

Municipal Action Guide

Fully Incorporating Prevention in Comprehensive Youth Violence Reduction Strategies

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The Challenge

For cities, maintaining public safety is job one. When street gangs contribute to youth violence, cities do best to implement comprehensive plans that balance prevention, intervention, and enforcement strategies and engage neighborhoods and residents in restoring peace. Yet, within such a broad effort, identifying, pursuing, and sustaining prevention elements—those that contribute to minimizing future violence well in advance—typically pose the greatest challenge for municipal leaders. Additionally, with the notable exception of city-run afterschool and recreation activities, counties, states, schools, community-based organizations, and medical professionals typically have a more direct role in prevention-related services than most cities.

Proving that “prevention works” can at first present problems, and indeed prevention efforts may take years to show effects. In turn, justifying new, continued, or expanded funding for prevention initiatives becomes difficult, especially in tight budget times and in the face of familiar demands for controlling street crime now. However, experience and empirical evidence show that neither intervening after problems have arisen nor trying to “arrest one’s way out of the problem” work on their own. Indeed, these elements have their greatest effect when combined with prevention. Municipalities will achieve the greatest gains in public safety and positive youth development by pursuing a balanced approach. This brief highlights recommended strategies, action steps, and existing city approaches to prevention.

Strategies

Municipal leaders—along with local teams representing police, education, probation, recreation, social service, and public health agencies—should take several strategic steps to incorporate prevention fully in local efforts. These steps include the following:

- **Establish violence and gang prevention as a policy priority on a par with intervention and enforcement.**
- **Map or otherwise depict existing or planned prevention efforts as part of a continuum, linked with intervention efforts in particular.** Municipal officials in cities such as Oxnard, Santa Rosa, and Los Angeles, California, maintain that they could not achieve their intervention and enforcement goals without simultaneously investing in prevention.
- **Buttress prevention efforts with dedicated funds.** Several California cities did this by combining proposals for increased funding for prevention, police, and fire in ballot initiatives. At a minimum, point to the ways that existing parks and recreation funding contributes to prevention.
- **Target prevention efforts in the hardest-hit neighborhoods** via multidisciplinary teams drawn from city, county, and state agencies, as San Bernardino has done in its Operation Phoenix neighborhoods.
- **Assemble and regularly activate a coalition of support for prevention** whose membership ranges from service providers, parents, and pastors to police officials, such as the San Diego Commission on Gang Prevention and Intervention or the San José Mayor’s Gang Prevention Task Force. Hearing from traditional and non-traditional voices in support of prevention—including at the time of yearly city budget hearings—keeps prevention “on the radar screen” and on the budget map.
- **Embrace “contextual” or “environmental” prevention activities** such as neighborhood clean-ups, graffiti removal, closing or reducing concentrations of problem liquor stores, and peace marches.
- **Utilize family interventions** such as gang awareness training for parents, pre- and postnatal home visitation, and functional family therapy.

Action Steps

Key areas for action when fully incorporating prevention into city violence reduction efforts include the following:

Planning

Establish or update a comprehensive city plan for reducing youth and gang violence. Determine current infrastructure, programs, and policies in the areas of prevention, intervention, and enforcement, and chart out what needs to be added or changed over the coming two to three years within the context of a major theme or vision. Involve representatives of multiple systems and sectors in creating the plan under the overall leadership of the mayor and chief of police. If no coordinating body exists for youth violence reduction, consider creating one. Consult with and include relevant city and county agencies, community-based and faith-based organizations, and other stakeholders during the plan development process. Consider a range of data sources in addition to law enforcement such as education, child welfare, and public health, and establish accountability measures related to overall healthy and safe child and youth development, as well as crime reduction.

Thinking across the spectrum of prevention from early childhood through the teenage and young adult years—and across school, family, and neighborhood settings—strive to identify two to three major prevention initiatives that will anchor this portion of your plan, and that will support intervention and enforcement activities. Include existing prevention efforts such as Head Start, and build upon this infrastructure by proposing activities such as mentoring for older siblings of Head Start participants. Prevention initiatives might include improved supports for fragile families, expanded or targeted early childhood education and early home visitation, expanded or targeted youth development and support for teens, and the environmental or contextual strategies mentioned above.

