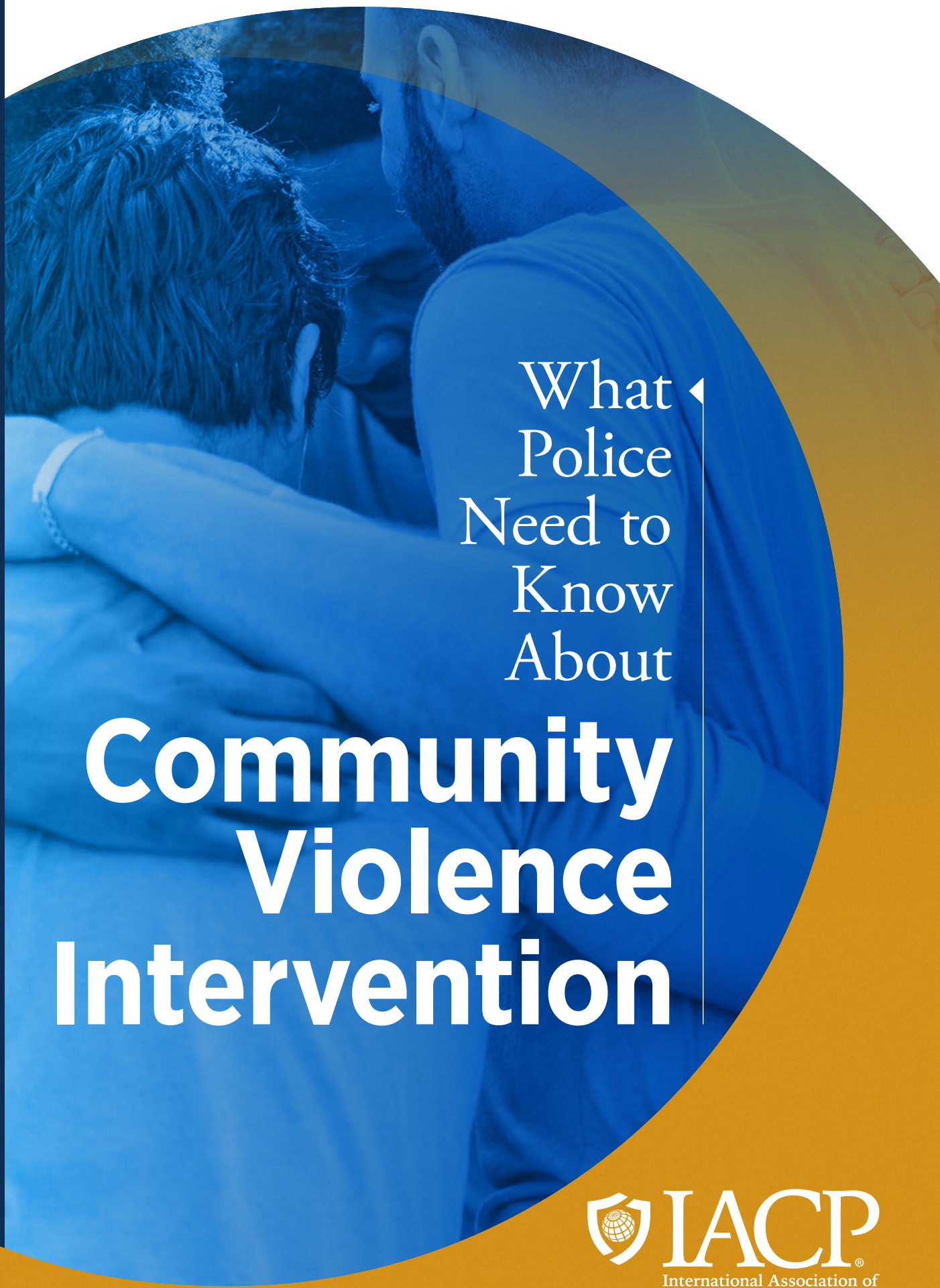


What Police Need to Know About

Community Violence Intervention

IACP
International Association of Chiefs of Police



INTRODUCTION

Police agencies have increasingly sought to develop or engage in comprehensive public safety initiatives that involve the community. Community Violence Intervention (CVI) programs offer an opportunity for police to work alongside credible community leaders to address violence. CVI programs are community-driven strategies that leverage trained and trusted community members to identify and support the small number of community members at the greatest risk of perpetrating or being victimized by violence.

