not step in.

Still, interviewees cited increasing funding for community-based efforts to address youth gun and group violence as a primary sustainability challenge, even in places that had dedicated government funding for the work. The interventions need to get bigger to meet the scale of the problem and establish a presence throughout their jurisdictions. Pay for interventionists and other antiviolence workers remains too low. Community violence intervention efforts across the United States have

shown what is possible, and some communities have found innovative mechanisms for funding them (box 6), but none have seen the investments necessary to fully realize that potential.

Within law enforcement agencies, the scaling question may not have the same nexus to funding. Law enforcement stakeholders we interviewed noted that engagement in strategies such as focused deterrence did not necessarily require more resources for law enforcement (although they usually did for community partners), but they did require assigning staff time and attention to the analysis, planning, partner coordination, and community engagement aspects of those strategies.

It does not take a lot of cops to handle this issue. It's a priority shift. The adequate level of resources, you can find those within the department. Real services and opportunities need to happen ... Quality intervention—resources should go there.
—Law enforcement stakeholder

BOX 6

Practice Example: Funding Antiviolence Work through Ballot Initiatives in Oakland and Stockton, California

The California Partnership for Safe Communities conducted a problem analysis using Oakland homicide data from January 2012 to June 2013, which revealed that a number of partners' assumptions about the sources of gun violence in the city were incorrect. The analysis found that around 400 people (0.1 percent of the city's population) were responsible for the majority of the city's homicides, not 20,000 people (4 to 5 percent of the city's population) as previously estimated. The problem analysis also revealed that the average age of homicide suspects was 28 and the average age of victims was 30. These findings required substantial changes to Oakland's approach to funding resources and interventions aimed at preventing and reducing gun violence.

At that time, social services aimed at preventing and reducing gun violence were funded using money from a ballot funding initiative called Measure Y, which expired at the end of 2014. Under Measure Y, service providers reported to city officials that there was a dire need for services for a population that was older, predominately male, and disproportionately involved in the criminal justice system. But Measure Y only provided funding specifically for youth and children involved in violence. In an effort to incorporate the findings from the problem analysis into a modified approach for funding violence reduction and intervention services, Oakland introduced Measure Z to the general election

ballot in 2014. Measure Z would provide funding that would enable service providers to target those who were at highest risk of violence, as revealed by the problem analysis.

Measure Z, formally known as the 2014 Oakland Public Safety and Services Violence Prevention Act, split funding between law enforcement and service providers 60/40 and ensured that funding went to a broader age range, capturing those who were at the greatest risk for violence. A violence reduction strategy called Ceasefire was written into Measure Z and funds were devoted to project management and crime analysis and to renewal of the city’s commitment to regular evaluation of Ceasefire. The aim of Measure Z was to implement a more focused and data-driven violence reduction strategy that would be more effective than strategies under Measure Y. City officials and community- and faith-based groups spread awareness and advocated for Measure Z leading up to November 2014, when residents voted to extend Oakland’s \$100 parcel tax, securing an estimated \$277 million over the next decade to fund violence reduction in the city.

In Stockton, California, voters approved ballot-initiative funding approaches Measures A and B in November 2013 to provide an estimated \$280 million across law enforcement, crime prevention services, and other community services to residents, businesses, and property owners. Measures A and B included a 10-year commitment to spend 65 percent of the proceeds of the sales tax measure on the Marshall Plan on Crime, with the remaining 35 percent devoted to city services. The Marshall Plan on Crime provides funding across the following areas: preventing, reducing, and interrupting violence; reclaiming neighborhoods; addressing nongang violence; identifying people at high risk of violence; addressing trauma; ensuring system capacity for responding to violence; creating a humane and evidence-based system; and sustaining violence reduction efforts. In addition to funding Stockton Ceasefire, the Marshall Plan includes funding for “peacekeepers,” who focus on street outreach, and for hospital-based peer intervention for victims of gun violence.

Sources: Mike McLively and Brittany Nieto, *A Case Study in Hope Lessons from Oakland’s Remarkable Reduction in Gun Violence* (San Francisco: Giffords Law Center, 2019). “Measure A,” City of Stockton, accessed December 9, 2021, <http://www.stocktongov.com/government/departments/manager/pubmeasurea.html>; “Marshall Plan on Crime: A Violence Reduction Strategy,” City of Stockton, accessed December 9, 2021, http://www.stocktongov.com/files/MarshallPlanBrochure_web.pdf.

We need more intervention workers and we need them to make a livable wage. My workers can go to Walmart and make a dollar more, but they do this because they have a passion. It needs to become a legitimate profession.

—Intervention stakeholder

Invest in the Antiviolence Workforce and the Capacity of Community Organizations

Addressing youth gun and group violence is challenging, can be stressful, and requires constant learning as the dynamics driving violence change. Supporting the people and organizations engaged in this work to do it at the highest possible level and maintain it requires multiple forms of investment. Box 7 defines some roles common in community violence interventions.

BOX 7

Community Violence Intervention Job Titles

The array of common titles given to workers and types of work done by people employed outside traditional justice agencies is a source of potential confusion in the context of practices that address youth gun and gang/group violence. “Outreach workers,” “violence interrupters,” “peacekeepers,” “intervention workers,” and “case managers” are just a few of the terms used by multiple interventions. In addition, people in different communities and jurisdictions share job titles but do different kinds of work or do similar work but have different job titles, and what are distinct roles in one intervention may be combined into a single job title in another. Throughout this guide, we use four common job titles—case managers, credible messengers, outreach workers, and violence interrupters—in the following ways, recognizing that a person may have the responsibilities of more than one of them:

- A **case manager** is someone who carries a caseload of youth enrolled in a program, facilitates and monitors their progress on life plans, or uses other mechanisms to identify their goals and milestones.
- A **credible messenger** is someone who is trusted by youth affiliated with groups or gangs and promotes risk reduction by encouraging mediation with gang/group members. They have a particular ability to do this relational work because young people view them as living examples of change because of shared experiences, such as community membership and experiences with incarceration or justice involvement in general. Credible messengers may do any or all of the types of work done by the other three positions in this list.
- An **outreach worker** is someone who works to connect with youth affiliated with gangs or groups in the community to build trust and relationships and to connect them to (and keep them connected to) formal programs and services.
- A **violence interrupter** is someone who intervenes to prevent retaliation and other modes of violence spreading through communities by responding to shooting scenes and mediating active conflicts, among other means.

Whether outreach workers, case managers, and interrupters are based in a government organization or a community-based one, hiring a workforce that has the necessary combination of neighborhood knowledge, motivation, skills working with young people, and credibility in the community is at the core of success. There are some potential issues to navigate when employing people who have been gang or group members or had contact with the criminal legal system, particularly those with criminal convictions. The stigma associated with criminal convictions is evident in research on hiring practices (Pager 2003). In our context, the concern is related to determining whether they have left that involvement behind them and that partners can trust that they have. Law enforcement in particular can be skeptical on this point, which can lead to conflict with outreach workers and interventionists in the streets if not addressed. In some cities, representatives of police departments participate in hiring panels for outreach workers and similar positions to address this challenge.

There are varying views about what constitutes the optimal antiviolence workforce, and the answer is likely different for every jurisdiction. Although essentially everyone we interviewed in our scan of practices noted the importance of having credible messengers in these roles, several expressed that it is not necessary to have lived experience such as gang involvement to succeed as an outreach worker, provided one is familiar with the culture of one's community and believes in and can authentically support youth at high risk of gun violence. There are generational challenges in this workforce; some interviewees noted that continually recruiting younger outreach workers is important for remaining able to connect with the youth population. In addition to ensuring the ages of people in the workforce mirror the ages of youth in the target population, there is a need to ensure staff can work effectively with communities of all kinds (interviewees cited the need to hire sufficient Spanish-speaking staff and more Asian American and Pacific Islander staff) and to hire more women to be violence interrupters and outreach workers. For initiatives that have been operating for years, hiring and promoting people who originally connected with those initiatives as clients has helped meet some of these needs.

Training and other forms of professional development are important for ensuring that people in the workforce continue to deepen and broaden their skills (box 8). Levels of standardization in training vary; some jurisdictions have developed their own training approaches (see box 17 on page 56) and many use national trainings in models from organizations like OJJDP, Cure Violence, and the Health Alliance for Violence Intervention. For law enforcement, trainings using frameworks like [relationship-based policing](#) and [procedural justice](#) that enhance the skills of officers to engage in collaborative gun violence work in ways that enhance community trust. These trainings often incorporate participation from representatives of communities most directly impacted by gun violence and enforcement responses to it.

BOX 8

Practice Example: Los Angeles Violence Intervention Training Academy

Community intervention workers working for the City of Los Angeles Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development participate in the Los Angeles Violence Intervention Training Academy, which is operated by the Urban Peace Institute. Cohorts of community intervention workers and other interventionists receive over 100 hours of training. The development of this training academy and Los Angeles interventionists' engagement in it are critical steps toward professionalizing the field of antiviolence intervention in that they build out the education for certification and enhance the perception of intervention and outreach as a profession in the eyes of partners. Training content for community intervention workers includes how to provide outreach to victims of violent crimes, deescalate violence, control and defuse rumors, broker peace agreements between rivals, and effectively build relationships with partners. By training cohorts of community intervention workers and other interventionists from across Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Violence Intervention Training Academy also fosters a greater sense of community among people doing this work in the varied and diverse neighborhoods of Los Angeles.

Sources: Interviews conducted with stakeholders during Urban's scan of practice, and the Los Angeles Mayor's Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development comprehensive strategy, available at https://www.juvenilejusticeresearch.com/sites/default/files/2020-08/GRYD%20Brief%201_GRYD%20Comprehensive%20Strategy_6.2020.pdf.

Again, addressing youth gun and group violence is extremely difficult and demanding. For staff of community violence interventions, the importance of being consistent and available in relational work can easily lead them to feel they need to be constantly available. In addition, clients' acute needs for support arise unpredictably, and staff responsible for responding to shootings also have that unpredictable obligation. This makes setting boundaries between work and life challenging, and the work in general carries a high risk of burnout. Although attention to issues of stress and burnout for law enforcement personnel was not a specific feature of antiviolence interventions covered in our literature review or scan of practices, the prevalence of these issues and their negative effects are well documented (see Dawson 2019).

Some community violence interventions provide supports such as access to clinicians (sometimes the same ones working with program clients) who can assist with direct or vicarious trauma. But in many of the interventions included in our scan of practices, the teams working in the interventions, including peers and supervisors, appeared to be primary sources of support. The importance of establishing supports for the antiviolence workforce came through powerfully in interviews conducted for the scan of practices, and that support included finding ways to pay interventionists a good wage with benefits.

Some respondents noted that many members of this workforce might need many of the same supports and services as program clients and may carry trauma from previous experiences of violence.

It's rough. Sometimes it's in the hospital, you have to tell a dad that his son has passed away. If you've never heard that scream, it'll echo in your heart forever ... Being able to juggle all that, it's not always "I changed my guy's life." Sometimes it's "I've lost him."

—Outreach stakeholder

Many of the community organizations that employ antiviolence workers may also need capacity-enhancing support. Some grassroots organizations with strong capacity to work with youth at the greatest risk of violence and to intervene in conflict and build peace may have much less experience and capacity in areas like administering complex government contracts or grants. Conversely, organizations with a strong capacity to compete for and administer grants and contracts may not have the best capacity to actually do the work. In recognition of this, many cities have undertaken efforts to bridge this capacity gap. Examples include working through fiscal intermediaries who can handle grant administration and logistics so that smaller organizations can focus on the content of the work. Government partners can also fund external capacity by, for instance, paying for accounting firms to work with community organizations on fiscal matters on which they lack prior experience. Staff at government violence reduction agencies may also work as intermediaries between contracting and fiscal components of local government to try to ease burdensome requirements and identify opportunities to reduce the burdens on contracted community organizations.

Resources for Resourcing and Supporting a Robust Community-Based Antiviolence Strategy

- The Health Alliance for Violence Intervention is a resource for [training and technical assistance](#) for emerging hospital-based violence intervention programs.
- Cure Violence provides an [array of trainings](#) for people taking a public health approach to antiviolence work.
- *Investing in Intervention: The Critical Role of State-Level Support in Breaking the Cycle of Urban Gun Violence* presents models for state-level support for gun violence reduction work.

