

An Overview: Community Violence Intervention Strategies

History of Community Violence Interventions

Community violence consists of the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against another person, group or community in a specific location that results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.

When referring to community violence, homicides are highlighted as the number one issue, particularly homicides from gun violence; however, it is important to acknowledge the toll of nonfatal violent injuries when researching community violence as they far outnumber fatal deaths by more than one hundred-to-one.





Community violence intervention has been in existence for decades with community-based organizations successfully reducing violence through locally driven, data informed alternative public safety measures. Several models for Community Violence Intervention (CVI) include but are not limited to street outreach, group violence intervention, crime prevention through environmental design and hospital-based violence intervention programs. The Biden Administration is supporting localities to adopt and advance this suite of approaches.



UPDATED OCTOBER 2021!

Visit the Bureau of Justice Assistance's (BJA) [Community Violence Intervention \(CVI\) page](#), home to recordings of a 4-part webinar series produced by the White House and numerous other CVI resources.

Several models for Community Violence Intervention (CVI) include, but are not limited to:

-  Group Violence Intervention
-  Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs
-  Violence Interrupters
-  Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design



Group Violence Interventions (GVI)

A form of problem-oriented policing and often funded through law enforcement agencies, GVI is based on the understanding that a small, identifiable group within a community is responsible for the majority of violence.

The individuals typically associated with this violence tend to be affiliated in groups with violence stemming from local rivalries and competition. While these groups are many times marked as "crews" or "gangs", these terms are intentionally avoided within this work as they infer organized structure and exclude informal street groupings that account for a majority of the violence. This strategy also highlights that this violence more than likely stems from conditions of economic desperation and is frequently committed by the most chronically underserved individuals. Given this understanding, this model relies heavily on the "carrot and stick" theory: providing individuals with resources but also ensuring they understand that if they do not put down the guns, there will be consequences through enforcement.

While there are a variety of GVI programs, there are specific components required as part of this model. These components include the following:

- An organized cohort of respected and credible community members, faith leaders, social service providers, researchers, and law enforcement officials
- A working list of individuals (identified by cohort) in the community most at risk for committing or becoming the victims of violence
- “Custom notifications” to alert identified individuals that they are on the working list
- Intimate in-person meetings or “call-ins” between the community cohort and the working list. These meetings include the following:
 - Strong communication to “stop the violence” and “put the guns down”;
 - Opportunity for enrollment in wrap-around resources for attendees included but not limited to GED tutoring, transportation assistance, mental health treatment, housing support, and tattoo removal;
 - Law enforcement messaging regarding swift and sure legal action if violence is not ceased;
 - Highlight the powerful “focused deterrence” effect of deterring crime by increasing the swiftness, severity and certainty of punishment for crimes by implementing a mix of law enforcement, social services, and community mobilization.

The key feature of GVI is the understanding that community is the primary deterrent of violence. While law enforcement plays an essential role, GVI is grounded in the participation of community leaders. Because of the community’s centralized role, at-risk individuals are more likely to recognize enforcement as “legitimate” as they see officers acting on behalf of the neighborhood and community. This method also has the potential to lead to building and/or repairing strained relationships between law enforcement and community.

The GVI model has a remarkably strong track record, featuring a documented association with homicide reductions of 30–60%. **A commonly known program, Operation Ceasefire, was developed in Boston** in the mid-1990s and was associated with a 61% reduction in youth homicide, bringing attention to this strategy.



Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs (HVIPs)

Given their immediate access to those who have been harmed by violence, hospitals have become the first line of support for victims and provides time for the reduction of tensions between the victim and perpetrator that may lead to retaliatory violence.

These multi-disciplinary programs, HVIPs, partner medical staff and credible community-based partners to support victims of violent crime through safety planning, services, and trauma-informed care. [Research](#) indicates that victims of violence are at a higher risk for being revictimized as well as becoming perpetrators of violence. The time these victims spend recovering in the hospital serves as an opportunity to tackle the potential for retalia-

tion and recidivism. Studies show that victims in healthcare settings are particularly poised to interventions to reduce violence and promote positive behavior change.