As police agencies seek to develop effective and sustainable approaches to reducing violence, working alongside CVI programs on comprehensive, but distinct, initiatives offers a pathway to build stronger partnerships with communities, reduce harm, and enhance police legitimacy. This publication provides police personnel with a foundational overview of what CVI is; how it intersects with and complements policing strategies; and highlights the benefits and real-world examples of comprehensive public safety initiatives involving CVI programs.

Whether a police agency is exploring CVI strategies for the first time or seeking to deepen existing connections with CVI organizations, this publication offers practical insights to help police agencies navigate the evolving landscape of violence reduction and public safety strategies that involve the community.



Understanding CVI



BACKGROUND

The 2022 Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) marked a federal response to rising gun violence in the United States following the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the BSCA, the federal government made sweeping investments available to communities nationwide to address violent crime and develop community-based crime reduction strategies, including what were termed CVIs. Although CVI is a relatively new term, the strategies it encompasses—such as street outreach (e.g., violence interrupters), hospital-based violence intervention programs (HBVIPs), and Group Violence Intervention (GVI)—have existed for decades. CVI formally recognizes and consolidates long-standing grassroots efforts to prevent violence through community engagement, data-informed strategies, and cross-sector collaboration. There is a growing body of research showing how CVI programs can help reduce violence and crime and help program participants achieve better life outcomes.

Violence Interrupter Programs (e.g., Street Outreach Programs)

Violence interrupter programs use trained "credible messengers" from the community, often formerly incarcerated people, ex-gang members, or individuals with direct personal exposure to community violence, to identify and mediate disputes, and connect people to services like counseling, housing, or job support. Due to their strong community ties, violence interrupters can often engage individuals who are reluctant to talk to police and enter spaces where police presence may escalate tensions. Examples include the **Newark Community Street Team** and the **Chicago CRED Program**.

Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs (HBVIPs)

HBVIPs provide immediate crisis intervention and case management to victims of violence in hospitals and trauma centers. HBVIP staff are trained credible messengers who build trust with patients at the bedside, assess retaliation risk, provide connections to supportive services like counseling, safety planning, or help with jobs or housing, and provide ongoing support to prevent revictimization and deter retaliatory violence. Examples include **Chester Community Coalition: Hospital-Linked Violence Prevention Program** and **Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Violence Intervention Program**.

Group Violence Intervention (GVI)

GVI is a focused deterrence strategy that targets those responsible for a disproportionate share of gun violence. Through collaboration between police, prosecutors, community members, and service providers, GVI programs identify gangs, other groups or networks driving violence, and the individuals in them who are at the highest risk of being involved in shootings, either as victims or perpetrators. Police and other GVI partners hold face-to-face call-in sessions to deliver a three-pronged message:

1. Community members impacted by violence provide a credible anti-violence message.
2. Police inform attendees that continued involvement in violence will trigger an immediate, sustained, and coordinated police response, including local or federal prosecution.
3. Service providers offer supportive services and resources to those looking to prevent criminal activity.

Although GVI does not fully align with the definition of CVI because it is not community-led, it is often included under the CVI umbrella because it works closely with the community. Unlike traditional CVI programs, GVI community messengers are not necessarily individuals with lived experience; they may be clergy members or other community leaders. GVI initiatives are typically police-led and involve enhanced information sharing because GVI community messengers have opted in to sharing information with police during shooting reviews. As a result, GVI programs do not have the same confidentiality restrictions as violence interruption programs or HBVIPs. Examples include **Oakland Ceasefire** and **Miami-Dade County GVI**.



Demonstrating the Impact of CVI Programs

Advance Peace Model

Across four sites in Sacramento, CA, gun violence decreased 8 to 29 percent, compared to a 9 percent increase in zones where Advance Peace was not implemented.[1]





Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs

In cities like Baltimore, Philadelphia, and San Francisco, HBVIP participants were less likely to be re-victimized or convicted of future offenses compared to nonparticipants.[2]



UTEC, Inc.

Across coverage areas in Massachusetts, 71 percent of youth clients had no new arraignments after 1 year.

