



Intervention over Incarceration: A Limited Government Approach to Youth Violence

By Logan Seacrest

Policymakers and community leaders across the country need the latest information on this promising, non-law-enforcement approach to youth violence.

Executive Summary

Over the past two decades, community violence intervention (CVI) has emerged as an important violence prevention strategy. CVI programs rely on credible messengers to mediate disputes, conduct focused deterrence, provide service referral, and, most importantly, build genuine relationships with individuals at risk of experiencing violence. By treating violence as a public health problem, CVI programs represent a paradigm shift in protecting vulnerable communities. They remove law enforcement from the equation entirely, going beyond the familiar “limited government solution” framework to one that could be more accurately described as a “no government solution.” Policymakers and community leaders across the country need the latest information on this promising, non-law-enforcement approach to youth violence. Fortunately, in the past five years, a new generation of youth-focused pilot programs has added to the growing body of evidence demonstrating that CVI programs can help juveniles as well as adults. This paper presents evidence covering CVI’s history, theoretical framework, operating models, program evaluations, challenges, and policy implications and concludes with recommendations.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	2
Theoretical Framework	2
Origin of CVI	2
The Pareto Principle	4
Collective Behavior Theory	4
Credible Messengers	5
Bipartisan Consensus	6
Fiscal Benefits	7
Smaller Government	8
CVI Evaluation	8
CVI Challenges	14
(Un)Safe Streets	14
Between Two Worlds	14
Funding	15
Recommendations	15
Conclusion	17
About the Author	17

Introduction

Youth violence in the United States is a significant problem, second only to car crashes as the leading cause of death among children and adolescents.¹ Nonfatal violence is even more widespread, with the rate of violent victimization for persons ages 12 to 17 more than doubling from 2021 to 2022.² Traditional juvenile justice methods alone have proven insufficient to curb this devastating public safety issue. The goal of community violence intervention (CVI) is to reduce homicides and assaults through proactive, direct engagement with those most at risk of either perpetrating or being victimized by violence. Historically, CVI has been geared toward young adults, but recent initiatives have shown CVI can reduce youth violence as well. By shifting the nexus of violence prevention from the state to private individuals and organizations, CVI programs can shrink the footprint of the government and improve public safety at the same time.

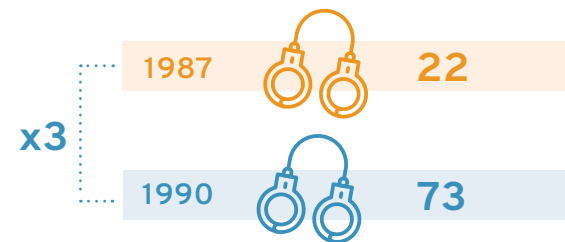
Theoretical Framework

Origin of CVI

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, juvenile homicides in Boston more than tripled—from 22 in 1987 to 73 in 1990.³ To counter this alarming trend, city officials worked with the community to develop Operation Ceasefire, a radically different approach to violence that used direct deterrence rather than investigation and punishment. Beginning in 1995, Ceasefire workers identified young people with the highest risk of gun-related violence and contacted them face-to-face.⁴ Ceasefire workers communicated an unequivocal warning: If violence continued to occur, it would be met with a swift and certain response.⁵ This group accountability model served as a powerful deterrent. Within two years of implementing Operation Ceasefire, the number of youth homicides in Boston dropped to 10, with just one during all of 1999 and 2000.⁶ Overall, the project was associated with a 63 percent reduction in Boston’s youth homicide rate and significant reductions in shots fired, calls for service, and gun-related assaults.⁷ The improvements were so surprising that the program became known as the “Boston Miracle.”⁸

For years, criminologists struggled to explain Operation Ceasefire’s amazing results. They knew it worked, but not how or why. Then, in 1999, an epidemiologist named Gary Slutkin developed a theoretical framework that explained Ceasefire’s success. Slutkin spent most of his career treating infectious diseases in Africa; this field experience shaped his ideas about violence prevention. After returning home, he noticed that patterns of urban violence in Chicago resembled the spread of infectious

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1. Jason E. Goldstick et al., “Current Causes of Death in Children and Adolescents in the United States,” *The New England Journal of Medicine* 386:20 (May 2022), pp. 1955–1956. <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMc2201761>.
2. Office of Justice Programs, “Nonfatal Violent Victimization of Juveniles Returns to Prepandemic Levels,” U.S. Department of Justice, April 25, 2024. <https://www.ojp.gov/news/news-release/nonfatal-violent-victimization-juveniles-returns-prepandemic-levels>.
3. Anthony A. Braga, “Serious Youth Gun Offenders and the Epidemic of Youth Violence in Boston,” *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 19:1 (March 2003), pp. 33–54. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23366743>.
4. David M. Kennedy et al., “Reducing Gun Violence: The Boston Gun Project’s Operation Ceasefire,” National Institute of Justice, September 2001. <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/188741.pdf>.
5. Scott Michaels (Director), *How Operation Ceasefire Transformed Urban Policing* [Film], *The New Yorker*, September 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CuKHAVqm1Gw>.
6. Mark E. Rushefsky, *Public Policy in the United States: At the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century* (M.E. Sharpe, 2002). <https://archive.org/details/publicpolicyinun0003rush/page/n8/mode/1up>.
7. Anthony A. Braga et al., “Problem-Oriented Policing, Deterrence, and Youth Violence: An Evaluation of Boston’s Operation Ceasefire,” *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 38:3 (August 2001), pp. 195–222. https://www.d.umn.edu/~jmaahs/MA%20Theory%20Articles/Braga_problem_oriented%20policing_deterrence.pdf.
8. Sandra Johansson, “Boston’s miracle: how America stopped young men killing each other,” *The Guardian*, Dec. 6, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/dec/06/bostons-miracle-how-free-nappies-and-a-little-mentoring-are-curbng>.

disease he had witnessed overseas. He observed that violence moved through neighborhoods like a contagion, with a single incident leading to even more violence, the same way infected cells become nodes in a network of viral reproduction. Without a sufficiently strong socioeconomic immune system to stop transmission, certain communities continue to be plagued by violence year after year. Embedded in this insight was an aspirational vision: If violence behaves like a disease, perhaps it can be diagnosed, treated, and even cured. By targeting the individuals most at risk of causing harm or becoming victims, it may be possible to “slow the spread” within communities infected by violence.⁹

Based on this epidemiological model of violence, Slutkin founded an organization called Cure Violence, that works to reduce violence in three stages:¹⁰

- **Diagnose the Patient:** Identify individuals at the highest risk of being involved in violence and conduct personal, one-on-one outreach via credible messengers.
- **Interrupt Transmission:** Use the power of personal relationships to prevent minor conflicts and petty arguments from escalating before someone is hurt or killed.
- **Boost Immunity:** Mobilize local residents to change norms that perpetuate violence, provide compelling alternatives, and build resilience.