- Section VIII of the Department of Justice’s *Violence Is Preventable: A Best Practice Guide for Launching & Sustaining a Hospital-based Program to Break the Cycle of Violence*, on making direct service hiring decisions for a hospital-based violence intervention, provides generally valuable insights, in addition to those specific to that approach.
- Healing Justice Alliance’s *Best Practices for Supporting Frontline Violence Intervention Workers* provides an in-depth treatment of how to address this challenge.
- The International Association of Chiefs of Police has developed a number of resources to support health and well-being for law enforcement officers.
- *Strengthening Community-Police Relationships: Training as a Tool for Change* outlines an approach that the California Partnership for Safe Communities and partners took to training that strengthens police-community trust in the context of effective gun violence reduction work.
- The Bureau of Justice Assistance National Training and Technical Assistance Center’s [web series](#) on community violence interventions provides guidance, including linked resources, for communities seeking to implement or expand community violence intervention efforts.

Practice Area 3: Engage the Community to Establish and Maintain Peace

The community is an essential partner and can provide powerful resources for reducing violence and connecting with the community to make and keep the peace. Proactive peacemaking is an important component of violence reduction models; for instance, it could constitute the community mobilization component of the Comprehensive Gang Model or the norms and narratives work of the public health or focused deterrence models. Communities are complex and varied systems, and the forms that community engagement in antiviolence strategies can take are also varied. Because gangs and groups are defined and operate differently in different communities, interventions require community-specific cultural buy-in and local knowledge. For community-based antiviolence strategies to be as successful as possible, they should happen in tandem with other intervention strategies. Box 9 summarizes our recommendations for engaging the community in antiviolence interventions.

BOX 9

Recommendations for Engaging the Community

Gather community members’ perspectives on violence reduction and translate their asks into action from government. Engaging the community around approaches to address youth gun violence can lead

to better-informed efforts and secure support for a jurisdiction's strategies that can help sustain them as political leadership and priorities change.

- *Who's involved:* Local government can create spaces for this engagement, such as regular community coalition meetings that provide forums for sharing information from antiviolence efforts with communities and hearing their concerns. Law enforcement or community violence interventions also play this convening role in many places.

Include advocacy for community needs in youth gun violence reduction strategies. An intermediary who advocates for what communities and youth need for long-term peacemaking can help translate community priorities into concrete action. Government not being structured and oriented to take in community input and a lack of mechanisms for engaging community in defining violence reduction initiatives can be impediments to realizing the potential of community engagement.

- *Who's involved:* An intermediary with the capacity to advocate for needed policy changes informed by community needs and priorities and which understands how local policymaking works can help surmount these barriers. This can be a community-based organization or a role for staff of a government violence prevention office or agency.

Hold community activities such as pop-up events or peace walks in neighborhoods regularly and after shootings to address trauma and provide support. Events and other means of being present in the community can be scheduled routinely and organized quickly after a shooting or traumatic event. Although stakeholders recognize the importance of this kind of community engagement, in practice, such activities may receive the least support (financial or otherwise).

- *Who's involved:* Community violence interventions often lead this work, although law enforcement plays this role in many places.

Stakeholders implementing interventions to reduce youth gun and group violence seek to have a visible presence in the community to build support for their work, articulate and reinforce community norms against violence, facilitate engagement from high-risk youth by showing concern for the community, create opportunities for engagement with youth, and establish, reestablish, or maintain peace (box 10). Community events are often used to meet these goals, including routine ongoing events (and pop-up events) and safety walks set up in response to shootings and other events that impact communities' sense of safety. This kind of community engagement may be complemented by regular community coordination meetings that bring community members together with partners from government, law enforcement, and community-based organizations working to address gun violence to exchange information, build support and understanding of antiviolence work, and identify emerging problems or opportunities. For example, such meetings are regular components of the Safe Streets program in Baltimore.

BOX 10

Engaging Community in the Wake of Trauma: HEART Walks in Danville, Virginia

HEART (Heal Engage After Recent Trauma) walks were established in 2019 by Project Imagine and the Danville Police Department to engage with the community 24 to 72 hours after a shooting or murder and provide support and promote healing for those affected. The impetus for the HEART walks was to interrupt the long-standing narrative that a community policing model would not work in Danville because of community distrust in law enforcement stemming from Bloody Monday, a series of police arrests and brutal attacks that occurred during a civil rights prayer vigil on June 10, 1963. Those who attend HEART walks might include the Danville Police Department chief and staff, law enforcement officers and staff from other departments, and Project Imagine staff. HEART walk participants knock on doors, talk to community members about their needs and offer words of comfort, pass out flyers detailing resources to help the community cope with and heal from trauma, and share updates on investigations when appropriate.

Although information about recent acts of gun or gang violence may be communicated to community members during these walks, this is not the main purpose. The goal is to show the community that the police department is committed to getting to know community members and meeting not only their needs after violence has occurred but also their needs unrelated to the violence, such as repairs to neighborhood roads or residents' homes. The community walks are opportunities for police to organically find out what is going on in the community, not to canvass the area for information or evidence about recent acts of gun or gang violence.

Sometimes, the police will choose to walk a neighborhood not because it has recently experienced gun violence but simply because they have not visited it before. Much like HEART walks, the purpose of these community walks is to get to know the needs of a neighborhood that may not be represented in police data on shootings or homicides because community members living there do not make calls for service to the police. The police view these walks as chances to begin building trust with communities that may have been harmed by law enforcement officers and are therefore apprehensive about interacting with them.

Source: Interviews conducted with stakeholders during Urban's scan of practice.

An important part of community engagement is engaging and addressing norms and narratives that may contribute to violence directly by justifying it or indirectly by delegitimizing other forms of managing conflicts or undermining community solidarity. This can be done through public events, marches, and media campaigns and integrated into community events. In some models, such as focused deterrence, an explicit goal of this work is to mobilize a community to insist that violence stop so that the moral demands made of youth engaged in such violence come from the community rather than representatives of law enforcement or government. This can be done by having a speaker (usually

someone who has lost a family member to violence) at a focused deterrence call-in meeting address the pain in the community caused by gun violence and having one speak to the negative impact that gun violence has on all community members' well-being.

It's important to amplify the voice of youth. We ask them for solutions for violence in their neighborhoods. Employment was something they said and we got that up the chain. We got an antiviolence employment program.

—Local government stakeholder

Finally, because engaging and building trust with communities supports effective work to mitigate gun violence, many initiatives prioritize advocating for what communities need. The New York City Crisis Management System and linked initiatives such as the Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety support communities in defining what safety interventions should be in their neighborhoods. They do this through means such as using resident engagement processes to identify and prioritize community safety projects in NeighborhoodStat sites, facilitating youth-specific engagement to define youths' needs, and providing microgrants to residents for ideas that support peace and safety (for more detail, see the Center for American Progress [case study](#) on NeighborhoodStat). The Ceasefire programs in Oakland and Stockton include this thinking in their focused deterrence approaches, inviting youth from call-in meetings to join councils that meet with police leadership and can contribute ideas to be incorporated in the programs.

In addition to providing avenues for program participants and neighborhood residents to contribute to the design of safety efforts, a number of interviewees, some of whom worked in government violence prevention offices and some of whom worked in community organizations, described a role in which people are conduits for neighborhood views and a role in which people advocate for residents' needs and priorities with other government agencies or people at levels of government that are more distant from or less responsive to them. This advocacy should be done in response to young people's needs, because youth may need organizations to work proximately to systems that are causing them harm to hold those systems accountable for how they treat young people.

Community asks for a codesign and coleadership model, but government makes that hard.
—Local government stakeholder

Resources for Engaging the Community to Establish and Maintain Peace

- New York City’s *Neighborhood Activation Playbook* is a guide for public agencies undertaking coordinated efforts in partnership with communities to improve neighborhood safety.
- New York City’s *Public Safety Toolkit* outlines ways community residents can get involved in enhancing safety.
- *Group Violence Intervention: An Implementation Guide* discusses the logic behind and specific practices for engaging the community to incorporate the community’s moral voice in work to convince group-involved individuals to stop shooting.
- The National Network for Safe Communities’ [violent crime reduction operations guide](#) lays out how law enforcement can approach community engagement as a critical element of reducing violent crime.

Practice Area 4: Calibrate the Relationship between Law Enforcement and Community Violence Interventions

In communities experiencing high levels of gun violence, there is a deep distrust of the police rooted in the history of racial disparities in enforcement and the control of communities of color, and there are large disparities in enforcement and use of force against youth of color. This was the area that people we interviewed in our scan of practices most consistently named as a profound challenge to effective work to reduce youth gun and gang violence. Interviewees raised it as a more acute barrier for interventions that actively partner with law enforcement, but one that must be overcome even by interventions that have minimal or no partnership with police. Managing this reality is a fundamental and ongoing challenge in antiviolence work.

Some youth gun and group violence programs and interventions are led by members of law enforcement and some work closely with them, whereas others minimize or avoid direct engagement with them. But regardless of how interventions define their relationships to law enforcement, law enforcement plays the lead role in suppression and enforcement and has tremendous power to facilitate

or impede non-law enforcement antiviolence work. In addition, police are a significant presence in the lives of high-risk youth and communities where gun violence is prevalent. This makes it important to secure their support and partnership in community violence interventions. Doing so in a way that does not compromise trust in those interventions among people who mistrust the police requires thoughtful effort from all partners. Box 11 summarizes our recommendations for calibrating relationships between law enforcement stakeholders and those outside law enforcement.

BOX 11

Recommendations for Calibrating the Relationship between Law Enforcement and Community Violence Interventions

Clearly distinguish the roles of law enforcement and non-law enforcement antiviolence workers to preserve the perceived and actual independence of non-law enforcement interventions and their staff. This understanding needs to reflect respect for different roles and lanes in violence reduction work across all partners. Articulating clear boundaries and limits on what information, if any, interventionists and outreach workers share with law enforcement was a very strong theme in the scan of practice interviews. Similarly, community violence interventions and the community at large should understand the role of enforcement and what behaviors must result in apprehension, prosecution, and punishment.

- *Who's involved:* Law enforcement, local government, and community violence interventions all have a role, and an overall antiviolence strategy should articulate how their different roles contribute to a whole.

Establish communication and coordination between law enforcement stakeholders and community antiviolence workers at the executive level. Connecting for routine coordination and sharing of information relevant to gun violence dynamics across leadership, either of local government offices of violence prevention or community-based organizations, enables collaboration but avoids placing outreach workers or interventionists in a position of coordinating with law enforcement and thereby compromising needed trust from youth and communities. In this way, local offices of violence prevention can act as buffers between community violence interventions and police departments.

- *Who's involved:* Top-level leadership in law enforcement, local government, and community violence interventions.

Communicate the purpose and value of non-law enforcement antiviolence interventions to all law enforcement officers and staff, including what their roles are and how they should or should not be expected to work together. The targeted nature of youth group and gun violence work often means that the number of law enforcement officers detailed to or directly engaged with even police-led efforts like focused deterrence can be quite small relative to the entire department. This can result in uneven levels of support and understanding of nonpolice antiviolence interventions among law enforcement across

precincts or levels of the organization. Turnover among officers working in the area of youth involved in gangs/groups, an area in which it takes time to learn and see the value of nonpolice partners, exacerbates this dynamic. Because of rotating assignments, a working understanding must be reestablished regularly as new police personnel assume relevant positions. Law enforcement agencies can support this understanding by selecting personnel for involvement in violence reduction efforts with an eye toward embedding understanding of their logic within the agency over the long term.

- *Who's involved:* This is primarily the responsibility of law enforcement leadership.

Reaching an understanding about communication between law enforcement stakeholders and non-law enforcement stakeholders in antiviolence work is essential. A basic principle is that effective relational work in the community often depends on avoiding any perception that outreach workers or interrupters are sharing information about the youth they engage with law enforcement. In our scan of practices, police interviewees from many places recognized the importance and necessity of having such an information “firewall.” This has been operationalized in a number of ways. In some places outreach workers and interrupters may work with police, even extensively in settings like shooting reviews, but with the shared understanding that police will share more information with outreach workers and interrupters than vice versa. In other interventions, particularly public health interventions, it is established that there will be no direct partnership between outreach workers and police. In these cases, communication is handled at the leadership level, sometimes with a government violence prevention office serving as the liaison.