After 2 years, 65 percent of them had no new arraignments.[3]

Newark Community Street Team (NCST)



Across coverage areas in Newark, NJ, between June 2021 and July 2023, NCST's Trauma Recovery Center served 431 victims of violence, while 226 victims of violence enrolled in NCST's HBVIP.

Between 2020 and 2023, 103 community members graduated from NCST's Community Sentinels Leadership Program, which provides training in civic engagement, conflict resolution, and community organizing.[4]

Cure Violence Programs

South Bronx, NY, saw a 63 percent reduction in shooting victims.[5]

Cities like Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Chicago saw at least a 30 percent reduction in homicides.[6]





READI Chicago

A 65 percent reduction in shootings and homicides among male program participants was found.[7]



Operation Peacemaker Fellowship

Richmond, CA, saw a 55 percent reduction in firearm homicides and a 43 percent reduction in assaults.[8]

Safe Streets Baltimore

Through the years 2007–2022, an average of 16 to 23 percent reduction in homicides and nonfatal shootings was seen across implementation sites.[9]





Key Elements of CVI

Since 2022, a range of federal agencies and national organizations have contributed to refining and expanding the definition of CVI.[10] This led to the development of the **Community Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative Implementation Checklist**, which offers one of the most comprehensive definitions of CVI to date.[11]

Drawing upon this work, some of the key elements of CVI programs include:

- **A Community-Centered Approach—**This approach is grounded in the needs, voices, and leadership of local communities. CVI programs are designed and led by community members who understand local dynamics, have credibility with high-risk individuals, and are accountable to the communities they serve.
- **A Focus on High-Risk Individuals—**This focus identifies and supports the small number of individuals who are at the greatest risk of engaging in or becoming a victim of violence.
- **Credible Messengers—**Trusted community members who build relationships and leverage their credibility to mediate conflicts and guide individuals away from violence toward safer and more stable pathways.
- **Short-Term Violence Interruption and Long-Term Benefits—**Proactively addressing immediate risks of violence and retaliation through de-escalating potentially violent situations, while also addressing the underlying causes of violence at the individual level leads to long-term benefits.
- **Connection to Support Services—**Linking individuals to housing, employment, education, mental health care, substance use treatment, and other resources addresses many root causes of violence. CVI programs may also offer long-term case management to help individuals sustain positive changes.

- **Supportive Practices—**Recognizing and addressing the acute and long-term impact of violence on community members and CVI practitioners shape the delivery of programs and services. This helps to inform how practitioners build trust and support behavior change.
- **A Focus on Historically Disadvantaged Communities—**Areas disproportionately affected by violence and long-term systemic challenges are prioritized.
- **Fair Access and Representation—**Ensuring access and representation of all community members across all aspects of the program leads to equitable initiatives.
- **Data-Driven Strategies and Decision-Making—**Organizations can use data and research to guide interventions and measure outcomes.
- **Sustainability and Effectiveness—**Programs can build long-term capacity for ongoing impact and community resilience.
- **Cross-Sector Collaboration—**Coordinating efforts among community groups, public agencies, and police enhances effectiveness.
- **Confidentiality—**CVI programs work with individuals who are often deeply distrustful of institutions, especially police. Offering confidentiality assures participants that they can speak openly without fear that the information will be shared with police. Breaking confidentiality not only impacts the operations and effectiveness of CVI programs, but also the safety of CVI practitioners, as they risk being labeled as "informants". For police, this means CVI workers should not be approached for intelligence about individuals, groups, or incidents. CVI practitioners are not by default mandated reporters, but practices may vary depending on organizational policies, practitioner role, and state law.

Taken together, this information provides police personnel with a foundational outline of the components that make up an effective CVI program.





The Role of Police

Understanding CVI Practitioners

While police officers may work alongside CVI practitioners, police officers do not serve as CVI practitioners. CVI programs rely on trusted community members to serve as frontline practitioners, whose roles, qualifications, and titles vary based on the specific model and program. Central to these efforts are credible messengers, individuals who have trust and influence within a specific community, to deliver outreach and services. Often, the basis of their credibility is deep community knowledge, shared life experiences, backgrounds, or personal histories to those they are trying to reach. As the CVI field continues to evolve and professionalize, certification for credible messengers is becoming increasingly common. However, there is not a national standard at this time.