Cure Violence is centered around violence interrupters—individuals rooted in the community with the specific knowledge and independence necessary to conduct street outreach, de-escalate conflicts, halt retaliation, identify the individualized needs of youth, and provide resources to disrupt cycles of violence.¹¹ Most violence interrupters work independently of law enforcement, giving them additional credibility in the communities they serve, where trust in police is often low. Unlike law enforcement, violence interrupters’ goal is primarily to save lives, not necessarily fight crime.¹² This epidemiological approach has since become common across the CVI landscape, reducing violence by up to 70 percent in diverse communities in the United States and around the world.¹³ Independently administered, multiyear scientific evaluations in communities that deploy CVI techniques document other positive effects, including higher employment rates, better educational outcomes, and increased feelings of overall safety.¹⁴

CVI programs can be broadly categorized based on either the level of law enforcement collaboration or the setting where intervention occurs.¹⁵ **Group violence intervention** programs (like the original Operation Ceasefire) involve community leaders and law enforcement working together to identify hotspots for violence, relying on both personal intervention and police enforcement to deter further bloodshed. Individuals who continue to engage in violence are subject to arrest and prosecution, which is clearly communicated up front and only used once violence occurs.¹⁶ This type of CVI is distinct from **violence interrupter** programs (such as Cure Violence), which feature



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9. David M. Hureau et al., “Streetwork at the crossroads: An evaluation of a street gang outreach intervention and holistic appraisal of the research evidence,” *Criminology* 61:4 (November 2023), pp. 758-794. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9125.12353>

10. “Gary Slutkin,” Cure Violence Global, February 2020. <https://cvg.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2020.02.06-Gary-Slutkin.pdf>.

11. Steve James (Director), *The Interrupters* [Film], Frontline, Feb. 14, 2012. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/documentary/interrupters>.

12. “Community Violence Intervention Programs, Explained,” Vera Institute of Justice, September 2021. <https://www.vera.org/inline-downloads/community-violence-intervention-programs-explained-report.pdf>.

13. “The Evidence of Effectiveness,” Cure Violence Global, August 2022. <https://cvg.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Cure-Violence-Evidence-Summary.pdf>.

14. Ibid.

15. Josh Weber, “Restorative Justice Practices and Credible Messengers: Promising, Innovative Approaches for Improving Outcomes for Youth in the Juvenile Justice System,” CSG Justice Center, February 2024. <https://csjusticecenter.org/publications/restorative-justice-practices-and-credible-messengers-promising-innovative-approaches-for-improving-outcomes-for-youth-in-the-juvenile-justice-system>.

16. National Network For Safe Communities, “Group Violence Intervention,” John Jay College of Criminal Justice, last accessed May 8, 2024. <https://nnscommunities.org/strategies/group-violence-intervention>.

much less direct law enforcement involvement. In addition, **hospital-based violence intervention** programs operate out of emergency departments and trauma centers to engage survivors of violence immediately after injury occurs. Staff work with victims as well as their families to prevent retaliation and facilitate their immediate recovery with trauma support, counseling, and safety planning.¹⁷ No matter the model, the goal is to move people away from a retributive mindset by providing them with coping mechanisms, problem-solving abilities, and communication skills.

The Pareto Principle

CVI programs are based on decades of consistent research showing that only a small group of people drive most of the killing. Typically, less than 0.5 percent of a given population engages in violent crime, but this small percentage is linked to 60 to 70 percent of shootings and homicides.¹⁸ This disparity is a good example of the Pareto principle, which states that for many phenomena in nature, economics, and social science, a small proportion of causes typically lead to a large proportion of effects.¹⁹ Murders and shootings, for instance, are heavily concentrated geographically, and therefore disproportionately affect certain populations and neighborhoods. For example, young people growing up in some Chicago neighborhoods are exposed to gun violence at rates almost 30 times higher than their peers just a few miles—or even a few blocks—away.²⁰ Research on Operation Ceasefire in Boston over a 29-year period confirmed that 74 percent of serious violent incidents occurred on only 5 percent of the street blocks and intersections in the city.²¹

If crime and violence generally concentrate in and around a small number of high-risk places, people, and behaviors, it is logical that interventions targeting these elements would have the largest effect. Indeed, a systematic review of 41 violence intervention programs found that those targeting specific at-risk youth almost always outperformed more generalized approaches that cast a wider net.²² For this reason, CVI programs operate via the Pareto principle, deeply embedded within specific neighborhoods, relying on hyperlocal knowledge and leadership to target the small subset of the population causing, or subject to, most of the violence. To identify participants with high potential to be affected by violence, CVI programs use both algorithmic and human methods, gathering referrals from community leaders, law enforcement, hospitals, churches, and schools.

Collective Behavior Theory

To understand why CVI is effective at reducing youth violence, we must first understand why youth violence is particularly contagious. The theory of collective behavior posits that youth violence is usually the result of threats or perceived threats, which increase group membership, enhance solidarity, and lead to cycles of attack and retaliation.²³ Disputes between young people can turn violent quickly



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17. Noé D. Romo et al., “Improving Adolescent Violent Trauma Outcomes With a Hospital-Based Violence Prevention Initiative,” *Hospital Pediatrics* 13:2 (February 2023), pp. 153-158. <https://doi.org/10.1542/hpeds.2021-006428>.
18. Thomas P. Abt, “Towards a framework for preventing community violence among youth,” *Psychology, Health & Medicine* 22: Sup 1 (March 2017), pp. 266-285. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13548506.2016.1257815>.
19. R. Dunford et al., “The Pareto Principle,” *The Plymouth Student Scientist* 7:1 (2014), pp. 140-148. <https://pearl.plymouth.ac.uk/handle/10026.1/14054>.
20. Ford Fessenden and Haeyoun Park, “Chicago’s Murder Problem,” *The New York Times*, May 27, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/05/18/us/chicago-murder-problem.html>.
21. Anthony A. Braga et al., “The Concentration and Stability of Gun Violence at Micro Places in Boston, 1980–2008,” *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 26 (March, 2010), pp. 33-53. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-009-9082-x>.
22. Mary Ann Limbos et al., “Effectiveness of Interventions to Prevent Youth Violence: A Systematic Review,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 33:1 (July 2007), pp. 65-74. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2007.02.045>.
23. Rebecca Littman and Elizabeth Levy Paluck, “The Cycle of Violence: Understanding Individual Participation in Collective Violence,” *Political Psychology* 36:S1 (Feb. 20, 2015), pp. 19-99. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.12239>.