Implementation

Implementing prevention aspects of a comprehensive plan will require concerted activity in at least three key areas:

1. **Enlist and engage public agencies with prevention resources across jurisdictional lines.** Depending upon location, resources and staffing for key prevention services may reside at the state, county, or school-district level, and some of these agencies may in turn contract with community-based organizations for service provision. Cities seeking improved coordination and impact from prevention efforts must enlist partners as varied as public health departments, school districts, and workforce boards.
2. **Fully engage city resources focused on prevention.** Cities typically have significant prevention capacity at their disposal. To succeed in gang and youth violence prevention, this capacity must be focused or targeted. The involvement of city agencies responsible for recreation, afterschool

“Prevention” definition from UNITY Policy Platform/ Urban Agenda

“Prevention includes universal prevention before violence has occurred, as well as reducing the impact of risk factors of violence and reducing the reoccurrence of violence...Prevention means addressing the factors that contribute to violence in the first place, such as the following contributors to gang violence: lack of social opportunities; the degree of social disorganization present in a community; poverty; institutional racism; deficiencies in social policies; and a lack of or misdirected social controls.”

Through interviews with young people, the Prevention Institute helpfully proposed dividing the prevention continuum into three parts:

- **Upfront:** Strategies everyone needs to be safe and thrive, such as quality early care and education, quality out-of-school time programming, and youth employment.
- **In the Thick:** Strategies to reduce the impact of risk factors, such as mentoring and family support services.
- **Aftermath:** Strategies to prevent the recurrence of violence, such as supports for successful reentry and supports for children exposed to trauma or family violence.

programs, and early childhood education, and their contracted community partners, is essential. No less essential is involving the police in prevention, whether for referrals to services or for conducting outreach in school settings.

3. **Focus on service quality and impact.** Cities must ensure that prevention programs—and intervention and enforcement as well—are achieving desired results with high efficiency and effectiveness. To ensure service quality and impact, cities must take the lead in proclaiming clear objectives and establishing structures for accountability and gathering impact data or commissioning external evaluations. This may include gathering “baseline” information that, over a period of time, will help gauge the impact of prevention investments. Conducting or arranging professional development for prevention service providers is another step cities can take. When providers do not meet performance benchmarks, cities must terminate contracts and cultivate, train, or identify other providers. In addition, cities should share evaluation results widely.

Resources

California Cities Gang Prevention Network:
<http://www.ccgpn.org>

Federal Agencies:
 U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and
 Delinquency Prevention, OJJDP Model Programs Guide:
<http://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/prevention.aspx?continuum=prevention>

Bureau of Justice Assistance—OJJDP National Gang Center:
<http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for
 Disease Control and Prevention, Striving to Reduce Youth
 Violence Everywhere (STRYVE):
<http://www.safeyouth.gov/Resources/Prevention/Pages/PreventionHome.aspx>

Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs:
<http://www.findyouthinfo.gov>

International Association of Chiefs of Police, Prevention, and
 Response to School Violence:
<http://www.theiacp.org/PublicationsGuides/Projects/PreventionandResponsetoSchoolViolence/tabid/378/Default.aspx>

National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education, and
 Families Publications:

- Implementing a Citywide Gang Violence Reduction Strategy
- Preventing Gang Violence and Building Communities Where Young People Thrive: A Toolkit for Municipal Leaders
- Vital Partners: Mayors and Police Chiefs Working Together for America's Children and Youth

<http://www.nlc.org/iyef/safety/gang/resources.aspx>

Prevention Institute and UNITY Network:
<http://www.preventioninstitute.org>

University of Colorado at Boulder, Center for the Study and
 Prevention of Violence, Blueprints for Violence Prevention:
<http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints>

“Early childhood education has long been recognized as a cost-effective youth violence prevention strategy. Children who attend pre-school are more successful academically, have greater literacy and interpersonal skills, and have a lower tendency to get involved in risky behavior. Early childhood education is one of the most important strategies a community can undertake to prevent youth violence in later years.”

Former Salinas, California, Mayor and California Assembly Member Ana Caballero, quoted by the Prevention Institute

Examples of Local Prevention Efforts

San Diego, California (pop. 1,306,300): Leaders extended Friday hours at three recreation centers; employed 3,000 youth through the Hire a Youth summer program, with an emphasis on youth at risk of gang involvement and in close coordination with the recreation centers; conducted bimonthly community collaborative “curfew sweeps” to connect young people with a range of services; and mobilized residents for Safe Passage to School programs, all in specific neighborhoods. San Diego has also mobilized multiple partners on behalf of a training strategy to prepare youth to enter jobs in the growing local health care field.