CVI credible messengers serve in multiple, sometimes overlapping capacities.

Violence interrupters, also known as **outreach workers**, bring direct lived experience with community violence and are frequently individuals who are formerly incarcerated or gang or group-affiliated who have sustained transformational change. They leverage their experience to engage and work with community members who are driving violence in the community and are trained to mediate impending or ongoing street conflicts to interrupt cycles of retaliatory violence.

Case managers, on the other hand, focus on long-term stabilization and personal development. They maintain structured, ongoing engagement with high-risk individuals, assessing needs across domains such as housing, employment, education, mental health, and substance use. Based on these assessments, they develop personalized service plans that outline goals and actionable steps to reduce risk factors associated with violence. Acting as a bridge to community resources and supportive services, they monitor progress and adjust plans as necessary to ensure sustained engagement and positive outcomes. In many programs, outreach workers and case managers work collaboratively—outreach workers build initial trust and case managers provide intensive long-term service coordination. Ultimately, they aim to influence behavior change and help individuals transition away from violence.

Navigating Complementary Strategies

Although police and CVI programs may engage in some overlapping activities, such as fostering trust with community members, serving as guardians, and mediating conflicts, their core functions and operational frameworks are fundamentally distinct. Police agencies often focus on enforcement and investigative efforts using their legal authority to respond to and deter crime through arrests, patrols, and criminal investigations. (This is especially true as agencies struggle with staffing and have a limited capacity to engage in proactive community policing practices). In contrast, CVI practitioners rely on their personal credibility, reputation, and deep community ties to proactively engage community members involved in community violence. They work in spaces where police may have

limited access and little trust. They use conflict mediation strategies and resource connections to prevent violence. While police and CVI programs have different approaches, they are not in opposition. In fact, police and CVI programs are complementary strategies that, when coordinated effectively, can amplify each of their respective impacts to reduce violence, enhance public safety, and promote community wellness.

It is essential to recognize that the level and nature of police involvement in CVI efforts is determined by CVI programs themselves. Because CVI work relies heavily on personal trust, credibility, and safe access to individuals at the highest risk of violence, CVI practitioners must be able to set the boundaries that protect their relationships and the integrity of their approach. Police can offer support when requested, such as sharing data or participating in broader strategic planning, but they should not direct or assume involvement in day-to-day CVI operations. When CVI programs are empowered to define how, when, and to what extent police engage, CVI programs and police can effectively work alongside one another, respecting the distinct roles each plays in reducing violence.





Developing a Professional Understanding

Historically, CVI practitioners' interactions with police were governed by unwritten rules, often resulting in role ambiguity and inconsistent expectations. As jurisdictions move toward formalizing these relationships, many are establishing structured professional understandings that clearly define the roles, responsibilities, and protocols for both parties. These professional understandings foster mutual accountability and enable police agencies and CVI programs to operate in parallel, maintaining independence while supporting shared public safety goals. Importantly, such frameworks help preserve the credibility and community trust that CVI programs rely on, ensuring their effectiveness is not compromised.

For police leaders, it is important to recognize that CVI programs are most impactful when communities see them as independent from police and not as extensions of police operations. Even well-intentioned terms like "cooperation," "collaboration," or "partnership" can unintentionally blur boundaries and compromise the trust CVI professionals have built. Being intentional in framing the relationship as a professional understanding allows both groups to work in parallel, respecting distinct roles while coordinating efforts to reduce violence. Professional understandings between police departments and CVI programs preserve the autonomy of CVI initiatives while enabling both parties to align efforts toward reducing violence. With this foundation in place, police leaders should focus on the key areas where their work intersects and how they can complement each other's strategies.

Key Areas of Intersection



Information Sharing—Police agencies provide vital information to CVI programs such as recent violent crime and gang/group activity that help CVI programs target their strategies to the individuals most at risk of perpetrating or being victimized by violence. In contrast to police agencies, CVI programs cannot share individual-level information without compromising their credibility and endangering staff who operate in these high-risk environments. Doing so would reduce their ability to prevent violence and may put their life at risk for being seen as "working with the police." While they cannot provide specific data on individuals, CVI programs can offer valuable insights at the community level such as community activities, group dynamics, public sentiment, and specific community resource needs to improve public safety. Establishing clear parameters for information sharing at the outset helps align expectations and minimize the potential for misunderstandings. This approach to data sharing supports the shared goals of reducing violence while preserving the integrity and safety of CVI work.