because they lack the maturity and impulse control necessary to manage conflict peacefully.²⁴ Collective behavior explains much of youth gang activity, as any threat (real or imagined) bonds insiders together against a common enemy and dehumanizes those outside of the group, which allows members to normalize external violence.²⁵ The internet has only exacerbated these forces by magnifying the virality of violence, as disputes online spill over into real world carnage.²⁶ Indeed, social media functions as a powerful tool to organize and coordinate attacks, providing an easy mechanism to recruit, plan, and share intelligence on rival groups. For instance, platforms with geographic tags show where an individual is located, which can increase the chances of a lethal public confrontation. When calls for reprisal go viral, the danger is hard to contain.²⁷

Credible Messengers

Consistent, caring adults are critical for young people to thrive and flourish. However, many adults in positions of power have trouble communicating with young people involved in violence or the justice system.²⁸ Often the problem is not the message—the problem is the messenger. Even the most powerful or well-crafted anti-violence message will fall flat if the recipient does not authentically identify with the person conveying it. The problem is compounded when the messenger—often a well-meaning counselor, teacher, or police officer—is a beneficiary of race, class, and educational privileges that the young person has never experienced. To make anti-violence messages more relatable, CVI programs use “credible messengers,” trusted insiders that share similar backgrounds and characteristics to at-risk youth, giving them firsthand knowledge about how to put their lives on a more positive trajectory.

Credible messengers are frequently able to motivate hard-to-reach young people where other professionals have failed by using personal stories and shared trauma to foster genuine connections and model behavioral change. They are often former gang members or individuals with a history in the criminal justice system.²⁹ Credible messengers are chosen specifically based on demonstrated leadership qualities and subjected to a thorough screening process, as they serve on the front lines of urban violence, tracking youth and gang activity, responding to incidents, mediating conflicts, and even maintaining a presence at crime scenes to reduce the likelihood of retaliatory attacks. Ideally, credible messengers are able to help resolve conflicts through dialogue and outreach, without resorting to government authorities.

The unique position that credible messengers occupy enables them to act as a bridge between youth and community services, connecting clients with employment opportunities, educational resources, and healthcare. A credible messenger’s job is not only to prevent specific incidents of violence from occurring, but also to gradually shift the youth’s cultural orientation from retribution to one of compassion. In this capacity, credible messengers also serve as change agents, reorienting youths prone to seek vengeance toward pro-social activities and increasing the positive connections



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24. Logan Seacrest, “Treating Kids Like Kids: ‘Raise the Age’ Laws Align Juvenile Justice with Neuroscience and Common Sense,” The R Street Institute, Feb. 2, 2023. <https://www.rstreet.org/research/treating-kids-like-kids-raise-the-age-laws-align-juvenile-justice-with-neuroscience-and-common-sense>.

25. Scott H. Decker and G. David Curry, “Gangs, gang homicides, and gang loyalty: Organized crimes or disorganized criminals,” *Journal of Criminal Justice* 30:4 (July–August 2002), pp. 343–352. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0047-2352\(02\)00134-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0047-2352(02)00134-4).

26. Ariadna Fernández-Planells et al., “Gangs and social media: A systematic literature review and an identification of future challenges, risks and recommendations,” *New Media & Society* 23:7 (July 2021), pp. 2099–2124. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444821994490>.

27. Ibid.

28. Julia Lesnick et al., “Credible messenger mentoring to promote the health of youth involved in the juvenile legal system: A narrative review,” *Current Problems in Pediatric and Adolescent Health Care* 53:6 (June 2023). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cppeds.2023.101435>.

29. Rod Martinez et al., “New York City’s Wounded Healers: A Cross-Program, Participatory Action Research Study of Credible Messengers,” Urban Institute, Dec. 8, 2022. <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/new-york-citys-wounded-healers-cross-program-participatory-action-research>.

between young people in disadvantaged communities. This process builds social capital, repairing the networks individuals depend on to meet basic needs, modeling civil engagement and communicating the norms of reciprocity. As an important source of informal behavior regulation, low levels of social capital are associated with increased community violence.³⁰ CVI programs help generate social capital by hosting trust-building events, such as candlelight vigils, cookouts, peace walks, and athletic activities.³¹ Despite the importance of community building and service provision, the most influential factor leading to long-term behavioral change is the personal relationship between the young person and credible messenger.³²

CVI in Action

To illustrate the role that credible messengers play in CVI, consider the following hypothetical scenario:

At a school in an inner-city neighborhood, tensions escalate between two rival groups of youth following an altercation at a pickup basketball game. Rumors circulate that members from one group are planning to retaliate at a school barbecue the next day. A concerned parent informs a CVI volunteer named Franklin, who served time in prison after being involved in a gang-related shooting in the area. Franklin immediately reaches out to influential members of both groups, discussing the consequences of retaliation by emphasizing the potential repercussions and harms, sharing personal stories about the suffering he personally experienced after being shot. The next day, he and other CVI staff maintain a visible presence at the barbecue to prevent escalation of the conflict. Once tempers have cooled off, both groups participate in a CVI-facilitated restorative justice workshop to negotiate a lasting peace.



Bipartisan Consensus

Historically, CVI programs have mostly been implemented in liberal urban centers. Recent experiments in red states have been encouraging, demonstrating CVI's adaptability to different political environments and compatibility with bipartisan values such as fiscal restraint and local control.³³ CVI programs recognize that community members will always understand the idiosyncratic circumstances that give rise to violence better than federal, state, or even municipal law enforcement officials. In other words, those closest to the problem are best positioned to find solutions, and there is no such thing as one-size-fits-all. One example of CVI's ideological diversity is Stick Talk, a form of "gun harm reduction" founded by former victims and second amendment advocates who were dissatisfied with CVI's traditional abstinence-based approach to gun ownership.³⁴ In contrast, Stick Talk responds to urban violence without demonizing firearm possession, which demonstrates the versatility of CVI programs for policymakers looking for bipartisan solutions. Empowering local leaders to manage and resolve issues internally, instead of through the formal justice system, expands individual freedom and diminishes the role the state plays in the day-to-day lives of individuals.