We have to have collaborative patterns. We must acknowledge that there will be bumps. Outreach workers not trusting law enforcement and vice versa. We don't let little issues fester and we maintain commitment to partnerships.
—Law enforcement stakeholder

Where these understandings have been reached, they have been based on a recognition on all sides that credibility with communities is indispensable to the success of outreach workers and interrupters and is something they bring to the antiviolence work at a level that police and other justice agencies simply cannot. This is not an easy basis for any kind of working relationship because it is premised on a

shared understanding of a difficult reality about police-community relations and of the fact that non-law enforcement program staff may also mistrust law enforcement. Even when leaders of law enforcement agencies clearly understand this, police support at the street level can be uneven and can include outright hostility and even efforts to undermine that work.

There were certain firewalls that they agreed to. No one who conducts direct service will ever be in a meeting with law enforcement.

—Violence intervention stakeholder

Government offices of violence prevention can be intermediaries between law enforcement stakeholders and non-law enforcement stakeholders. This is directly articulated in GRYD's Triangle Protocol for managing communication between the Los Angeles Police Department, community intervention workers working for contracted community-based organizations, and staff of the GRYD office. Part of the logic behind the protocol is that dyad relationships are inherently unstable, especially relationships as fraught with tension as those between community organizations and police departments can be. The protocol's premise is that using a three-party relationship can foster the stability necessary for collective success in addressing gun and group violence.

Resources for Calibrating the Relationship between Law Enforcement and Community Violence Interventions

- The City of Los Angeles GRYD Office's *The GRYD Incident Response Program: Understanding the Impact of the GRYD Triangle Partnership* details the roles of the Los Angeles Police Department, GRYD regional program managers, and community intervention workers in the Triangle Protocol of incident response.
- National Network for Safe Communities' *Reconciliation between Police and Communities: Case Studies and Lessons Learned* describes its police-community reconciliation framework.
- The Department of Justice's Community Oriented Policing Services office's [community violence intervention](#) webpage provides resources and guidance that connect community violence intervention work to community policing.

Practice Area 5: Collect and Share Data to Refine Practices and Assess Effectiveness

It is critical that antiviolenence intervention stakeholders collect and report data to ensure antiviolenence work is done well, to correct course when needed, and to build and sustain efforts over the long term. But this requires investing in data and analysis capacity and committing to ensuring the data are actually put to use. Box 12 summarizes our recommendations for collecting and using data in interventions to reduce youth gun and gang/group violence.

BOX 12

Recommendations for Collecting and Sharing Data

Articulate the logic of and desired outcomes of each component of the antiviolenence strategy. Any program or intervention that is part of a strategy to address youth gun violence should have a logic model explaining how it reduces violence, and meaningful performance measures should be associated with that logic. Data infrastructure and evaluation approaches should be developed using the foundations created by these logic models.

- *Who's involved:* Community violence intervention or law enforcement staff who are skilled in developing performance measures will ideally be involved, and doing this in collaboration with a research partner will also be helpful.

Invest in data and analysis capacity. Data systems that facilitate consistent data entry and reporting across service providers are important components of antiviolenence infrastructure which can be locally developed or can be supported by using platforms developed for common models, as with Cure Violence's database. Hiring dedicated staff with expertise in research, data analysis, and performance measurement also strengthens antiviolenence efforts.

- *Who's involved:* Creating this form of infrastructure is a role that local government is well positioned to play, as with analyst positions for Safe Streets in Baltimore City government, and the City of Los Angeles GRYD research and evaluation team.

Feed data analysis back to program staff and have a mechanism for discussing and using data for continuous quality improvement. Consistently monitoring and reevaluating an intervention over time supports sustainability. This includes regularly assessing whether the intervention is achieving its intended goals and, if not, whether funds need to be reallocated or whether the intervention should adjust its approach.

- *Who's involved:* Community violence intervention or law enforcement running the intervention, with the dedicated staff referenced above in a lead role.

Include community members, including those directly impacted by gun violence, in data-related activities such as collection and evaluation. Solicit feedback from and involve community members or those directly impacted by gun violence, including frontline workers and program participants, in data-related activities. Enabling these stakeholders to do things like collect data, define performance metrics, and interpret data will lead to more reliable measures of success, among other essential evaluation metrics and challenges. Input from the community may also facilitate greater support and legitimacy for the intervention strategy in the larger community.

- *Who's involved:* Interventions and evaluators need to implement this recommendation, but support for such approaches from local government, other funders, or those requesting measurement and evaluation can facilitate them.

Set progress metrics for youth participants that include positive youth development outcomes, and measure success in terms of incremental changes or milestones. Program staff understand success not only in terms of reducing shootings, but also in terms of life changes and progress for participating youth. Having meaningful and valid measures of progress is necessary for law enforcement agencies and other justice agencies to have confidence in removing young people from their primary population of focus (as discussed under practice area 9).

- *Who's involved:* Programs and evaluators need to implement this recommendation, but support for such approaches from local government can be very helpful.

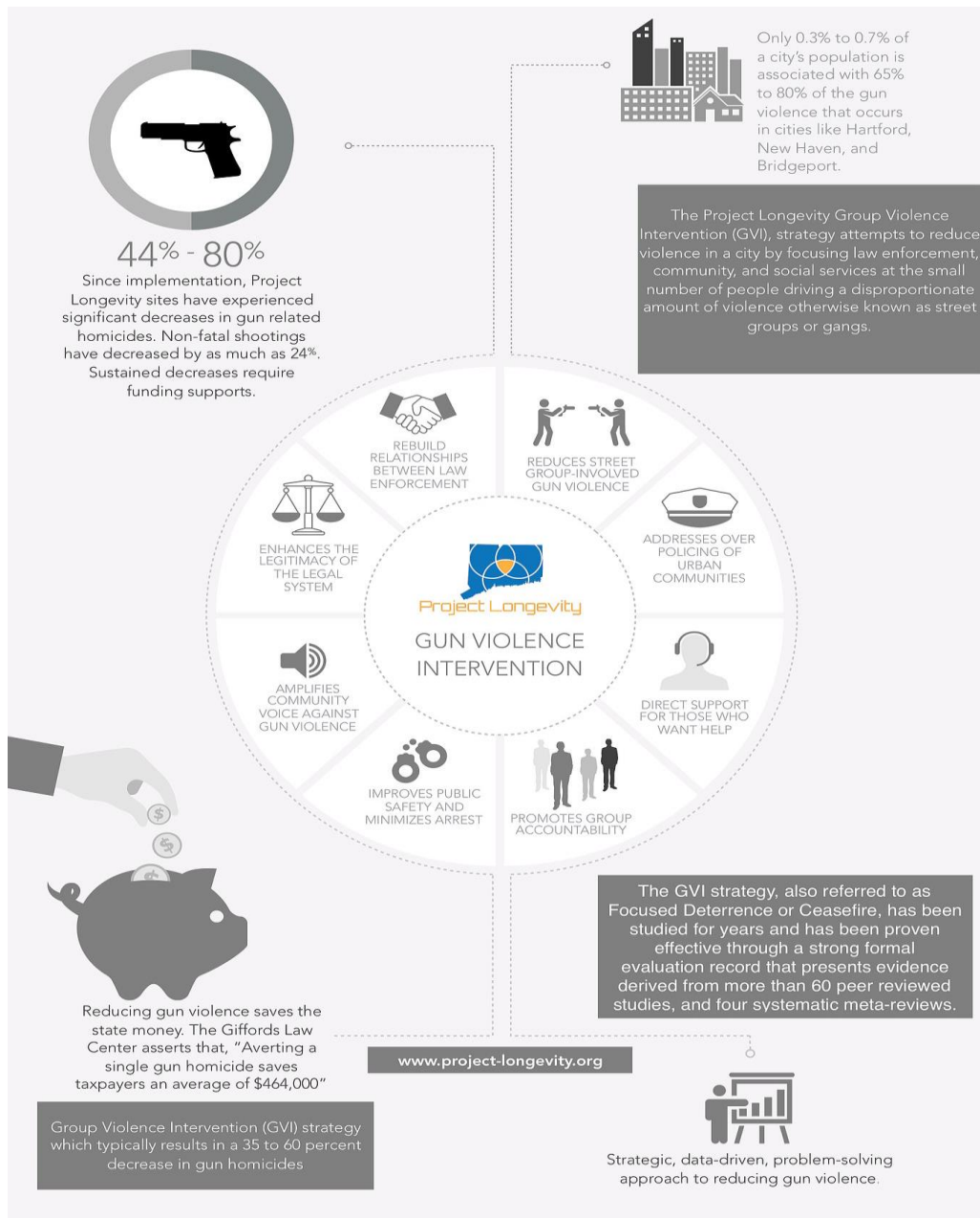
Evaluate interventions to determine whether they are delivering their intended impacts. The evidence base for youth antiviolence work continues to evolve, and evaluating results at the local level is important for building confidence and support for interventions. Securing a local evaluation partner to produce research evidence over the long term can build local partnership capacity for needed evaluation over the long term.

- *Who's involved:* Local government funding or fundraising for independent evaluation can ensure this happens.

Making reductions in shootings and gun homicides a central measure of success provides a compelling goal to internal and external partners who may come to the work with different perspectives and motivations (figure 2 provides a visual summary of how Project Longevity highlights gun violence outcomes in its public communication). It also creates opportunities for celebration, as when one of the Baltimore Safe Streets sites went a full year without a homicide. The relational nature of much of the antiviolence work that youth violence reduction interventions do entails establishing measures of success that capture the progress and success of individual young people. And metrics on prioritized activities, such as the number of client meetings or mediations conducted, is another category of data that can be captured.

FIGURE 2

Project Longevity Gun Violence Outcomes Page



Source: Image courtesy of Project Longevity.

Notes: Project Longevity is structured to address individuals involved in group/gang and gun violence activity who are 18 years of age or older. It will work with younger people if they become among those most involved in violence, but it is not structured to do so.

Creating data infrastructure can support the collection of all these types of metrics. The City of Los Angeles GRYD office spent years implementing and refining a database structure for all its contracted

community partner organizations to use to record prevention, intervention, and incident response activity. This data infrastructure became a platform for GRYD staff to share and discuss the data with provider organizations. Providing data back to the staff carrying out the work being measured is important because it emphasizes to staff that time spent collecting data is productive. Publicly sharing data on program performance can also secure community support.

One challenge of this work is that the burden of data collection falls upon a workforce of outreach workers, violence interrupters, and case managers already stretched thin and struggling to balance multiple high-priority demands on their time. Stakeholders in some of the sites in our scan of practices had a perception that data collection insufficiently captures all the work that community violence intervention staff do. This is surely true given the complexity of the antiviolence work, although any attempt to more comprehensively collect data that captures the work would place greater demands on staff. Relatedly, it is difficult to measure the success of much of the work done to address gun violence, such as preempting conflict by interrupting dynamics that lead to violence, like retaliatory cycles and intergroup conflicts. It is difficult to measure these kinds of things in outcome evaluation, let alone in performance measurement. Many interventions seek to address these challenges by making sure those responsible for monitoring performance have substantial exposure to the work on the ground and understand what is not captured by the data, and many address them externally by communicating performance results in combination with participant narratives and types of information about program activities that are incompletely reflected in data.

These are challenges related to programs and their efforts to define their own metrics. In addition, metrics required for grants and other funding sources may not align with local priorities and program parameters. This taxes already limited capacity for data collection if a community organization or government agency has to collect and provide what a funder requires in addition to what the organization or agency thinks is important and meaningful.

When you have data, it's hard to say that [our program] is not accomplishing its goals. When you have no data, it's easy to say that.