Trust Building and Credibility—For police, developing a professional understanding with CVI programs and demonstrating commitment to working alongside them as a complementary strategy can bolster their perceived legitimacy in the community, support community relations, and build public trust. Additionally, integrating CVI programs as a component of comprehensive public safety initiatives can increase support for CVI with local government officials and policymakers that could positively impact future funding and create program sustainability.



Coordinated Responses—When police agencies or CVI programs identify "hot spots," or concentrated areas of violence, within their community, they can deliver complementary public safety responses in tandem. For instance, CVI programs may deploy CVI practitioners to hot spots to engage the individuals involved by providing conflict resolution, offering connections to supportive services, and highlighting the consequences if they continue to engage in violence, including police intervention.



Reducing Retaliatory Violence—Police are well trained in mediation and de-escalation tactics. However, the relationships CVI practitioners have in their community typically allow them to identify and intervene in emergent conflicts before retaliatory violence occurs and police involvement becomes necessary.



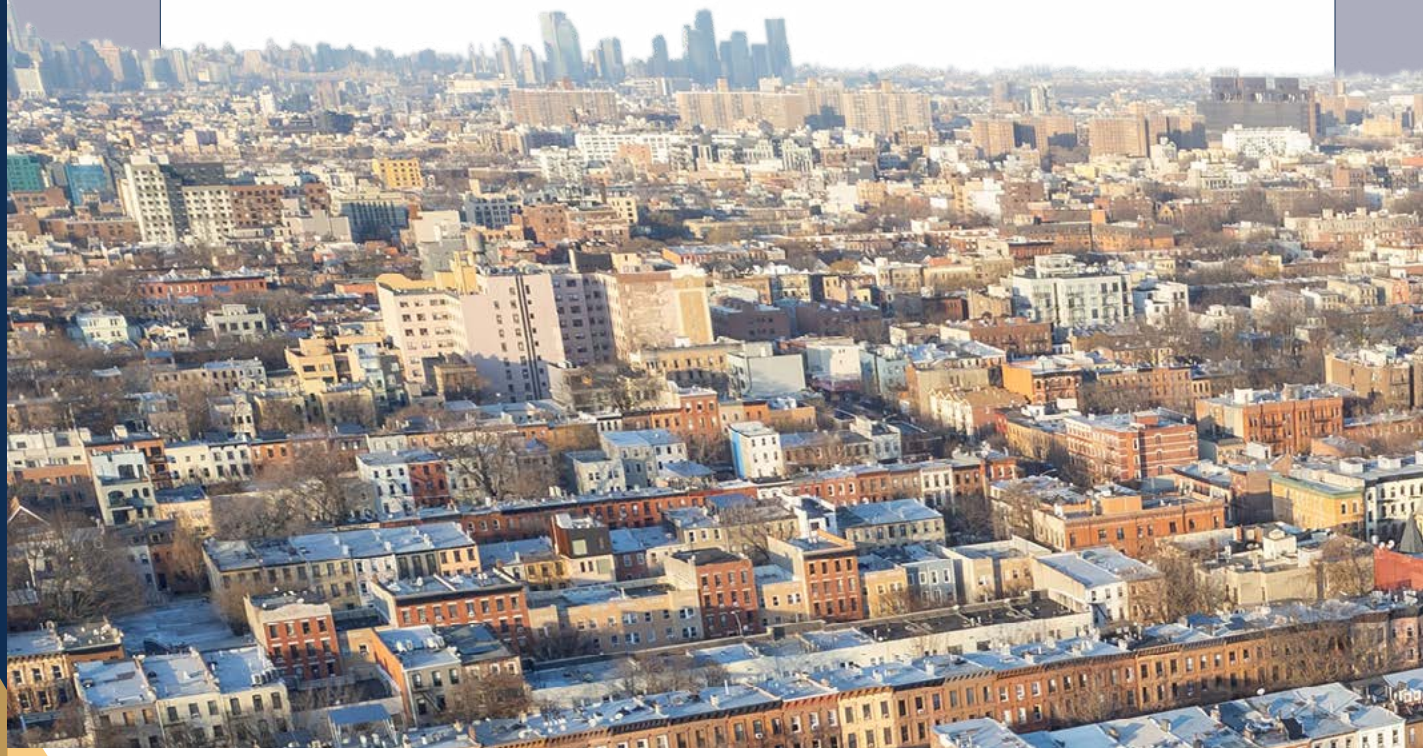
Supporting Strategic Use of Resources—Often, CVI practitioners can mediate conflicts, solve problems, and handle situations in the community before they escalate to violence and require a police response. This proactive approach frees up police resources by reducing the need for police intervention.