30. Megan Alderden, "Community Violence Prevention, Intervention, and Suppression," Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, June 17, 2017. <https://icjia.illinois.gov/researchhub/articles/community-violence-prevention-intervention-and-suppression>.

31. José Santos Moreno and Michya Cooper, "Violence Interrupters: Frequently Asked Questions," Friends Committee on National Legislation, Aug. 31, 2023. <https://www.fcni.org/updates/2023-08/violence-interrupters-frequently-asked-questions>.

32. "Effective Community Based Violence Reduction Strategies," National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform, 2020. <https://nicjr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Effective-Community-Based-Violence-Reduction-Strategies.pdf>.

33. Jule Smith and Alex Apple, "Mayor's Office of Community Safety Receives Nearly \$2 Million Grant for Violence Intervention and Prevention," Nashville Mayor's Office, Oct. 2, 2023. <https://www.nashville.gov/departments/mayor/news/mayors-office-community-safety-receives-nearly-2-million-grant>.

34. "Who We Are," Stick Talk: Firearm Harm Reduction, last accessed June 2024. <https://www.sticktalk.org/about>.

Fiscal Benefits

Youth violence is costly across every conceivable metric. Preventing it has ripple effects that produce compounding cost savings across the healthcare, criminal justice, and social welfare systems. Gunshots wounds, for example, are complex injuries that are expensive to treat and manage. Nationally, youth homicides and nonfatal physical assault-related injuries resulted in an estimated economic impact of \$122 billion in 2020, including medical care, lost work, and productivity costs.³⁵ As a result of the expansion of Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, the government has become the primary insurer for victims of violence, paying for nearly 40 percent of emergency room visits.³⁶ Thus, taxpayers now shoulder a significant share of these medical costs, particularly for severe injuries that require long-term services and support.³⁷ From a first principles perspective, preventing even a small proportion of these injuries would produce meaningful savings in the healthcare system.

Addressing delinquent behavior before it requires punitive measures can pay for itself over time. Fewer assaults and homicides mean fewer police investigations, court trials, and juveniles sent to detention, which relieves the burden on limited criminal justice resources. The average juvenile detention cost in the United States is now \$588 per day, or \$214,620 per year—a 44 percent increase from a decade ago, and costs are substantially higher in some states.³⁸ There are also hidden costs beyond the immediate medical and legal bills. Youth who experience violence as victims, perpetrators, or witnesses are more likely to develop behavioral and mental health difficulties, including post-traumatic stress, smoking, substance use, obesity, high-risk sexual behavior, depression, and suicide.³⁹ This population is also over twice as likely to be victimized in the future.⁴⁰ Consistent childhood exposure to trauma can be detrimental to every aspect of life, from mental health to academic achievement. Taken together, the innumerable downstream costs related to a single homicide can amount to over \$1 million.⁴¹ Considering the high cost of gun violence, researchers estimate CVI programs return \$7.20 to \$19.20 in economic benefits for every \$1 invested.⁴² It is clear that as with other types of deregulation, displacing the omnipresent “criminal justice-industrial complex,” with a private sector solution produces savings over time.



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35. Cora Peterson et al., “Economic Burden of US Youth Violence Injuries,” *JAMA Pediatrics* 177:11 (Sept. 18, 2023), pp. 1232-1234. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2023.3235>.
36. Kyle Fischer et al., “Medicaid: Advancing Equity for Victims of Violence,” The Health Alliance for Violence Intervention, 2021. <https://www.thehavi.org/public-funding-for-violence-intervention>.
37. Racquel Bozzelli, “A New Federalist Approach to Reducing Gun Violence: Model State Policy for Medicaid-Funded, Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs,” *Buffalo Law Review* 72:1 (March 29, 2024), pp. 419-453. <https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5007&context=buffalolawreview>.
38. “Sticker Shock 2020: The Cost of Youth Incarceration,” Justice Policy Institute, July 30, 2020. <https://justicepolicy.org/research/policy-brief-2020-sticker-shock-the-cost-of-youth-incarceration>.
39. Elizabeth M. Parker et al., “The Health and Economic Impact of Youth Violence by Injury Mechanism,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 66:5 (May 2024), pp. 894-898. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2023.12.019>.
40. Caterina G. Roman et al., “The Victim-Offender Overlap: Examining Police and Service System Networks of Response among Violent Street Conflicts,” Temple University Department of Criminal Justice, December 2019. <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/254626.pdf>.
41. “The National Cost of Gun Violence: The Price Tag for Taxpayers,” National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform, January 2023. https://costofviolence.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/NationalCoVReport_022123.pdf.
42. Daniel W. Webster et al., “Estimating the Effects of Safe Streets Baltimore on Gun Violence,” Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, March 2023. <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/sites/default/files/2023-10/estimating-the-effects-of-safe-streets-baltimore-on-gun-violence-july-2023.pdf>.

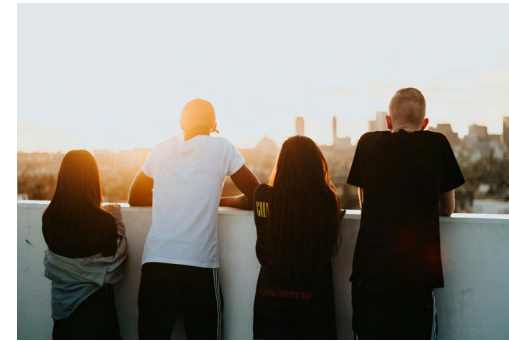
Smaller Government

By putting violence prevention in the hands of individual citizens and organizations, CVI embodies a true limited-government approach to juvenile justice. CVI programs are often supported by private and philanthropic funding, minimizing government spending in favor of private sector, free market solutions.⁴³ CVI programs can capitalize on preexisting community assets, such as local churches, community centers, and nonprofit facilities, which can provide space and services at reduced rates or even for free and maximize the impact of each dollar spent. In addition to reducing the need for heavy-handed government intervention, CVI programs also promote personal responsibility and individual agency, requiring young people to take ownership of their lives and communities. This not only reduces reliance on government, but builds stronger, more cohesive communities capable of self-regulated conflict resolution. Furthermore, CVI programs provide former felons with a meaningful career, one uniquely suited to their life experience. Research studies demonstrate that one of the best ways to reduce adult recidivism is stable employment.⁴⁴ Yet the average unemployment rate for ex-prisoners is over 27 percent—higher than the national rate during the Great Depression.⁴⁵ Giving former offenders a productive career creates a pathway to rehabilitation for the millions of incarcerated individuals in the United States. In fact, applying for a CVI job is one of the only places where a criminal conviction is an asset rather than a liability.