Recognizing that victimization does not typically end with an isolated incident, providers use the hospital setting to offer resources that will follow the individual back into the community. These resources are presented to the patients by outreach workers while in the hospital and those workers support the victims once reentering the community. These resources include but are not limited to community-based services, mentoring, home visits, follow-up assistance, and long-term case management as well as protective factors such as social support, job readiness, and educational attainment that reduce risk factors like substance misuse and chronic unemployment. This ensures that even as the patient is released, the wrap around services and support follows them back into the community.

While still a relatively new approach, states, like New Jersey, are finding ways to fund HVBIs through federal funding. [In 2020, New Jersey was able fund all nine of the states HBVIs with VOCA funds.](#)

STOP Violence Interrupters

Street outreach programs are a public health approach to violence intervention. The premise is that violence, specifically homicides and shootings, mimic a disease that spreads rapidly throughout a community.

Violence Interrupters (VIs), or street level conflict mediators, are the main component of street outreach programs to prevent and reduce

While clean green space is often identified as the main factor in CPTED, the strategy consists of four key components:

Access Control: designing streets, sidewalks, building entrances, and neighborhood gateways to clearly indicate transitions from the public environment to semi-private and private areas

Surveillance: maximizing the visibility of people, parking areas, vehicles, and site activities. Examples include strategic placement of windows, doors, walkways, parking lots, and vehicular routes.

Territorial Reinforcement: Using sidewalks, landscaping, and porches to help distinguish between public and private areas, showing signs of “ownership” that send “hands off” messages to those who may commit violent crimes.

Maintenance: Addressing management and maintenance of space such as proper upkeep (mowing grass, trimming trees and landscaping, picking up trash, repairing broken windows and light fixtures, and painting over graffiti). This signals that a location or facility is well cared for and therefore would be inhospitable to a criminal and that an owner, manager, or neighbor is watching out for the property and could spot illegal behavior.

violence. VIs are selected based on their credibility within a community and many times are returning citizens who were previously engaged in high-risk behaviors such as group or gang involvement. The VIs credibility provides a common ground with which these interrupters can approach high-risk individuals. Their history within the community offers invaluable knowledge and understanding of the community’s interworking including strained or tense rela-

tionships that could ultimately lead to violent conflict.

Given their unique understanding of the communities in which they lived and are now working, the majority of their time is spent in the streets to build trust, network, and connect with high-risk individuals to better understand where violent conflicts may arise. This means their main role is to prevent retaliatory violence and to ensure unresolved conflict does not escalate to a fatal level.

Part of the challenge reported by VI programs is the part-time status and poor pay for the violence interrupters. Many believe that VIs should be full time employees of the city, whether through the Mayor's Office or the Department of Health and Human Services and should be physically located within smaller communities that have heightened risks of violence. The UCLA Social Justice Research Partnership conducted a review of one of the first successful Violence Interrupter programs as well as how to begin a program like this, click [here](#).



Community Driven Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Community Driven Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is a long term, multi-disciplinary strategy using urban planning, architectural design, and the management of built and natural environments to reduce gun violence. Research indicates that a community's physical environment, bettered by simply cleaning up trash, is a critical component of creating safety within a community and should be prioritized as an investment by the city.

Research conducted by the University of Pennsylvania also indicates that adding greenery, incorporating better lighting, cleaning up trash, and providing clean and open spaces for community gathering leads to violence reduction without displacing or relocating crime.

Cities, like Seattle, have seen success using CPTED and funded the initiative through federal funding, the Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation grant. To learn more about their initiative click [here](#).

This document was created with the support of Grant No. 2019-DP-BX-K002 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the SMART Office, and the Office for Victims of Crime. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.