Working alongside CVI programs not only enhances day-to-day public safety efforts but also builds the trust and relationships needed to help navigate moments of crisis. This underscores the value of sustained participation in comprehensive public safety initiatives between police and CVI programs: When trust is built in advance, communities and police can respond effectively during times of uncertainty to co-create public safety.

SPOTLIGHTS

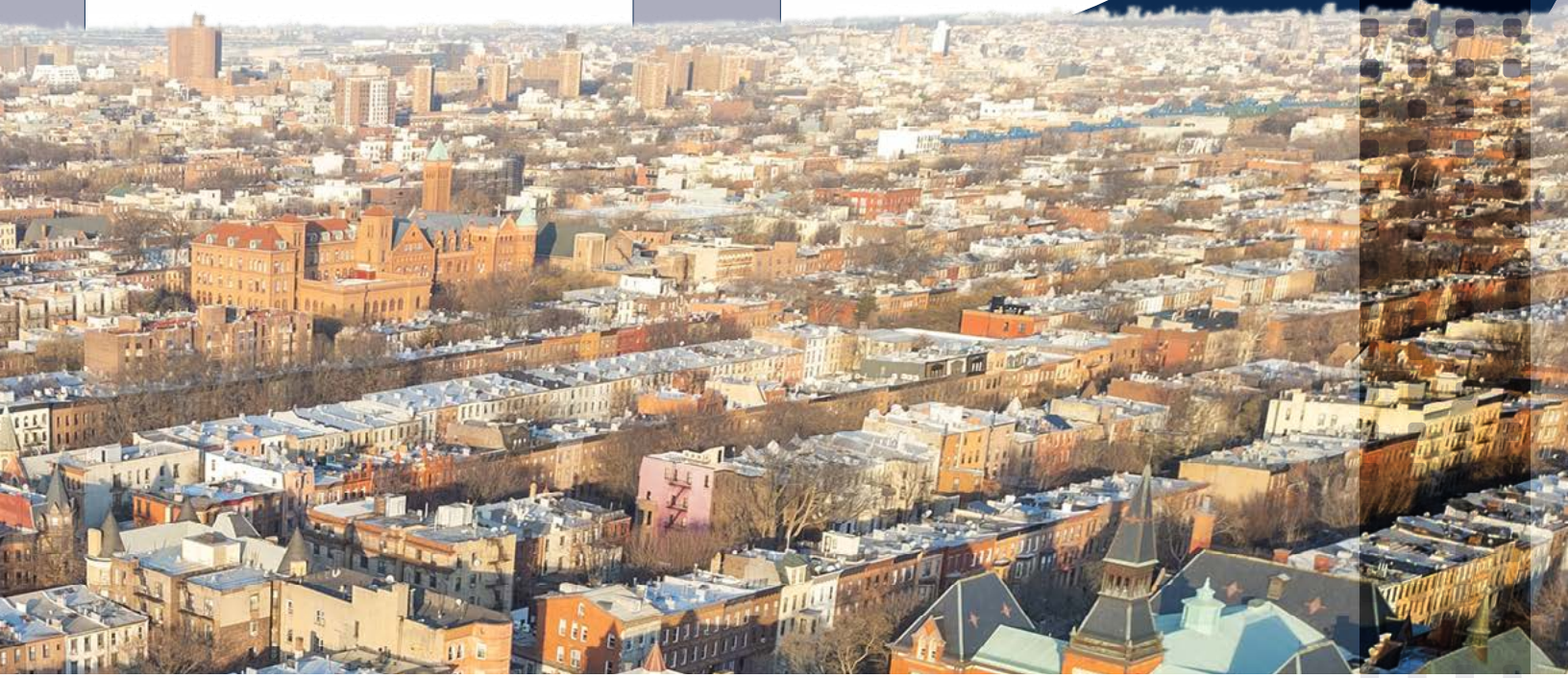
Police personnel can learn from real-world examples of police agencies that have effectively worked alongside CVI programs.