CVI Evaluation

If we treat violence as a public health issue, the standard for research rigor should match that of any other health intervention. However, due to the nature of violence prevention, measuring the impact of CVI is challenging. Simply comparing outcomes for a group that received a treatment versus one that did not can introduce selection bias. This can be a particularly tricky problem in CVI evaluation. After all, programs are *supposed* to actively screen for certain characteristics, which is perhaps the very definition of “selection bias.” This is a problem for the entire field of CVI evaluation but is rarely discussed in the literature. These kinds of methodological concerns can affect the willingness of stakeholders to support or continue funding CVI programs.⁴⁶

Luckily for policymakers and criminal justice professionals, a huge amount of fresh research—including randomized control trials (RCTs)—has been conducted and published in the past few years. According to this new evidence, CVI can significantly reduce both violence and recidivism for at-risk youth.⁴⁷ Below is a quick reference guide to the most rigorous of these studies from the past five years, including their methodology, program details, and key findings. To be eligible for inclusion in this analysis, studies must contain one or more quantitative estimates of a CVI program’s impact, either on youth violence or juvenile justice involvement.



CVI programs promote personal responsibility and individual agency, requiring young people to take ownership of their lives and communities.

43. Yucel Ors, “Community Violence Intervention Funding Opportunities for Local Leaders,” National League of Cities, April 10, 2024. <https://www.nlc.org/article/2024/04/10/community-violence-intervention-funding-opportunities-for-local-leaders>.

44. Christi M. Smith, “The Pathway to Prosperity: How Clean Slate Legislation Enhances Public Safety and Stimulates the Economy,” *R Street Policy Study* No. 279, March 14, 2023. <https://www.rstreet.org/research/the-pathway-to-prosperity-how-clean-slate-legislation-enhances-public-safety-and-stimulates-the-economy>.

45. Logan Seacrest, “Clean Slate: Old Arrest Records Hurt Public Safety and Economic Stability,” *R Street Institute*, Nov. 29, 2022. <https://www.rstreet.org/commentary/clean-slate-old-arrest-records-hurt-public-safety-and-economic-stability>.

46. Olga Pierce, “Studying Gun Violence Is Hard. But Intervention Programs Need Research to Survive,” *The Trace*, Jan. 4, 2023. <https://www.thetrace.org/2023/01/gun-violence-intervention-research>.

47. Weber. <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/restorative-justice-practices-and-credible-messengers-promising-innovative-approaches-for-improving-outcomes-for-youth-in-the-juvenile-justice-system>.

Study: Evaluating the Impact of a Street Outreach Intervention on Participant Involvement in Gun Violence⁴⁸

City: Oakland, CA
Date: January 2018
Methodology: Bayesian regression analysis

Program: Create Real Economic Destiny (CRED)

Program Details: Teens in the CRED program at high risk of committing or being victimized by gun violence meet two days per week after school to learn a range of life skills, including financial literacy and stress management. Because the participants are young and often living with a parent or guardian, program staff also work directly with families, providing cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), restorative justice, and addiction treatment.

Key Findings: Individuals who completed the full program were 73 percent less likely to be arrested for a violent crime in the two years following enrollment compared to individuals who did not participate. All CRED program participants experienced some benefits, but those who completed the full 24-month program had the best outcomes.



Study: Choose to Change: University of Chicago Crime and Education Labs Research Brief⁴⁹

City: Chicago, IL
Date: January 2018
Methodology: RCT

Program: Choose to Change (C2C)

Program Details: Launched in 2015, C2C is a 6-month intervention that offers youth on the South and West Sides of Chicago intensive wraparound mentoring services. Credible messengers serve as the first point of contact, providing a broad spectrum of services to youth, from obtaining basic necessities to direction on employment and educational goals. In addition, clinically trained therapists create individualized plans to help young people regulate their emotions and understand how chronic trauma and stress contribute to negative thought patterns and behavior.

Key Findings: Participating youth had 48 percent fewer violent crime arrests and 42 percent fewer total arrests than peers in the control group. The effect persisted over time, with participants having 38 percent fewer violent crime arrests than the control group after two years. At the program's conclusion, C2C youth were 39 percent less likely to have any arrest at all compared to the control group, an effect that also persisted after program completion. In addition, C2C improved educational engagement, with C2C youth attending an additional seven days of class per year, with 32 percent fewer school misconduct incidents.



48. Marisa C. Ross et al., "Evaluating the impact of a street outreach intervention on participant involvement in gun violence," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 120:46 (Nov. 6, 2023). <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2300327120>.

49. "Choose to Change: Your Mind, Your Game: University of Chicago Crime and Education Labs Research Brief," University of Chicago, February 2020. <https://crimelab.uchicago.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/06/ChoosetoChangeResearchBrief.pdf>.

**Study: Evaluation Report on
New York City’s Advocate, Intervene,
Mentor Program⁵⁰**

City: New York, NY
Date: October 2018
Methodology: Mixed-method

Program: Advocate, Intervene, Mentor (AIM)

Program Details: AIM is a court-mandated juvenile alternative-to-placement program that serves probation clients aged 13 to 18 years with high criminogenic risks. The program operates under the oversight of the NYC Mayor’s Office for Economic Opportunity and employs a one-on-one mentoring model with a paid credible advocate/mentor available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Key Findings: Over 90 percent of participants avoided felony rearrests within 12 months of enrollment, significantly exceeding the program’s target goals. More than two-thirds of participants completed the program without an out-of-home placement.



**Study: Baltimore Ceasefire 365:
Estimated Impact of a Recurring
Community-Led Ceasefire on
Gun Violence⁵¹**

City: Baltimore, MD
Date: March 2020
Methodology: Bayesian regression analysis

Program: Ceasefire 365

Program Details: Ceasefire 365 is a recurring, grassroots initiative to reduce gun violence by calling for city-wide ceasefires over designated weekends. Initiated in 2017 with the call to action that “Nobody Kill Anybody” for 72 hours, the program is not affiliated with any law enforcement or governmental agency, making it purely community driven. During Ceasefire weekends, volunteers engage in various peace-building activities such as rallies, vigils, and resource fairs to foster a culture of non-violence.