<http://www.sandiego.gov/gangcommission>

Oakland, California (pop. 409,189): Oakland is home to three major interrelated prevention strategies. The City–County Neighborhood Initiative provides support and staffing for neighborhood engagement and improvement efforts. For instance, the initiative engaged residents from the Sobrante Park neighborhood in community-strengthening efforts such as neighbor-to-neighbor bartering and youth economic development programs. The city’s Measure Y ballot initiative makes approximately \$5 million per year available for violence prevention activities, thanks to incremental increases in the real estate (parcel) tax and in a commercial parking surcharge. Alongside substantial investments in intervention, the youth comprehensive services segment of Measure Y funding supports activities such as afterschool job training, family resource centers, subsidized summer youth employment, mental health referrals for middle school students, and the use of the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum in pre-K through eighth grades at all Oakland public schools and Head Start centers. Recently, with the full cooperation of the police department and the local Roman Catholic archbishop, Oakland began conducting parent education classes on gang awareness at local churches.

<http://measurey.org/>

San José, California (pop. 964,695): City leaders grant more than \$3 million per year in city general funds to community-based organizations through the BEST program (Building Everyone's Strengths Together) for a mix of prevention and intervention services. An external evaluator determines impact each year. In a recent move toward greater efficiency, San José has entered into agreements with community-based organizations to manage many of the city's 58 community centers. The city funds maintenance and utilities, but not necessarily programming. San José's city council approved this approach when staff explained the contributions of prevention and intervention to reducing the city's crime rates. The variety of services now available at one site has helped the city reconstitute it as a family resource center.

<http://www.sanjoseca.gov/prns/mgptf>

Boston, Massachusetts (pop. 645,169): Mayor Thomas M. Menino instituted the Violence Intervention and Prevention (VIP) Initiative in collaboration with the Boston Public Health Commission. VIP seeks to implement conflict resolution and peer mediation skills training in schools and community centers, develop a youth-driven social marketing campaign, support community mobilization efforts in four high-need neighborhoods, and ensure access to afterschool opportunities for youth. Community mobilization occurs via VIP neighborhood coalitions in the four neighborhoods, each of which is organizing and forming active partnerships between city departments and community residents. VIP neighborhood coalitions are forums in which residents can join with local businesses, organizations, community leaders, and city staff to identify and address safety concerns and promote peace in the community. Each coalition is developing a violence prevention plan that describes the nature and extent of violence in the community, strengths and challenges of their community, and goals and activities that are aimed at promoting peace and reducing violence in the neighborhood.

<http://www.bphc.org/programs/cafh/violenceprevention/Pages/Home.aspx>

Minneapolis, Minnesota (pop. 385,378): Leaders created the "Blueprint for Action: Preventing Youth Violence in Minneapolis." The Blueprint establishes youth violence as a high priority public health concern, and now targets all young people ages 0–22. The initial focus was on youth ages 8–17 who reside in the neighborhoods experiencing the highest rates of crime and violence and who faced factors that placed them at higher risk of being a perpetrator or victim of crime. Beginning in 2009, Blueprint implementation expanded to focus on all neighborhoods. Notably, the Blueprint organizes its efforts around a straightforward set of four principles: (1) connecting every youth with a trusted adult; (2) intervening at the first sign that youth are at risk for violence; (3) restoring youth who have gone down the wrong path; and (4) unlearning the culture of violence in the community.

<http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/dhfs/yv.asp>

Los Angeles, California (pop. 3,831,868): City leaders instituted the Summer Night Lights (SNL) initiative at parks and recreation centers in each of 12 Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD) zones. SNL has expanded to 24 parks, providing expanded programming, afterschool activities, athletic leagues, art initiatives, family programs, and free food. Operating several days a week from 7:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m., the 2010 SNL season involved 710,000 participants. In its third year, with eight weeks of expanded programming for youth and families, communities around SNL parks experienced a 57% reduction in gang-related homicides and a 55% reduction in shots fired.

<http://www.mayor.lacity.org/Issues/GangReduction/index.htm>

San Bernardino, California (pop. 198,411): Leaders established multidisciplinary teams in conjunction with several county agencies to provide services in high-need neighborhoods. City agencies contributing staff to the teams include police, fire, city code enforcement, and school district police. County agencies on the team include probation, children's services, public health, behavioral health, and the district attorney. The full or partial team meets monthly, coordinates efforts or cross-refers particular families or street blocks, and reports monthly to each governing body. In another prevention measure, the City Council recently passed a "Deemed Approved" zoning ordinance (MC-1331) that provides the city with a mechanism to control concentration of liquor outlets.

http://www.ci.san-bernardino.ca.us/cityhall/mayor/operation_phoenix/operation_phoenix_homepage.asp, and <http://tinyurl.com/4u3huq2>