—Local government stakeholder

Program evaluation complements routine data collection, providing a means of generating evidence that interventions actually contribute to violence reduction. Evaluation partners can work with interventions in ways that engage them in the coproduction of knowledge. A locally based research partner may be particularly valuable. An evaluator can serve as a third-party source of information on the operation of an intervention or broader strategy and may have credibility speaking to some audiences on performance that program stakeholders do not. With this independent perspective comes the possibility that evaluation will produce results indicating that efforts are failing to produce the desired outcomes. Treating this as an opportunity to learn and improve rather than as a pass/fail test can mitigate potential pressure to produce positive results from evaluations or acrimony when this does not happen.

Beyond the benefits of evaluation for determining the effectiveness of local work to reduce youth gun and gang/group violence, evaluation also provides an important opportunity to build the evidence base in areas where it has substantial gaps. In our review of research on youth gun violence related to groups and gangs and interventions intended to reduce it, we identified the following areas that researchers should pursue:

- We know less about the *ways*, or the mechanisms by which, public health models work. We also know less about what works for whom; some strategies work for some subgroups but not others. Research would benefit considerably from rigorous evaluations of these models so they can be compared effectively with others.
- With notable exceptions, research on youth gun and gang/group violence has primarily been quantitative, and the field would benefit from qualitative insights into mechanisms, processes, and meanings.
- Quantitative studies should be longitudinal and account for context-specific controls.
- The fidelity of implementation is critical in the success or efficacy of an intervention, but this information is often left out of results and discussions.

Scholars of gun violence have been mainly interested in fatal violence and shootings overall, yet various other metrics within interventions would point to communal well-being. Examples of these metrics include use of social services, community members' mental well-being, and educational attainment. In addition, evaluators should more consistently assess the burdens that different intervention approaches place on communities, such as enhanced enforcement and surveillance, to provide a fuller picture of the costs and benefits of different approaches to reducing gun violence.

Resources for Collecting and Sharing Data to Refine Practices and Assess Effectiveness

- The Stockton, California, Office of Violence Prevention [data and donuts](#) presentations are examples of how to publicly communicate the rationale for an antiviolence strategy and measure its performance.
- GRYD’s “[The Impact of the GRYD Incident Response Program on Gang Retaliations](#)” describes an analysis intended to quantify the impact of incident response on preventing retaliation.
- GRYD’s “[Data Feedback Loop Training: Using a Community-Based, Participatory, Action Research Approach to Building Data-Informed Practice](#)” covers a participatory process for engaging prevention and intervention program staff in a performance data review and program improvement process.
- John Jay College of Criminal Justice’s [Reducing Gun Violence Without the Police: A Review of Research Evidence](#) concludes with useful guidance on where new research and evaluations of nonpolice approaches to reducing violence can address important knowledge gaps.
- Chapter 10 of the [OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model implementation manual](#) covers the role of data and evaluation in implementing that model.

Chapter 3. Building Effective Programs

This chapter covers practice-related guidance on how interventions, components of interventions, and initiatives can work to mitigate youth gun and gang/group violence at the individual, group, and neighborhood levels. We provide recommendations organized around four practice areas suggested by themes from the research review and scan of practices for local government, law enforcement, and community violence interventions in their implementation of specific violence reduction programs. The practice areas are assessing the problem to focus attention and resources, building positive relationships with young people at highest risk of shooting and being shot and connecting them with supports to improve their lives, interrupting and mediating conflicts, and using suppression and enforcement sparingly and in a focused way.

Practice Area 6: Assess the Problem to Focus Attention and Resources

With the array of models, research, and peer communities from which to learn and the life-and-death stakes of gun violence, it can be tempting to implement a program model taken off the shelf or fast-track a locally developed approach. But youth gun and gang/group violence dynamics vary from place to place, so doing a local problem analysis to determine local risk dynamics, needs, and available resources is an indispensable step to intervening effectively to stop it. Research on the three primary program models indicates the importance of devoting time to this up-front analysis and tailoring interventions to local conditions in supporting implementation success, and our scan of practices substantiated the value of this practice, suggesting that ongoing routine assessment is critical for effective responses and continuous improvement. Box 13 summarizes our recommendations for assessing the problem and focusing attention and resources.

BOX 13

Recommendations for Assessing the Problem and Focusing Attention and Resources

Conduct a local problem analysis before developing violence reduction strategies. For interventions focused on gun violence committed by young people affiliated with gangs or groups, this will involve

analyzing shootings to determine where shootings are concentrated (“hot spots”), what proportion of them is connected to gangs and groups, the characteristics of perpetrators and victims, and the conflicts and alliances between gangs and groups. Investing time in building relationships among people and organizations who will have to share data and use it for planning purposes sets a foundation for strong collaborative analysis, but if the analysis must be done quickly in the face of a gun violence crisis, that may require truncating a planning period and attending to relationship building through ongoing planning and analysis.

- *Who's involved:* Law enforcement will hold much of this data, but other local government agencies (e.g., offices of violence prevention and departments of health) and community violence intervention staff can be involved to provide their knowledge and insight. Local government may have to insist on the participation of constituent agencies when data available from police departments or other sources may be lacking in ways that impede doing good problem analysis, and agencies that hold necessary data may be unwilling to engage in collaborative analysis efforts.

Routinely and collaboratively analyze the violence problem so the strategy can be refined when needed. In sites included in our scan of practices, this often took the form of shooting-specific analysis (shooting reviews). Defining what data can be shared between partners and abiding by that understanding is particularly important for establishing workable relationships between police and nonpolice partners, for reasons explored further in practice areas 3 and 8. Failure to use these tools iteratively can undermine long-term success. Routinizing shooting reviews and other ongoing analyses prevents them from being used in a one-and-done manner.

- *Who's involved:* In most places, this process is led by law enforcement with strong participation from the organizations handling violence interruption, whether community-based or in local government.

Deploy resources to the people and places identified through the problem analysis. The geographic service or target areas and the youth population of interest to engage in individual-level programs and interventions should be connected to the findings of the problem analysis. This often involves designating neighborhood-level service areas and fielding tools to determine whether a young person is part of the population at greatest risk for involvement in violence, such as checklists or more involved assessment instruments. Local organizations may not have the tools to focus on the highest-risk people or places, or their mission and orientation may not align with focusing on some people and places to the exclusion of others. Development of a broad strategy that is built on this focus and has differentiated engagement pathways can help with this (see practice area 1).

- *Who's involved:* At the strategic level, scoping this deployment is the responsibility of local government leadership, although community violence intervention organizations can set service areas and develop tools and assessments for use within their programs.

Be ready to recalibrate strategies based on findings from initial and ongoing problem analyses. The definition of the youth gun and gang violence problem used to launch a program or strategy may not match what the problem analysis shows, or the dynamics of violence may change in ways that do not fit

the original design. Shooting reviews and other ongoing analyses can identify when such mismatches between violence dynamics and strategies are emerging, but that will do little good without partners adjusting course. Redefining programs can raise new challenges, as when available funding is tied to a focus on youth violence specifically, but many people involved in violence are older than a program's age range for services.

- *Who's involved:* The obligation to be open to recalibration falls on all local partners (local government, law enforcement, and community violence interventions), as well as funders (state, federal, philanthropic, and otherwise) to support the flexibility necessary to correct course.

A problem analysis can take many forms, but at a basic level it involves securing the data needed to understand shooting behaviors and convening partners to build on and supplement those data with their expertise on dynamics such as active and latent conflicts between groups or community members that are not readily discernable from the data. This can be a good early opportunity to bring together government stakeholders and law enforcement or other justice actors, who usually have needed administrative data, with community-based experts such as outreach workers and violence interrupters, who have the ground-level understanding of neighborhood dynamics, including who may be involved in shooting behavior. Some collaborative antiviolence interventions also engage a research and analytic partner to lead the problem analysis.

The problem analyses undertaken in sites included in our scan of practices generally focused on particular areas (where shootings were concentrated) and on people and groups (which people and groups were most actively involved in shootings). Focusing on these things makes it easier to organize an intervention's capacity around knowledge of street dynamics, which tends to be place-dependent, and the focus on people mitigates a tendency toward broad-brush place-based strategies such as extensive application of stop, question, and frisk.

Two important types of problem analysis are shooting reviews and gang audits. Shooting reviews involve delving into the data around all shootings over a defined period to better understand the characteristics of the shootings and the perpetrators and victims. Gang audits are a survey or census of the gang landscape in a neighborhood, developed collaboratively by law enforcement, community stakeholders, researchers, and other gang experts (Sierra-Arévalo and Papachristos 2015).¹¹

Always start with a problem analysis before you start thinking of a solution to combat the violence. – Violence intervention stakeholder

The problem analysis provides focus to an antiviolence strategy and has the benefit of making the people-centered aspect of the problem more manageable. For example, the problem analysis undertaken to guide Oakland Ceasefire, conducted by the California Partnership for Safe Communities, examined homicides over an 18-month period to understand aspects of the dynamics behind them, including the demographics of victims and perpetrators of gun violence, their prior justice involvement, their prior victimization, the causes of shootings, and the conflicts and alliances of gangs/groups in the area (Muhammad 2018). The analysis found that the very-high-risk population for shootings in Oakland comprised 300 to 350 people. At that scale, many options for outreach and engagement to the highest-risk population are feasible. Connection to national organizations or peer jurisdictions to assist with problem analysis was beneficial to a number of interventions in our scan of practices, particularly in smaller jurisdictions.

This focus on a small group of very-high-risk people contrasts with the development of broader gang databases, or gang intelligence systems, which are data repositories that store information (mainly names, though not limited to them) about people who have been categorized by law enforcement as involved with gangs. Research and public discourse are polarized on the value of such databases. Critics have noted the high likelihood of socially costly errors resulting from inaccuracies and inconsistencies in who is included, stemming in part from the lack of a settled definition of gang membership (Kennedy 2009; Sullivan 2005). At the same time, other researchers have argued that gang databases are helpful for understanding patterns related to gangs and gang-related crimes to respond accordingly, and can be improved if standardized and overseen to lessen potential errors (Brown 2008; Barrows and Huff 2015; Densley and Pyrooz 2020; Huff and Barrows 2009). In the context of efforts to address youth gun violence associated with groups and gangs, the emphasis on conducting a problem analysis to narrow the focus on a relatively small number of people at very high risk for involvement guides the attention of law enforcement and other justice partners, reducing the likelihood of spreading their focus across a much larger group of people and thereby diluting suppression and enforcement impacts.

We thought homicides were related to narcotics, juvenile or gang-related shootings, but we learned through our analysis that our assumptions were incorrect. That led to buy-in from the department that less than 1,000, or less than 1 percent of the population was driving violence. That made it realistic for us to manage the violence.

—Law enforcement stakeholder

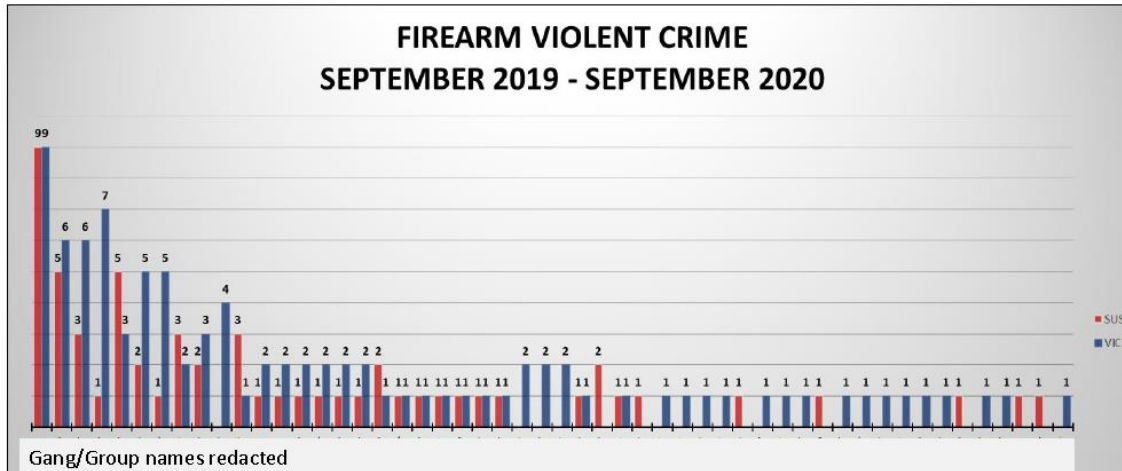
The work of problem analysis does not end with the initial work of understanding gun violence dynamics, which can change rapidly. Routine analytic efforts help partners monitor changes to gun violence dynamics and allow for course corrections as needed. Shooting reviews are a widespread and particularly important version of ongoing analysis. In Stockton, California, weekly shooting reviews bring in police department personnel and the city’s outreach workers to discuss every shooting incident that occurred over the previous week, including ones in which no one was hit. In the meeting a scorecard is updated to identify the three to five groups that are most active, in terms of their numbers of victims and shooters, to serve as a focus for the coming week’s priority activity (figure 3 provides an example of the 12-month version of the scorecard). As discussed in practice area 4, it is necessary to have a strict understanding of the limits of information sharing from outreach workers to protect the trusting relationships they are developing with the high-risk people they are working with in the community.