Key Findings: Researchers took advantage of the intermittent nature of the program, finding a 52 percent reduction in gun violence during ceasefire days compared to non-ceasefire days over a period of seven years. There was no evidence of a postponement effect, meaning the reduction in gun violence was not followed by a compensatory increase in the following days.



50. Lindsey Cramer et al., “Evaluation Report on New York City’s Advocate, Intervene, Mentor Program,” Urban Institute, October 2018. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/99228/evaluation_report_on_new_york_citys_aim_program.pdf.

51. Peter Phalen et al., “Baltimore Ceasefire 365: Estimated Impact of a Recurring Community-Led Ceasefire on Gun Violence,” *American Journal of Public Health* 110:4 (March 11, 2020), pp. 554-559. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305513>.

**Study: Healthy, Wealthy and Wise:
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and
Transformative Credible Messenger
Mentoring to Reduce Violence
and Justice⁵²**

City: Oakland, CA
Date: March 2020
Methodology: Mixed-method

Program: Healthy Wealthy and Wise (HWW)

Program Details: HWW is a 16-week program designed for youth and young adults at risk of experiencing violence or justice system involvement. The program employs a combination of facilitated group CBT sessions and one-on-one mentoring through credible mentor life coaches who maintain contact up to 18 months after program completion. The focus of the curriculum is on decision making, cognitive restructuring, identity formation, and goal setting.

Key Findings: The study found significant reductions in recidivism and gun violence, demonstrating the program’s ability to alter destructive behavior patterns. The recidivism rate for participants was 10 percent—which is significantly lower than the overall recidivism rate for young people in California—and only 3 percent were involved in new incidents of gun violence. Economic analysis indicated a high return on investment, with substantial social and economic benefits resulting from the program’s impact on reducing violence and improving participant outcomes.



**Study: Improving Adolescent Violent
Trauma Outcomes with a Hospital-Based
Violence Prevention Initiative⁵³**

City: New York, NY
Date: January 2023
Methodology: Retrospective cohort with multivariate regression

Program: Stand Up to Violence (SUV)

Program Details: SUV integrates hospital and community outreach efforts to improve outcomes for adolescent patients suffering violent injuries. The team includes social workers, medical directors, hospital responders, and outreach workers who provide immediate support in the hospital and continuing care after discharge.

Key Findings: Patients in the treatment group demonstrated increased likelihood of attending follow-up medical visits and showed significantly lower odds of being readmitted with violent injuries. The study demonstrates that SUV can effectively extend care beyond immediate medical treatment and significantly reduce exposure to subsequent violence.



52. David Muhammad and Cait Ahearn, “Healthy, Wealthy and Wise: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Transformative Credible Messenger Mentoring to Reduce Violence and Justice System Involvement,” National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform, March 2020. <https://nicjr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/HWWReport.pdf>.

53. Noé D. Romo et al., “Improving Adolescent Violent Trauma Outcomes With a Hospital-Based Violence Prevention Initiative,” *Hospital Pediatrics* 13:2 (February 2023), pp. 153-158. <https://doi.org/10.1542/hpeds.2021-006428>.

Study: Estimating the Effects of Safe Streets Baltimore on Gun Violence⁵⁴

City: Baltimore, MD
Date: March 2023
Methodology: PSM

Program: Safe Streets

Program Details: Launched in East Baltimore’s McElderry Park in 2007, Safe Streets combines violence interrupters for direct interventions and case managers that connect individuals to services and opportunities that reduce their risk of being arrested, injured, or killed.

Key Findings: Johns Hopkins researchers analyzed homicides and nonfatal shootings across 11 Safe Street sites over 19 years, from January 2003 through July 2022. Researchers estimated that the program was associated with a 23 percent reduction in nonfatal shootings across all 11 sites and with reductions in both fatalities and shootings in eight of the sites. In the longest-running sites, homicides decreased by 32 percent. Results were less pronounced in newer sites, suggesting that CVI can take time to start having an effect.



Study: Multidisciplinary Teams, Street Outreach, and Gang Intervention: Mixed Methods Findings from a Randomized Controlled Trial in Denver⁵⁵

City: Denver, CO
Date: April 2023
Methodology: RCT

Program: Gang Reduction Initiative of Denver (GRID)

Program Details: Since 2009, GRID has employed a dual intervention strategy combining multidisciplinary teams and street outreach. Teams consist of probation officers, human services representatives, and credible messengers who collaboratively develop individualized case plans for behavioral health, education, and employment. This personalized approach requires detailed awareness of gang dynamics that could impact the viability of these plans, such as ensuring a youth is not transferred to a school in a rival gang’s neighborhood.

Key Findings: Between 2019 and 2022, researchers paired a process evaluation with a randomized controlled trial, determining GRID participants were nearly 70 percent less likely to perpetrate violence than the control group. Interestingly, participants were more likely to identify as gang members, indicating that the intervention changed behavior rather than identity. The process evaluation indicated that GRID teams were effective in securing mental health and addiction treatment services for their clients.



54. Webster et al. <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/sites/default/files/2023-10/estimating-the-effects-of-safe-streets-baltimore-on-gun-violence-july-2023.pdf>.

55. David Pyrooz et al., “Multidisciplinary Teams, Street Outreach, and Gang Intervention: Mixed Methods Findings from a Randomized Controlled Trial in Denver,” University of Colorado Boulder, April 14, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/3bqfr>.

Study: Predicting and Preventing Gun Violence: An Experimental Evaluation of READI Chicago⁵⁶

City: Chicago, IL
Date: July 2023
Methodology: RCT

Program: Rapid Employment and Development Initiative (READI)

Program Details: READI operates in Chicago’s most dangerous neighborhoods, combining multimodal economic incentives, subsidized employment, and mental health support. Participants are identified through predictive algorithms based on police data, referrals from local outreach workers, and screening of individuals exiting the criminal justice system.

Key Findings: Researchers found firearm and homicide arrests decreased by 65 percent. They estimated the program generated significant savings, ranging from \$182,000 to \$916,000 per participant, with a cost-benefit ratio between 1:4 and 1:18. The program showed greater efficacy (79 percent fewer arrests) among participants referred by outreach workers than other referral methods.