Rapid City, South Dakota—The Rapid City Police Department (RCPD) found that members of the homeless population were at an increased risk of engaging in or being victimized by violence. In response, the RCPD helped facilitate the creation of Journey On, a Native American-led CVI program focused on supporting the homeless population. Launched in 2021, Journey On's credible messengers engage at-risk individuals by building trusting relationships and connecting them with supportive services. Journey On has a strong and evolving partnership with the RCPD, grounded in a shared goal of reducing violence and improving community safety without relying solely on enforcement interventions. The RCPD has provided essential funding, support, and connections to resources and subject-matter experts, without impeding Journey On's agency or independence. Additionally, through collaboration with the RCPD and other public safety stakeholders, Journey On is now a component of Rapid City's co-response program, responding to nonviolent calls for service involving issues related to homelessness, intoxication, and behavioral health crises. Last, with the support of a Community Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative grant through the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the RCPD has expanded on this co-response model, increased Journey On's capacity to serve high-risk youth through case management with police and established a Safe Passage Program in Northside school zones to monitor routes to and from schools. Overall, these co-response efforts decrease the strain on RCPD resources and improve relationships with the Native American community and police.



Lowell, Massachusetts—UTEC, Inc., is a nationally recognized CVI program that has been running for twenty-five years and focuses on supporting young adults who have been involved in violence through a comprehensive model that includes intensive street outreach, behind-the-walls programming inside correctional facilities, and reentry support. UTEC convenes weekly meetings with representatives from police agencies in Lowell, Lawrence, Haverhill, and Methuen counties, which serve as regular forums to review crime trends, analyze recent incidents, and identify hot spots of violence. Police provide data and intelligence, and UTEC provides general information on community dynamics, public safety needs, and public sentiments, but not information that would risk their credibility. These partnerships have evolved through years of sustained trust building, mutual respect, and shared goals of reducing violence. While UTEC and the police agencies work in separate, distinct lanes, they all recognize the shared value of coordinated efforts to reduce violence, promote safety, and improve community well-being.

Los Angeles, California—The Urban Peace Institute (UPI) is a national nonprofit dedicated to building sustainable, community-based public safety infrastructure in communities around the country.[12] In Los Angeles, UPI worked with cross-sector partners to develop the Rapid Response Team. This multi-agency team, convened weekly or as needed, includes leadership from the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD)'s Community Safety Partnership Bureau, People's Health Solutions, and local CVI programs such as Chapter T.W.O. and Southern California Crossroads. The LAPD is a key member, as it provides critical real-time crime data and crime mapping support to the Rapid Response Team. Leveraging police data and hot spot mapping, the team coordinates the strategic deployment of Violence Interrupters and HBVIP practitioners. These efforts aim to reduce gun and gang violence, prevent retaliatory incidents, and build trust between community members and police.





CONCLUSION

Police agencies and CVI programs offer distinct yet complementary strategies for reducing violence that, when taken together, can enhance each of their respective impacts on public safety. For police personnel, developing a professional understanding with CVI programs is not just a strategic enhancement, it maximizes the effective use of valuable resources. CVI practitioners have deep community ties, which are essential for entering spaces or engaging with individuals where police presence may be counterproductive. By mediating conflicts and connecting individuals to critical services, CVI practitioners can reduce the burden on police and prevent violence before it escalates. By fostering collaboration, sharing timely information, and respecting the unique role of CVI practitioners, police can help create a more holistic and effective approach to violence prevention. For police agencies, engaging with CVI programs offers a meaningful opportunity to reduce violence, build public trust, and share responsibility for public safety with the communities they serve.

These relationships take time to grow and develop. However, learning more about CVI can equip police personnel with the knowledge to help strengthen existing relationships and develop new connections with CVI programs.



ENDNOTES

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This project is supported by Cooperative Agreement No. 15PBJA-23-GK-04297-JAGP awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. 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.



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