Findings from ongoing problem analysis may suggest a need to revisit the design of efforts to reduce violence. Several interventions in our scan of practices found that a substantial portion of the people shooting and being shot were older than the age ranges they had set for youth-focused interventions. Other jurisdictions may have funding to focus on older populations to the exclusion of younger people who are also high risk and need services. Changing approaches to reflect such revised understandings of violence dynamics can create barriers such as funding being tied to working with specific age ranges, and effectiveness may depend on flexibility from local programs, local government, and national funders.

FIGURE 3

Stockton, California, Shooting Review Scorecard Showing Shooting Activity among Local Groups

LAST 12 MONTHS SHOOTING SCORE CARD



Source: Stockton Police Department.

A problem analysis does not need to be built solely on gun violence to be effective. For instance, Milwaukee’s ongoing analysis of its violence prevention efforts, using the Cardiff model, includes attention to gun violence, but its ongoing data analysis is attentive to interpersonal violence more broadly to include harms such as intimate partner violence, child abuse, and human trafficking. A partnership facilitated by the Office of Violence Prevention convenes regularly around data to monitor trends, identify hot spots, and brainstorm potential strategies to address them. Whether focused on gun violence or not, collaborative routine problem analysis can reinforce stakeholders’ partnerships and their common commitment to reducing violence by establishing a common understanding of the issue.

Once a good problem analysis has been conducted, operationalizing the connection between the results of that analysis and where and with whom antiviolence interventions work is what makes it pay off. The literature on public health interventions against youth gun violence indicates that it is imperative to clearly define the locations and people most at risk and with the highest need, and to target those people. Initiatives included in our scan of practices had commonly done this by defining geographic service areas and using checklists of criteria for people who were at highest risk of involvement in gun violence to determine who would be enrolled in the most intensive intervention services as opposed to alternate service pathways more appropriate for younger or less at-risk youth who need more prevention-focused engagement. Defining priority areas and populations in this way fosters consistency in prioritizing people at highest risk of shooting and being shot and building a common understanding among interventionists about the key factors they need to consider.¹²

Resources for Conducting a Problem Analysis

- This [slide deck](#) detailing the problem and opportunity analysis of serious violence in Oakland, conducted by the California Partnership for Safe Communities, is an example of what such an analysis includes.
- National Network for Safe Communities' *Group Violence Intervention: An Implementation Guide* contains a detailed chapter on problem analysis for a focused deterrence approach, with a focus on group audits.
- GRYD's [research reports](#) provide details on how geographic areas of focus, research-based eligibility criteria, and detailed assessment are incorporated into its [intervention](#) and [prevention](#) services.
- *OJJDP Spergel/Comprehensive OJJDP Model: A Guide Assessing Your Community's Youth Gang Problem* provides guidance on problem analysis in the context of that model.
- California Partnership for Safe Communities' *Partnership-Focused Management: Maintaining a Sustained, Intensive Focus on Reducing Violence* situates routine shooting reviews in ongoing collaborative violence reduction efforts.

Practice Area 7: Build Positive Relationships with and Support Young People at High Risk of Gun and Gang/Group Violence

The fact that it is a relatively small number of identifiable people who are at the highest risk of committing or falling victim to youth gun and group violence creates an opportunity to engage in focused proactive work to prevent violence through direct engagement that builds trusting relationships with youth at high risk. This kind of relational work is a core component of every approach to addressing youth gun and group violence, with the exception of standalone suppression. Local government has a critical role in scoping antiviolence efforts that maintain this focus and supporting community-based antiviolence workers in building trusting relationships with young people affiliated with groups and gangs that police and other justice actors cannot build. Specifically, effective antiviolence efforts conduct outreach to open lines of communication with youth in the target population, build the positive relationships with them that will begin and maintain their engagement in programs that will reduce their risk, and make those relationships platforms for connecting them with supports to improve their lives. Box 14 summarizes our recommendations for building positive relationships with high-risk young people.

BOX 14

Recommendations for Building Positive Relationships with and Supporting High-Risk Young People

Structure engagement with youth at high risk of experiencing gun violence. Setting standards for how relational work should look supports consistency and quality in work with youth. This includes standards for the frequency and parameters of contact (e.g., in person, involving family members), and the use of tools such as case plans or life plans involving areas like employment, housing, mental health, safety, and positive adult relationships. Different service pathways appropriate for young people with different levels of risk or need should also be part of this structure. This mitigates potential pressure to serve all youth in one program or intervention. In places with many youth-serving organizations, clearly and consistently communicating the different roles played by each and how to identify which young people they should be enrolling is a substantial coordination challenge. This is something developing a broad antiviolence strategic plan can address (see practice area 1).

- *Who's involved:* Local government can set structured engagement standards consistent with a broad antiviolence strategy, allowing for delivery of services across an array of partners based in specific areas and with local competency, but with a common basis for fidelity, measuring program performance, and developing a jurisdictionwide practice community that can collaborate and share knowledge around shared activities. Community violence interventions doing relational work with young people should have input into the development and refinement of such standards.

Be consistent in relationships with youth engaged in interventions and programs. Consistently following through on commitments is necessary for both individual participant engagement and community support. Practitioners working with youth emphasized that this consistency was a necessary condition for building and maintaining relationships that facilitate positive changes for high-risk young people.

- *Who's involved:* Delivering on this consistency is the work of community violence interventions, but local government can facilitate it through measures such as providing sufficient funding, setting realistic caseload standards for the number of youth outreach workers and case managers are expected to work with at one time, and avoiding placing too many additional responsibilities on these workers.

Employ people with relevant lived experience to be credible messengers and develop relationships with youth at high risk. A community violence intervention workforce with relevant lived experience can more quickly and deeply develop the trust that underlies relational work with youth connected to groups and gangs.

- *Who's involved:* Community violence interventions do this, and local government and law enforcement have a role in setting expectations and supporting and validating the expertise of credible messengers doing violence prevention work.

Build in a preenrollment stage to develop trusting relationships with youth when they may not be ready to engage with formal services. This provides time to meet youth where they are and build trust and relationships before asking youth to commit to and focus on formal program requirements. Doing this may not be feasible for all programs, as it requires the ability to allocate staff time to maintaining communication and connections to youth in more informal ways.

- *Who's involved:* Community violence interventions should operationalize this, and local government should set it as a standard.

Develop robust service linkages and referral partners and be clear and candid with youth about what needs an intervention can and cannot meet. Insufficient ability to meet basic youth needs in concrete ways challenges many programs working with youth at high risk of violence involvement, whether due to insufficient services, services that come and go due to inconsistent funding, programs that are reluctant to work with youth engaged by antiviolence initiatives, programs that lack the capacity to successfully do so, or a more general lack of important opportunities like employment options. Referral partners who are not ready for or sensitive to the nature of working with high-risk youth in particular is a huge issue because of how central keeping promises and consistent follow-through are for working successfully with these young people.

- *Who's involved:* Individual community-based programs can build linkage and referral partnerships, and local government can contribute as well through coordination/convening to encourage willingness to work with the high-risk youth population.

Establish the capacity for hospital-based interventions. Hospital-based interventions are positioned to engage with people who have been shot (and their families) to reduce their risk of being revictimized.

- *Who's involved:* Local government can explore establishing these interventions if they do not exist or support their effectiveness and connection to other components of the broader antiviolence strategy where they are already in place.

Outreach

The initial engagement between youth and programs can begin in multiple ways. Most interventions seeking to work with the highest-risk youth have a street outreach component in which outreach workers canvass neighborhoods and make connections with youth in the focus population where opportunities present themselves. Hospital-based violence interventions generally connect to people who have been shot or otherwise subject to violent trauma at the bedside in trauma units. This is a unique opportunity to engage people who are particularly high risk and difficult to reach. There can also be referral relationships from sources such as schools, parole and probation departments, and the police. Stakeholders we interviewed for our scan of practices noted that the youth at highest risk have

often been let down by systems at many points, making them highly skeptical of offers of help. In these situations, having multiple entry points for beginning trusting relationships is important and increases the likelihood of being in contact with youth when they are receptive to engaging (or reengaging, as many youth may not succeed in their first engagements).

Engaging with youth in focused deterrence interventions may involve street outreach, but stakeholders in these interventions often begin their engagement with youth through group-based call-in meetings or by notifying individual young people. In both methods, stakeholders directly and respectfully communicate the value of youth remaining alive, free from incarceration, and successful, but they also communicate the threat of justice system sanctions, which is absent from other types of interventions, including public health interventions. Initial engagement done in call-in meetings or by notifying individuals can also be an opportunity for outreach workers and community service providers to begin developing and maintaining trusting relationships and connecting young people to services that can meet their needs. Some focused deterrence efforts have been moving away from coercive approaches to initial engagement, such as having parole or probation stakeholders mandate attendance at call-in meetings for people in target groups who are subject to supervision. Stockton Ceasefire, for example, has been implementing smaller, more intentional call-in meetings that rely on voluntary attendance from people already in contact with the Stockton Office of Violence Prevention outreach workers or custom notifications. Stockton Ceasefire stakeholders feel that more clients have been engaging with the intervention's relational elements under this approach than under past approaches.

It is important that this relational work be carried out by people with relevant lived experience who can serve as credible messengers to high-risk youth; credible messengers are people who share the experiences of the populations they serve and can open communication with and engage people faster and more meaningfully because of that shared experience.¹³ In the context of violence prevention, reentry, and work dealing with group-associated youth or those entangled in the legal system, this means sharing experiences of marginalization, criminalization, and contact with the legal system. Many frontline credible-messenger staff have been incarcerated and may have been involved with groups, and many are from the same structurally marginalized communities and areas as the youth they engage. Credible messengers leverage trust from group members to enhance program activities such as street and hospital-based outreach, life planning, conflict deescalation, case management, direct conflict mediation, community engagement, mentoring, and system navigation. (See practice area 2 for a discussion of hiring and retaining people with lived experience.)

An ongoing challenge to the ability of outreach workers to be credible and establish trust is the perception that they are providing information to law enforcement (or 'snitching'), a perception they

have to overcome to do relational work. Sometimes the branding and public faces of interventions can exacerbate this, as when programs use terminology like “antigang” and have uniforms and vehicles that look like those used by police or other criminal justice professionals. At the same time, these things can help get police, court, and justice system actors engaged in community-based antiviolence initiatives.

One thing these guys want is consistency. If I'm not consistent, then I'm failing as an intervention worker. – Intervention stakeholder

Building Trusting Relationships

However relationships between intervention partners and young people begin, partners must be consistent and authentically caring when working with high-risk youth, their families, and their communities. Structuring interactions is important in ensuring this consistency. Many programs set the standard for this consistency in their case management approaches and set expectations for how frequently stakeholders should contact program participants and what they should focus on when they do. Standards can also incorporate positive youth development frameworks, as the GRYD program in Los Angeles is doing with its Achieving Intentional Youth Development approach.

Whether people with caseloads of participants are called case managers or something else, these people are responsible for relationships with young people and for coordinating collaborative resources for entire strategies. For youth at high risk who likely have many needs, caseloads cannot be too high; interventions in our scan of practices commonly had capped caseloads at 15 for the highest-risk people (prevention caseloads are generally larger).