Study: Streetwork at the Crossroads: An Evaluation of a Street Gang Outreach Intervention and Holistic Appraisal of the Research Evidence⁵⁷

City: Boston, MA
Date: October 2023
Methodology: PSM and other matching techniques

Program: StreetSafe Boston (SSB)

Program Details: SSB is a partnership between police, researchers, and service practitioners that works with individuals who have had recent involvement in serious violence. SSB prioritizes sophisticated data monitoring and analysis with a dedicated data manager on staff providing real-time notification of shootings and fights using intelligence gathered from Boston police and local hospitals.

Key Findings: SSB reached a significant proportion of targeted gang members, with about 88 percent having been contacted by outreach workers, which led to positive outcomes, such as increased access to social services for the participants. However, the study found that SSB treatment was associated with an *increase* in shootings relative to a matched set of comparison groups during the four-year intervention period, although the results were not statistically significant.



56. Monica P. Bhatt et al., “Predicting and Preventing Gun Violence: An Experimental Evaluation of READI Chicago,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 139:1 (February 2024), pp. 1-56. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjad031>.

57. David M. Hureau et al., “Streetwork at the crossroads: An evaluation of a street gang outreach intervention and holistic appraisal of the research evidence,” *Criminology* 61:4 (November 2023), pp. 758-794. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9125.12353>.

CVI Challenges

(Un)Safe Streets

Working day in and day out around violence can come at a high price. In 2021, Dante Barksdale, a leader in Baltimore's Safe Streets' program, was gunned down while on the job. The target of the shooting was a young man Barksdale was trying to help, but the killers fired indiscriminately at the corner where the two were standing.⁵⁸ Over the course of the next 12 months, Safe Streets violence interrupters Kenyell Wilson and DaShawn McGrier were also shot to death.⁵⁹ The attacks, while unconnected, prompted widespread soul searching in the CVI community, raising safety concerns and questions about whether enough was being done to protect workers. After an internal review, bulletproof vests were made available for workers during night shifts, but many refrain from wearing them, fearing the vests make them look too much like police officers.⁶⁰ The emotional and physical toll of prolonged exposure to high-stress working conditions has led to high turnover rates among staff, affecting the consistency and reliability of program delivery.⁶¹

Between Two Worlds

The murders of Safe Streets workers underscore a core challenge of CVI, namely the tension inherent in asking violence interrupters to straddle two worlds simultaneously. CVI workers must maintain familiarity with street-level dynamics of crime without getting personally involved. Meanwhile, they need to work with law enforcement while visibly maintaining their independence at the same time. This delicate balance requires diplomacy, interpersonal acumen, and a high degree of emotional intelligence, especially in communities with a deep-seated distrust of authorities. While some CVI programs operate independently of law enforcement, most require some level of collaboration with police. Police have real-time intel that can help identify brewing conflicts that outreach workers can mediate.⁶² As first responders, police also have immediate access to family members following an incident; if they are willing to allow CVI personnel that same access, the workers have the opportunity to directly tamp down talk of retaliation, console survivors, and immediately link loved ones to grief or crisis services.

However, too close of a relationship between CVI staff and police can compromise the perceived credibility of staff, which is a serious problem when credibility is the primary job qualification.⁶³ Youth may not be inclined to participate if they view credible messengers as informants working for the police. Walking the line between serving as a trusted resource while maintaining a working relationship with law enforcement is a challenge every CVI program must navigate. Staff must carefully communicate with young people that their role is to save lives, not to investigate crimes. On the other side of the equation, they must be careful to avoid interfering with police



Youth may not be inclined to participate if they view credible messengers as informants working for the police.

58. J. Brian Charles, "The Human Toll of Keeping Baltimore Safe," *The Trace*, March 3, 2022. <https://www.thetrace.org/2022/03/baltimore-safe-streets-shootings-gun-violence-mayor-scott>.
59. Deena Zaru, "Another violence interrupter killed in Baltimore as community reels from gun violence," *ABC News*, Jan. 24, 2022. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/violence-interrupter-killed-baltimore-community-reels-gun-violence/story?id=82430617>.
60. *Ibid.*
61. Lea Skene, "Review finds Safe Streets program lacks oversight; Baltimore mayor pledges \$10 million to expand 'violence intervention ecosystem,'" *The Baltimore Sun*, April 13, 2022. <https://www.baltimoresun.com/2022/04/13/review-finds-safe-streets-program-lacks-oversight-baltimore-mayor-pledges-10-million-to-expand-violence-intervention-ecosystem>.
62. Shani Buggs et al., "Implementing Outreach-Based Community Violence Intervention Programs: Operational Needs and Policy Recommendations," *Local Initiatives Support Corporation*, September 2022. https://www.lisc.org/media/filer_public/c3/69/c3697be4-e82d-4dc7-b9a8-5e29f2afdf7d/110922_safety_justice_community_violence_intervention_report.pdf.
63. Logan Seacrest interview with Clinton Lacey (Zoom), April 22, 2024.

investigations or encroaching on law enforcement activities. Furthermore, police may be skeptical about entrusting former offenders with youth or may perceive CVI staff as “protecting criminals” and undermining their authority. After all, program participants, and sometimes even the outreach workers themselves, may have been the focus of criminal investigations in the past. Getting buy-in from local law enforcement, particularly among rank-and-file officers, can be difficult, but friction and misunderstandings can be avoided by methodically delineating organizational responsibilities at the outset. It pays for everyone to have a clear understanding that CVI programs and law enforcement are complementary, not antagonistic.

Funding

In addition to dangers faced by workers and tensions with law enforcement, CVI programs have faced inconsistent and inadequate funding, relying on temporary or fluctuating income sources, which can affect a program’s ability to sustain their interventions. Additionally, some policymakers have been hesitant to invest in initiatives that employ individuals with criminal records, further complicating programs’ financial outlooks. That began to change in 2022, when the Department of Justice launched the Community-Based Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative (CVIPI), which awarded nearly \$200 million in grants in FY22 and FY23, funded by the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act.⁶⁴ Then, after the Biden administration announced that states would be permitted to use Medicaid funding to support CVI programs, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, New York, and Oregon passed laws approving the use of Medicaid money for violence prevention.⁶⁵ Hospital-based violence intervention programs are the most obvious fit for Medicaid reimbursement, but any CVI model that provides long-term health services—such as CBT—is also eligible.⁶⁶ Leaders are heavily investing in CVI, with states like Illinois dedicating up to \$400 million with the goal of reducing homicides by 75 percent over the next 10 years.⁶⁷

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over the next 10 years.

Recommendations

Whether in response to a specific incident or before tragedy occurs, there is no one right or way to build out a CVI program. Regardless of the catalyst, there are a few components necessary for CVI programs to be successful. First, government stakeholders need to be open to new forms of community collaboration committed to sharing both power and funding. Second, law enforcement needs to be comfortable working with individuals who may have a criminal record. Finally, adequate funding needs to be dedicated to CVI programs to not only protect frontline workers, but to track data items necessary for ongoing program improvements. As the evidence supporting CVI continues to accumulate, so, too, does our knowledge of what works. Below are a set of policy recommendations to make CVI the centerpiece of a new anti-violence infrastructure.

64. Office of Justice Programs, “Community Based Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative,” U.S Department of Justice, last accessed April 28, 2024. <https://www.ojp.gov/program/cvipi>.

65. Samantha Young, “States Begin Tapping Medicaid Dollars to Combat Gun Violence,” KFF Health News, Jan. 5, 2024. <https://kffhealthnews.org/news/article/medicaid-violence-prevention-new-state-funding-guns-firearms>.

66. Dan Piening et al., “Expand Medicaid’s Investment In Community Violence Intervention,” Health Affairs, July 28, 2023. <https://www.healthaffairs.org/content/forefront/expand-medicoid-s-investment-community-violence-intervention>.

67. “Scaling Community Violence Intervention for a Safer Chicago,” MacArthur Foundation, Feb. 21, 2024. <https://www.macfound.org/press/grantee-news/scaling-community-violence-intervention-for-a-safer-chicago>.

Build partnerships. It is imperative for CVI organizations to be data-driven in their identification of the specific individuals or groups that may be at greatest risk of violence. Partnerships between CVI programs, police, and schools can allow experts to best identify youth at an elevated risk of experiencing violence. This could involve data-sharing agreements with law enforcement to monitor hotspots and respond to violent incidents in real time. Similarly, partnering with a local medical provider to form a hospital-based intervention program allows expedited access to patients as they arrive in the emergency room to quickly address retaliation concerns and begin assisting with immediate health needs.

Break down silos. Regular communication between police departments, social service providers, educational institutions, and community organizations is required to gain a complete picture of a given situation. For CVI staff to operate safely and with integrity, everyone needs to be on the same page. Regular meetings that includes representatives from all these group can serve as a venue to share intel, best practices, and success stories.

Prioritize cross-sector collaboration. Public-private partnerships between businesses and nonprofits can bring additional resources, innovation, and management expertise to CVI efforts. Policies that provide tax incentives or other benefits to violence prevention organizations can enhance the sustainability of CVI programs. Similarly, partnerships with media outlets can provide help with communication campaigns that highlight CVI successes, broaden the support network for youth, and integrate CVI more deeply into the fabric of the community.

Protect credible messengers. The turbulent, high-stakes nature of CVI work puts enormous pressure on staff. A formal infrastructure to support physical and mental wellbeing helps people cope, minimizing turnover. Comprehensive training on conflict resolution, trauma-informed care, and CBT are important for all CVI staff, but especially frontline workers. In addition, professional-development opportunities, such as the University of Chicago Crime Lab’s Community Violence Intervention Leadership Academy, provides leaders in the CVI ecosystem with the updated tools needed to do their jobs.⁶⁸

Make a long-term investment. Allocating a portion of public safety spending to CVI initiatives reduces dependence on fluctuating grant dollars and demonstrates a commitment to violence prevention as an integral component of community safety. Each neighborhood has unique challenges that require customized intervention strategies based on specific demographic, cultural, and socioeconomic factors. Hiring a full-time municipal CVI manager to oversee the effort and hold the community partners accountable can improve model fidelity and operational stability.

Extend grant periods. Philanthropic organizations should extend grant funding periods for CVI programs to 3 to 5 years, including at least 12 months for planning and relationship building prior to implementation. Restructuring funding pipelines to send advance payments provides smaller CVI programs with the resources they need up front so they do not have to rely on reimbursement. This will help CVI programs move beyond government grants to more private funding.



Partnering with a local medical provider to form a hospital-based intervention program allows expedited access to patients as they arrive in the emergency room to quickly address retaliation concerns and begin assisting with immediate health needs.

68. Rodrigo Canales et al., “CVI Leadership Academy,” The University of Chicago Crime Lab, last accessed April 28, 2024. <https://crimelab.uchicago.edu/projects/community-violence-intervention-leadership-academy>.

Measure performance. Both governments and private funders should budget for independent evaluations to continuously analyze program effects and identify ways to improve. This includes longitudinal studies to track long-term outcomes, qualitative and quantitative research into best practices, and cost-benefit analyses. Rigorous program evaluations help communicate the impact of CVI, support sustainability and are often required to secure grant funding from donors and government agencies.

Adhere to the model. Mandating regular reporting on CVI performance helps refine strategy and replicate successful models across different regions. Process evaluations should be used to check for adherence to model fidelity, as well-implemented interventions outperform poorly implemented ones, even if the latter have stronger, more evidence-based designs.⁶⁹ Discuss data-collection and program-tracking needs candidly with workers and directly address expectations, confidentiality, and documentation.

Research rural results. While CVI research has shown promising results, evidentiary gaps remain. So far, studies have overwhelmingly been conducted in dense, urban settings, raising questions concerning CVI's applicability to other contexts. New programs, particularly those in rural settings, have the opportunity to make significant contributions to the literature by evaluating CVI viability outside major city centers.

Conclusion

By integrating principles of public health, social work, and community activism to directly address the root causes leading to youth violence, CVI programs offer a transformative blueprint for shifting responsibility from state mechanisms to localized, community-driven solutions. Empowering communities to end violence, either by themselves or in tandem with law enforcement, alleviates the burden on overworked and understaffed police departments. By leveraging the unique insights and experiences of credible messengers, CVI provides young people with a tangible example—perhaps their first—that a better future is possible. The research from the past five years has taken the evidence on CVI effectiveness to a new level, eliminating virtually any doubt as to whether these programs work. Violence is better addressed through community collaboration rather than the justice system alone. As policymakers continue to seek bipartisan strategies to combat youth violence, CVI stands out as a compelling option for anyone interested in saving lives and advancing limited, effective government solutions.



CVI programs offer a transformative blueprint for shifting responsibility from state mechanisms to localized, community-driven solutions.

About the Author

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69. Abt. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13548506.2016.1257815>.