Too often you find that folks do outreach and it's unclear what that means, you're "walking neighborhoods" or "working with folks." Do they mean that they meet their clients once a month or every other month? You need a highly structured contact two to three times a week in person, development of a life plan and case plan and focus in those big five areas of employment, housing, mental health, safety, and positive relationships with another adult, focusing first on the relationship. –Antiviolence stakeholder

Because building trusting relationships with youth is a precondition for maintaining their engagement with programming, many interventions allow for formal or informal preenrollment periods during which outreach workers can build trust through regular communication and through activities like sharing meals. Interventions such as the Gang Reduction Initiative of Denver specify a 30-day engagement period to give potential clients time to see what the program is about and communicate with staff in a situation that has lower stakes than program enrollment from the perspective of the youth. The early engagement stage is also an opportunity to apply tools to guide decisions about program eligibility and enrollment. (For examples, see appendix A for information about the Gang Reduction Initiative of Denver's intake process, and see the GRYD briefs linked at the end of this section that discuss the Social Embeddedness Tool for intervention clients and Youth Services Eligibility Tool for prevention clients.) Box 15 discusses how the pandemic has complicated interventions' relational and engagement work.

Delivering a variety of new and meaningful experiences for youth is a common method for deepening and maintaining relationships. Efforts as varied as New York City's Crisis Management System, Advance Peace sites, and GRYD's Achieving Intentional Youth Development approach in Los Angeles all emphasize the need to provide meaningful new experiences for youth engaged in programming. One concern researchers have raised around this type of work and around programming in general is a paradox of programming whereby opportunities for youth group or gang members to engage in prosocial activities can actually be natural spots for groups and gangs to congregate and can increase violence. At the same time, programs such as Advance Peace have developed highly intentional means of bringing together people who are or have been involved in rival factions, but only after they have reached a point in the program at which this is safe and appropriate.

My mentor said if you could answer yes to four questions—Are you for real? Can I trust you? Do you love me? Does your stuff work?—you'll be successful. —Intervention stakeholder

BOX 15

Relational Work: Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has put stress on efforts to reduce youth gun and gang/group violence on many fronts and has risked compromising their effectiveness while many cities have experienced serious increases in violence. Activities that are central to violence reduction efforts, such as focused deterrence call-in meetings and group conflict mediations, had to be suspended in the interest of health and safety. And while many interventions covered in our scan of practices reported being able to maintain contact and engagement with people who were already participating, making new connections with potential clients became much more difficult.

At the same time, the pandemic also created opportunities for stakeholders to build trusting relationships with high-risk youth and the communities they live in. Outreach workers could show up to demonstrate consistency and care when both were badly needed. A Stockton Ceasefire outreach worker described in detail how they mobilized to do so:

We shifted into high gear. Gotta give props to team and myself, we pushed forward ... Almost brings tears to my eyes, we sacrificed a lot. Time with our family, risking our lives. Nobody knew what this was. Got up at 5:00 a.m., stood in lines to make sure our people had food, disinfectant, masks. Started feeding our folks and their families, two hot meals a week. Some of our guys hadn't eaten in three or four days. When we left, gave them a supply pack, toilet paper, two boxes of food, napkins, etcetera.

In Los Angeles, organizations deeply involved in work to reduce gun violence—Urban Peace Institute, Chapter T.W.O., H.E.L.P.E.R., Resilient and Breaking Through Barriers to Success—mobilized community health workers to deliver 400,000 personal protective equipment materials and reach over 32,000 people in Los Angeles. The Los Angeles GRYD program and its partners modified the annual Summer Night Lights public events series in 2020 to become a distribution network for pandemic-related resources including food, PPE, and activity kits for families in areas where the GRYD program operates. These efforts were guided and refined by pandemic-specific community needs assessment data collection to better understand community COVID-19 impacts and resulting needs. In 2021 resource distribution continued as limited in-person Summer Night Lights programming returned, including on-site COVID testing and vaccination.

This type of mobilization demonstrates the ways that community gun violence reduction infrastructure is public health infrastructure, and how the capacity of this infrastructure can be mobilized to protect communities from emergent health threats, increasing trusting relationships in the process.

Sources: Urban Institute interviews of violence reduction intervention stakeholders; “Saving Lives from COVID-19,” Urban Peace Institute, May 10, 2021, <https://www.urbanpeaceinstitute.org/in-the-news/2020/6/17/saving-lives-from-covid-19>; GRYD Annual Report 2020, 2021 GRYD Summer Night Lights Summary Report, <https://www.juvenilejusticeresearch.com/sites/default/files/2021-12/GRYD%20SNL%202021%20Summary%20Report.pdf>.

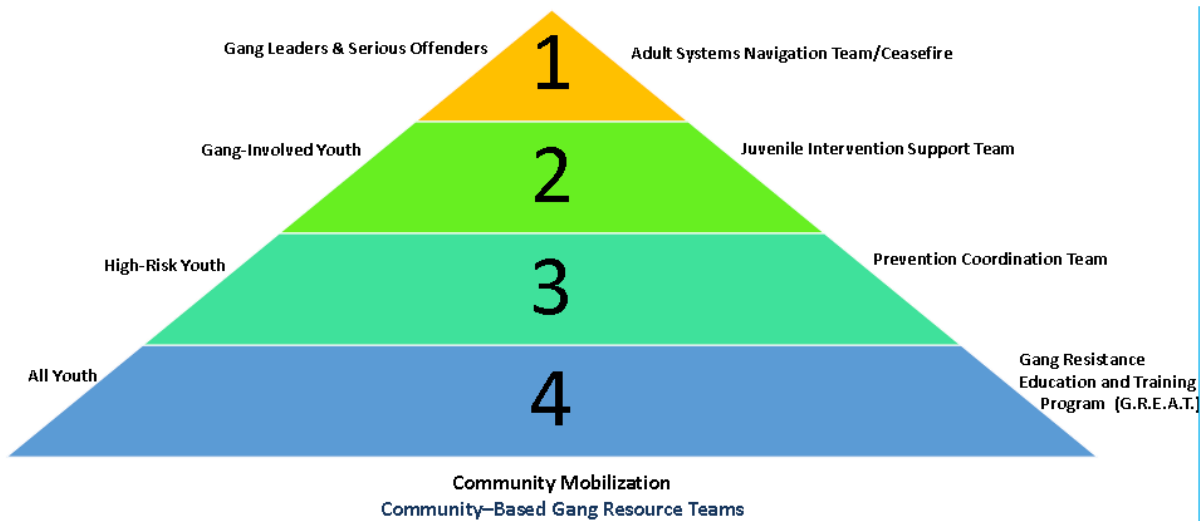
Connection to Services

Strong relational work with young people at risk of gun and gang/group violence forms a basis for connecting youth to an array of resources, services, and programming they might need, including those delivered within interventions that case managers or other holders of relationship work for, or from networks of partner organizations that interventions commonly build. The ability to provide meaningful support in concrete ways, such as assisting with employment, strengthens working relationships with youth and their commitment to change and may help them engage or remain engaged with more difficult behavior-change programs.

Differentiating between service pathways can help interventions match the right youth to the programs or interventions appropriate for their levels of risk and need. The highest-risk young people and those already in groups or gangs that are involved in gun violence have different needs than those who are at risk of such involvement and are the appropriate population for prevention-focused services. Interventions that address youth gun violence are staffed by highly committed people who are reluctant to turn away any young person who seeks help or is referred by someone who thinks they need assistance. Having different service pathways, whether in a single effort or through partnerships that are positioned to work with youth having differing needs, mitigates this challenge. Local government has an important role to play in this differentiation, as individual programs may develop such pathways but cannot do so for an entire jurisdiction's antiviolence strategies. If there is a single service pathway, there will be a strong temptation to put everyone on it who needs help. The Gang Reduction Initiative of Denver, the City of Los Angeles GRYD program, and New York City's array of services are all examples of the differentiation of service pathways. The Gang Reduction Initiative of Denver's service differentiation is depicted in figure 4, which shows how elements intended for a broad base of youth, like school-based gang resistance education, are complemented by components that focus more on high-risk and gang-involved youth. The most intensive component of the intervention is for the few gang leaders and youth committing serious offenses. In smaller communities with fewer service options, this level of differentiation can be harder to deliver. Box 16 discusses an intervention in Chicago that has used and contributed to the evidence about intensive programming for high-risk people.

FIGURE 4

The Gang Reduction Initiative of Denver’s Comprehensive Gang Model Coordinated Service Delivery System



Source: Gang Reduction Initiative of Denver.

BOX 16

Developing Programming from and Contributing to the Evidence Base: READI Chicago’s Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Programming

READI Chicago provides intensive programming for men most at risk of being involved in gun violence. It provides a combination of paid employment, cognitive behavioral therapy and wraparound services over a 12-month period. READI developed its program based on a review of the evidence about transitional jobs and cognitive behavioral therapy, including evaluations of the Center for Employment Opportunity’s Transitional Jobs demonstration and cognitive behavioral therapy-based interventions Becoming a Man and One Summer Chicago Plus.

While the evidence base for the program is solid, it has yet to be determined how effective components are for the program’s target population. READI is working to contribute to the evidence base by engaging with the Crime Lab at the University of Chicago to carry out an evaluation of the program using a randomized controlled trial design that will provide rigorous evidence of the program’s impact on whether participants are arrested for serious violent crimes and whether they become victims of gun violence. READI demonstrated how seriously it takes evidence-based practice by building its approach on the evidence that exists and committing to the rigorous examination of the program to build that evidence base and apply it more directly to gun violence reduction.

Sources: “Program Overview,” Heartland Alliance, accessed December 10, 2021, <https://www.heartlandalliance.org/readi/program/>, <https://urbanlabs.uchicago.edu/programs/readi>, and program development materials provided to Urban by the READI/Heartland Alliance team.

A continual challenge for interventions in this area is sufficiency and quality of resources and services. Many struggle to meet some of the most acute needs of the youth they work with, particularly in areas like housing and mental health services. And when there are means to meet these needs, there is still the question of whether partners delivering them do so at a high level of quality and understand and are willing to work with youth at high risk of violence. Ensuring this is the case is important, as the need for consistency and care in the relationship-building extends to services, and youth who have a bad experience in a program or with a referral partner may not come back to try services again. But vetting referral partners and building their capacity to work with high-risk youth is time consuming for interventions that have many other demands on their time. Most interventions working with high-risk youth with experience limitations with service availability, and candor with youth about where assistance can and cannot be provided is necessary to ensure these limitations are not experienced as failure to deliver on commitments to help (this can be particularly important when working with youth who have experienced trauma; box 17).

Creating forums for partners to routinely coordinate and share information can facilitate communication and coordination among government and community partners that support service connection. Such forums are also opportunities to work across silos, as partners may be focused on their particular aspects of antiviolence work and may not be thinking about or communicating with others. A broad partnership can get new partners engaged to ensure they are equipped to successfully engage with young people at high risk for violence, relieving community violence interventions of the burden of doing so.

First and foremost, it is to actually be in loving relationships with our young people. Everyone understands that the whole reason for programs is to build relationships. It's not the other way around. –Community program stakeholder

BOX 17

Bringing a Trauma Lens to Policy, Programming, and Practice

Since the early 2000s, the field has increasingly recognized the need to employ trauma frameworks for certain prevention and intervention efforts, including those serving youth and people who are justice involved, those intended to prevent violence, and those that address behavioral health needs. There is

evidence that experiencing trauma or victimization is connected to certain behavioral outcomes, such as substance use, violence, and other offending behaviors (Zweig, Yahner, and Rossman 2012; Zweig et al. 2015); that a person’s likelihood of experiencing contact with the criminal legal system (arrest, jail, incarceration) is connected to how frequently they have experienced trauma) (Jag et al. 2016); and that contact with the criminal legal system is itself traumatizing (Ervin et al. 2020; Jag et al. 2016; McCoy et al. 2020).

Having a trauma lens means shifting from asking people in need, “What is wrong with you?” to asking, “What happened to you?” (CPI 2020). It involves explicitly acknowledging the effect that trauma has on how people view the world, their interactions and experiences, and their behaviors. Building prevention and intervention efforts using this frame is critical to producing effective outcomes (SAMHSA 2014). Several views on trauma approaches exist and we provide two perspectives here for consideration that incorporate critical elements.

SAMHSA (2014) defines an entity as trauma informed if it recognizes the impact of trauma on people’s lives, understands how that influences paths to healing, and is responsive by integrating this knowledge into policies, practices, and operating procedures. The goal is to achieve successful outcomes while minimizing the risk of retraumatizing those being served. Further, SAMHSA’s framework articulates the following six principles for such an approach:

- safety (creating safe spaces for those served based on their own definitions of what makes them feel safe)
- trustworthiness and transparency (developing and implementing program processes with transparency to build and maintain trust between those being served and service providers)
- peer support (incorporating those who have lived experience with trauma as part of the services being provided)
- collaboration and mutuality (eliminating power differences between service providers and those being served and incorporating shared decisionmaking around services being provided)
- empowerment, voice, and choice (empowering those being served by uplifting their voices and choices through shared decisionmaking and goal setting, building capacity for self-advocacy, and adequately supporting staff to do the work)
- cultural, historical, and gender issues (providing culturally and gender-responsive and relevant services that recognize historical trauma)

There are many frameworks that address trauma and provide food for thought about how to effectively implement programming that imbues a trauma lens into the work. Success in interrupting and preventing further violence requires acknowledging the role trauma plays and how best to approach improving well-being and promoting genuine healing and change.

More recently, there has been a further call to shift from solely a trauma-informed programming lens to healing-centered engagement with people.³ Healing-centered engagement reveals the limitations of employing a trauma-informed lens as an end goal, rather than a step in a process, in that it

unintentionally reinforces a deficit approach to programming. While acknowledging the trauma people have experienced is appropriate, it does not in itself lead to a path to restore someone’s well-being. Healing-centered engagement is focused on full restoration of one’s well-being, views healing as a collective processes, and is asset-based. It moves away from asking, “What happened to you?” to “What’s right with you?” Shawn Ginwright outlines four elements to healing-centered engagement:

- It is political rather than clinical: that is, well-being is tied to the environments we all live in, and participation in movements for policies to address areas for growth and investment helps give people a sense of control and purpose.
- It centers culture: that is, it views healing as a sense of belonging and restoration of one’s identity—acknowledging the intersectionality of a person’s identity and that healing is achieved collectively.
- It is asset driven, focusing on people’s strength and potential, rather than on treating their symptoms.
- It promotes program providers’ own healing processes, holding up those that help others through “an explicit focus on restoring, and sustaining the adults who attempt to heal youth.”

^a Shawn Ginwright, “The Future of Healing: Shifting from Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement,” Medium, May 31, 2018, <https://ginwright.medium.com/the-future-of-healing-shifting-from-trauma-informed-care-to-healing-centered-engagement-634f557ce69c>.

Resources for Building Positive Relationships with and Supporting High-Risk Young People

- The [Credible Messenger Justice Center](#) provides a clearinghouse for information about credible messenger approaches and connections to training and support for people working as credible messengers.
- The National Network of Hospital-Based Violence Intervention’s [Hospital-Based Violence Intervention: Practices and Policies to End the Cycle of Violence](#) presents the theory underlying hospital-based violence interventions and policy facilitators of that approach.
- National Network for Safe Communities’ [Custom Notifications: Individualized Community in the Group Violence Intervention](#) provides detailed guidance for this individual outreach in a focused deterrence approach.
- The City of Los Angeles GRYD program has published research briefs on components of relational work, including the following:
 - » [Achieving Intentional Youth Development](#)

- » *Building Capacity for Trauma-Informed Care within GRYD Intervention Family Case Management (FCM) Services*
- Advance Peace’s *Advance Peace & Focused Deterrence: What Are the Differences?* covers the conceptual similarities and differences between the two approaches in a way that clarifies how each approaches addressing violence and relational work.
- Chapter 8 of OJJDP’s *Comprehensive Gang Model implementation manual* lays out the team-based case management component used in that approach, and Chapter 9 covers the role of street outreach.
- The *National Mentoring Resource Center* makes an array of evidence-based resources, reviewed by its national research board, available to support the mentoring of youth.

Practice Area 8: Interrupt and Mediate Conflicts

Intervening in active conflicts is a core part of many different kinds of initiatives to address youth gun and group violence because such a large portion of gun violence is based on intergroup dynamics and retaliatory cycles. Conflict interruption has two aspects: acute response to shootings in an attempt to prevent further spread of violence from an incident that has already occurred, and proactive work to mediate emergent or ongoing intergroup conflicts. This work is usually undertaken by the same professionals who are doing the relational work discussed in practice area 7. This has advantages: the same local knowledge and trusting relationships needed for effective relational work are invaluable when interrupting or mediating conflicts that occur in the same social circles. At the same time, each is a time-consuming and challenging part of the work, and balancing attention to both is a serious challenge for antiviolence professionals. Box 18 summarizes our recommendations for interrupting and mediating conflicts.

BOX 18

Recommendations for Interrupting and Mediating Conflicts

Routinely alert violence interrupters of shooting incidents that require their response. This further formalizes the role of interrupters in incident response and ensures they are systematically apprised of where their response may be needed. Such alerts usually come from law enforcement and include local government. In hospital-based violence interventions, the equivalent is a mechanism to ensure intervention staff are alerted by the hospital when people are brought to the trauma unit with whom they should attempt to connect.

- *Who's involved:* Law enforcement or hospital staff are needed to send the alert, and community violence interventions deliver the response.

Create a working understanding among police at the leadership level and the precinct or local division level about the role of violence interrupters in responding to incidents. Having this understanding in place helps all parties do their work well in the high-pressure setting of shooting incident response. Community members may mistrust interrupters at shootings scenes if they perceive them as being affiliated with law enforcement and passing information to them. However, it is difficult to maintain clarity on roles between interventionists and law enforcement without some minimal level of interaction at scenes. In the absence of this understanding, conflict can arise between police and interrupters at shooting scenes when police do not understand or respect their role in preventing further violence.

- *Who's involved:* Local government is best positioned to establish this understanding, but both law enforcement and community violence interventions need to be involved, and law enforcement must make sure the understanding spreads throughout the department, with buy-in and vocal support from chiefs of police and law enforcement.

Develop a staffing approach that helps violence interrupters balance their responsibilities to young people and their need to respond to shooting incidents. Capacity limitations make it challenging to deliver conflict mediation, incident response, client engagement, and client case management at needed levels. Using team approaches to share information about conflicts needing mediation and distributing the work of shooting scene response make it more manageable for each individual interrupter.

- *Who's involved:* Community violence interventions do this, but local government can support it by providing funding and setting associated standards.

Proactively engage with people in all groups in a neighborhood so that trust has already been established when conflict mediation is needed. Ensuring different gangs, groups, and factions understand interventionists are trying to protect everyone and are not aligned with one side of a conflict makes them more effective in mediation and protects them from potential danger. The lived experience that makes interventionists credible messengers can also involve past involvement in these groups, and it is necessary to understand where those ties exist and to actively manage how they are understood in the community.

- *Who's involved:* Community violence interventions employing interventionists.

Build strong working relationships with victim service providers. This allows interrupters to connect shooting victims (and loved ones of shooting survivors and homicide victims) to immediate supports to help meet their needs, reducing the potential for and the harm of retaliation.

- *Who's involved:* A partnership between community violence interventions, victim service providers, and justice agencies who house some victim support services.

Interrupters who respond to scenes in the sites included in our scan of practices indicated a number of goals for responding to shooting scenes. These included providing immediate support to the families of shooting victims, defusing volatile situations that could cause further violence, and controlling rumors that might emerge and could also contribute to further violence. Some interventions provide parallel responses at hospitals where shooting victims have been taken, where similar work to calm people can help avoid retaliatory violence. Interrupters said at shooting scenes and in hospitals, helping people access victims' services as a follow-up measure is important. Communication and coordination with law enforcement on responding to shooting scenes varied. In some places there was a formalized notification approach for outreach workers, most notably in Los Angeles, where communication is handled via the "triangle protocol," through which the Los Angeles Police Department notifies via text message the GRYD regional program coordinator (based in the mayor's office) for the area where the shooting occurred and the violence interrupter (community intervention worker, in Los Angeles) at the contracted community organization providing intervention services in that area when a gang-involved shooting has occurred. But even when there is a formal notification process, interrupters often first hear about shootings from their own local networks.

The structure of interactions between violence interrupters and a law enforcement officers at the scene is important, because both are present. Both have different roles, and where there is community mistrust of police it can be valuable to have minimal interaction at the scene to facilitate engagement between outreach workers and community members. Ensuring that officers understand who interrupters responding to shooting scenes are and why they are there is helpful because there can be little time and space to explain this at the scenes. Working out that understanding with police leaders at the precinct level and communicating it throughout the ranks appears to be an important practice, though it will not always ensure that officers responding to scenes have that understanding.

Interventions that combine the roles of outreach worker and violence interrupter among staff who are responsible for both staying connected with participants on their caseloads (or preparticipants) and responding to shooting scenes have had to establish guidance for their workforces on how to balance those roles. The Stockton Office of Violence Prevention, for example, has a rotation in which two peacekeepers are on shooting-response duty over a seven-day period. This rotation is necessary because it can be overwhelming for peacekeepers to respond to shooting scenes while handling their regular ongoing caseload work. Another way to share the burden of responding to scenes that several interventions have employed is to have supervisory staff, who either do not carry caseloads or have smaller ones, available to respond to shooting scenes.

Our presence there ... we can't go and put our arms around family. We can't go over and talk to rival gang members ... that's where intervention comes into place.

—Law enforcement stakeholder discussing shooting scenes

In mediating conflicts outside of immediate scene responses (box 19 discusses one example of how conflicts can arise outside this context), interrupters rely on their relationships and local knowledge. Establishing neutrality between groups or factions is critical—unless all parties see the interventionists as unaligned with any particular group and invested in safety for all, they cannot play a mediating role successfully. In some interventions, sharing information on where there are active conflicts and assigning responsibility for setting up mediations is a subject for weekly team staffing meetings.

BOX 19

Social Media and Conflict Dynamics

In our scan of practices, the increasing importance of social media in shaping conflict and violence among young people was a prominent theme. Conflicts that once occurred in physical places/spaces are now starting and being fueled via social media, including via the circulation of videos in which groups threaten or disparage other groups.

Law enforcement monitors social media communication to track conflict patterns, and social media is yet another mechanism for young people to put themselves at risk of violence from peers or sanction from the justice system. This makes monitoring social media part of the job for interventionists, some of whom described encouraging clients to use social media more responsibly to avoid inflaming potential conflicts and to avoid triggering criminal sanctions by, for instance, appearing in videos with firearms. This element of conflict dynamics puts the onus on intervention workers to be technologically savvy, which can be particularly challenging for older intervention workers.

It is important to note that a research-based understanding of this area is still emerging, with recent work demonstrating that the relationship between social media communication and violence is complex and easily misinterpreted (Stuart 2020).

Sources: Urban Institute interviews of violence intervention stakeholders conducted through the scan of practices.

Resources for Interrupting and Mediating Conflicts

- GRYD's *The GRYD Incident Response Program: Understanding the Impact of the GRYD Triangle Partnership* describes its Triangle Partnership for incident response.
- This [slide deck](#) from Cure Violence Global provides an overview of its approach to interrupting the spread of violence.

Practice Area 9: Use Suppression and Enforcement Precisely and Sparingly

Suppressing violence through police presence and using enforcement to deter and address violence and associated behaviors such as carrying guns have long been used to address youth gang/group and gun violence, and they have long been criticized by researchers (see Klein and Maxson 2006). There is evidence supporting their role in reducing violence, but they also come at a cost in terms of community trust and harms done to youth. Building trusting relationships with high-risk youth when they are targets of focused surveillance and sanctioning from justice agencies is difficult and will not work unless space is created for youth to succeed. Therefore, the roles of suppression and enforcement have to be carefully defined and bounded in a successful and sustainable youth violence reduction effort. Box 20 summarizes our recommendations for using suppression and enforcement.

BOX 20

Recommendations for Using Suppression and Enforcement

Concentrate suppression and enforcement efforts in geographically and socially precise ways.

Building on the understanding of gun violence dynamics covered in practice area 6, the suppression and enforcement components of gun violence reduction strategies can focus on the micro-places (e.g. specific street corners) and specific individuals involved in group-based conflicts resulting in shootings. This maximizes their suppression, incapacitation and deterrence impact on gun violence while minimizing the burdens of enforcement on communities already negatively impacted by the presence of violence.

- *Who's involved:* Law enforcement, prosecution and other justice agencies are lead, but local government develops the overarching antiviolence strategy defining this approach to use of suppression and enforcement.

Respectfully communicate the risk of sanctions to people at high risk so that they understand and are aware of it. This is a core element of focused deterrence interventions, and staff from some community violence interventions that do not include enforcement also emphasized the importance of candidly

sharing information about elevated surveillance and the risk of sanctions to youth who will be subject to it. Focused deterrence efforts have a specified framework for this messaging that combines a role for police and justice system actors and community representatives. Some leading interventions have increasingly moved away from the larger group call-in meetings that were part of earlier iterations of these interventions toward communication of focused deterrence messages via smaller call-ins or individual meetings.

- *Who's involved:* Law enforcement often leads this messaging, in partnership with other justice agencies (e.g. US attorneys' offices), community violence interventions, and community representatives.

Couple suppression and enforcement strategies with positive engagement strategies to support success for youth at high risk. The willingness of partners with strong connections to communities where violence is concentrated to support identification of people and places at highest risk may be contingent on whether that risk will be met first and foremost with engagement and support, so that sanctions are the last resort as much as possible. It is therefore important that the overall strategy for which partners are defining a population of focus does so without harmful stereotyping or unduly elevating young people's risk of system involvement.

- *Who's involved:* As the holder of the overall strategy to address youth gun and gang violence, local government has a primary responsibility to ensure this is the case.

Scale back focused surveillance and enforcement attention when youth reduce their risk through positive program engagement. If youth who are making progress and reducing their risk through programming continue to be subject to enhanced scrutiny from law enforcement and other justice actors (e.g., probation), it can hamper trust and reduce their motivation. There needs to be a mechanism for dialing back enhanced surveillance and enforcement attention for such youth.

- *Who's involved:* This requires a mechanism for moving information from community violence interventions working with young people to reduce their risk and law enforcement and other justice agencies that need to adjust their level of focus to account for this progress. As the holder of the overall strategy to address youth gun and gang violence, local government has a primary responsibility to develop and oversee a mechanism for this.

Build trust with communities by reducing the burden of broad-based enforcement strategies on them. Interventions that emphasize to participants a primary focus on the importance of gun violence and valuing and wanting success for young people at high risk for violence may find that message undermined by intensive enforcement around lower-level offenses, concentrated in neighborhoods where gun violence is also concentrated. The resulting community mistrust of police and the justice system can impede the ability to obtain necessary information to solve shootings and crimes.

- *Who's involved:* Law enforcement and other justice partners can work to reduce overly burdensome enforcement, and partners in the overarching gun violence reduction strategy can advocate for this, with a prominent place for community voices.

Targeted enforcement is common within or alongside interventions intended to reduce youth gun and gang/group violence. In focused deterrence interventions in particular, the direct threatening of enhanced sanctions is a core component of messaging to youth, and the program’s logic makes following through on these threats with people or groups that do not desist from involvement in shootings necessary. The multipart message from focused deterrence interventions is that people must desist from violence, there will be support for those who do, and there will be enhanced penalties for those who do not. In the focused deterrence model, clear and respectful up-front communication of the risk of sanctions, framed as a last resort, is the precondition for following through on enforcement actions when needed. Targeted gang takedowns based on problem analyses are undertaken by law enforcement both within and outside focused deterrence approaches, and there is evidence that this reduces violence (see Chalfin, LaForest and Kaplan 2021). These enhanced enforcement actions often include prosecution (state and federal) and parole and probation participation to “pull every lever” regarding available sanctions for groups or gangs that continue to engage in gun violence.

Many public health interventions are designed to have minimal coordination or connection with law enforcement, prosecutors, corrections, and other parts of the justice system that do surveillance and sanctioning. Nonetheless, outreach workers noted that it is important for them to communicate candidly to young people at high risk of violence that they are under enhanced scrutiny by the justice system and at serious risk of arrest and incarceration, in addition to the possibility of being victims of violence themselves. Several outreach workers in different cities noted that when youth feel they are continuing to be the subjects of enhanced surveillance, stops, searches, and sanctions from police and other justice actors (or restrictions based on gang affiliation like civil gang injunctions as discussed in box 21), it makes them feel their progress in programs is not being recognized and demotivates and disincentivizes them from working with antiviolence and youth-engagement programs. One method for addressing this is to incorporate information about engagement in community violence intervention programming as a component of ongoing shooting reviews and problem analyses (see practice area 6) and to remove people from lists of people at highest risk for shooting based on that progress, as happens in Stockton Ceasefire.

The more specific definitions arrived at through problem analyses play an important role in shaping how police and justice actors use suppression and enforcement. Stakeholders we interviewed from many cities, within and outside of law enforcement, noted that law enforcement officers needed to change their mindsets to align with the focused approaches arising from problem analyses and that they needed to recognize that broad place-based tactics like sweeps and enhanced traffic and pedestrian stops were not precise enough to reliably reduce gun violence.

BOX 21

Civil Gang Injunctions

Civil gang injunctions (CGIs) are intended to curtail gang violence by imposing behavioral restrictions on people in gangs living within designated areas. The premise is that removing the opportunity for social interaction between people in gangs reduces the likelihood of violence. These injunctions are backed by civil suits that seek court orders declaring the public behavior of a gang a nuisance to the community.¹⁴ They impose sanctions with the intent to send a message to targeted people that there are high costs for engaging in prohibited behaviors and illegal activity within CGI zones. Additionally, certain public behaviors like standing or gathering in one place for more than a few minutes, driving, wearing certain clothing, or making certain body language gestures within the injunction area may also be prohibited. Violations of prohibited behaviors result in civil sanctions in the form of financial penalties, and CGIs have enhanced penalties (e.g., longer sentences) for illegal activity, such as vandalism, selling drugs, and acts of intimidation, in CGI zones.

Some studies of the impacts of CGIs on crime suggest that serious and violent crime is reduced in areas with CGIs (Carr, Slothower, and Parkinson 2017; Grogger 2002; Los Angeles County Civil Grand Jury 2004; Ridgeway et al. 2019). Other studies point to temporary reductions in crime and modest improvements in community safety (Maxson, Hennigan and Sloane 2005; O’Deane and Morreale 2011). Research also demonstrates mixed and perhaps fewer promising results of CGIs for the people targeted by them. Interviews with people in gangs who have experienced the restrictions of CGIs reported that their gang activity persisted within the safety zones and in surrounding neighborhoods without any gang presence and even to rival gang territory (Swan and Bates 2017). Bichler and colleagues (2019) mapped the violence networks of people in gangs in Los Angeles and found that postinjunction, violence and conflict among gangs intensified and became more centrally located. Similarly, Bichler, Norris, and Ibarra (2020) found that as the filing of CGIs increased, the violence between people in gangs became more complex over time, and gangs under CGIs became more likely to retaliate and commit violent acts against other gangs subjected to injunctions. Another study examined the offense histories of 36 members of four gangs and paints a more positive picture of the effects of injunctions on people subjected to them. Researchers found that three years after people in gangs were subjected to injunctions, offenses dropped by 74 percent and there was a 60 percent reduction in victimization of the gang members, compared with the preinjunction period (Carr, Slothower, and Parkinson 2017). It is important to note that while evidence of impact on violence and gang activity is mixed, more critical scholarship and advocates have raised concerns around the racialized origins and incidence of gang injunctions, highlighting the implications of restricting the civil rights of a predominately Black and Latinx group of people (Moore and Stuart 2022; Muniz 2014).

Resources for Using Enforcement and Suppression Sparingly

- Chapter 6 of OJJDP's *Comprehensive Gang Model implementation manual* covers suppression as a component of that model.
- National Network for Safe Communities' *Policing Guns and Gun Violence: A Toolkit for Practitioners and Advocates* details ways to support the implementation of practices in policing the presence of guns, gun violence, and people at the highest risk.
- The National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform's *Oakland's Successful Gun Violence Reduction Strategy* describes how respectful communication of risk operated as a component of that strategy.
- The National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice was a six-site demonstration project undertaken to improve relationships and increase trust between communities and law enforcement. The *process and outcome evaluation* of that effort produced relevant lessons for trust-building work.

Conclusion

Dynamics at the intersection of guns, youth, violence, and gang/group affiliation are highly complex. Practices that address them are constantly evolving and being innovated, and it is challenging for researchers building research evidence or attempting even to describe the state of the field just to keep up. For all that, the knowledge base on addressing youth gun violence connected to gangs and groups provides a strong foundation from which to build and refine practice, as laid out in this practice guide and the associated reports synthesizing the extant research and findings from the scan of practices.

While effective practices in this area cannot be easily summarized, our findings about the state of interventions in youth gun and gang/group violence need to be

- multicomponent, coordinated around broad strategies that situate each component within the whole;
- focused, with that focus guided by locally specific analysis that directs all components toward the people and places where the risk of shooting and being shot is concentrated;
- relational, to engage youth and help them distance themselves from risk factors for involvement in violence;
- parsimonious and focused in the use of enforcement, reserving it for where and when it is absolutely necessary;
- community engaged, so that work to reduce youth gun and gang/group violence is guided by community priorities and needs, builds support and legitimacy, and coproduces community safety and peace; and
- generative of evidence, allowing local stakeholders to ascertain whether components of their strategies are being implemented as planned, producing desired outcomes, and contributing to the knowledge base to guide the work for communities everywhere.

Notes

- ¹ “Fact Sheet: More Details on the Biden-Harris Administration’s Investments in Community Violence Interventions,” White House Briefing Room, April 7, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/07/fact-sheet-more-details-on-the-biden-harris-administrations-investments-in-community-violence-interventions/>; Eddie Bocanegra, Erica Ford, and Mike McBride, “There’s a Proven Way to Reduce Gun Violence in America’s Cities. We Just Need to Fund It,” *Time*, July 8, 2021, <https://time.com/6078496/reduce-gun-violence-americas-cities/>.
- ² “A Whole Justice Approach,” Credible Messenger Justice Center, accessed December 29, 2021, <https://cmjcenter.org/approach/>.
- ³ “What Is a Gang? Definitions” National Institute of Justice, accessed December 29, 2021, <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/what-gang-definitions#note1>.
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- ⁹ Sarah Spinks, “Adolescent Brains are Works in Progress: Here’s Why,” PBS, accessed January 3, 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/teenbrain/work/adolescent.html>.
- ¹⁰ This age range differs from that used by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in resources including the Model Programs Guide to reflect the scope of the project and the fact that it is common for efforts focused on youth gun violence related to gangs and groups to define their service populations to include juveniles *and* young adults.
- ¹¹ Andrew V. Papachristos, “What Is a ‘Gang Audit?’” Huffington Post, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/andrew-papachristos/what-is-a-gang-audit_b_1651386.html. For an example of a problem analysis including both components, see the California Partnership for Safe Communities’ problem analysis materials done for Oakland, available at <http://thecapartnership.org/cms/assets/uploads/2016/02/Oakland-Problem-Analysis-for-City-Council-Report-03.25.14-Slides-1.pdf>.
- ¹² For a strong example of how geographic areas of focus, research-based eligibility criteria, and detailed assessments of people’s fitness for intervention or prevention services, see Kraus, Leap, and coauthors (2017) and Kraus, Chan, and coauthors (2017).
- ¹³ See Austria and Peterson (2017) for an overview of the role credible messengers can play. “Credible messenger” is a term that has been associated with specific programmatic interventions, but stakeholders we interviewed for our scan of practices indicated that it is also used widely in the antiviolence field in this more general sense.
- ¹⁴ “Current Citywide Gang Injunction Map,” Office of the City Attorney of Los Angeles, Criminal Division, Gang Injunctions, 2012.

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