

Nine Strategies to Guide Efforts to Reduce Youth Gun Violence

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RECOGNIZING INEQUITIES IN EXPERIENCES WITH VIOLENCE AND ENFORCEMENT

Large geographic, socioeconomic, and racial inequities exist in who is **most at risk of being a victim of or perpetrating gun violence**. For instance, Black Americans are 10 times more likely than white Americans to be victims of gun homicides.

Alongside the unequally distributed harm of gun violence is **the unequally distributed burden of police and justice system enforcement**.

These factors contribute to very **high levels of mistrust of police and other justice system actors** in communities where crime and violence are most concentrated.

An effective community safety infrastructure must recognize these inequities to **develop mutually respectful working relationships between the government and community members**.

Gun violence, including that perpetrated by young people, is a pernicious problem for many communities, particularly those facing historically high levels of concentrated disadvantage and disinvestment. To effectively address youth gun violence and establish and maintain peace, communities need stable safety infrastructures and effective interventions.

We developed a research-based practice guide to help local governments, law enforcement agencies, and antiviolence organizations determine how to shape their approaches to reducing gun violence perpetrated by young people ages 10 to 25 in gangs or groups. Here, we summarize the guide's recommendations on how to develop effective interventions and build a broader safety infrastructure that supports the success of different partners working to protect young people and communities from gun violence.

HOW TO BUILD ANTIVIOLENCE INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Formalize the government's role in coordinating antiviolence work. Local governments have an important role in funding, coordinating, and supporting antiviolence work, even though much of that work is done by nongovernment organizations. Robust antiviolence collaboration requires partners with varied toolkits, and local governments are best positioned to situate elements of those toolkits within overall strategies.

2. Fund and support a robust community-based antiviolence strategy. Executing such a strategy requires investing in the people and organizations that do antiviolence work, just as all levels of government have invested in traditional justice agencies and professionals. This means providing adequate funding and building broad and sustained antiviolence partnerships.

3. Engage the community to establish and maintain peace. The community is an essential partner and can provide powerful resources for reducing violence and keeping the peace. Because the social dynamics driving gun violence vary in different communities, interventions require community-specific cultural buy-in and local knowledge.

4. Calibrate the relationship between law enforcement and community violence interventions.

The justice system has tremendous power to facilitate or impede non-law enforcement antiviolence work, and police are a significant presence in communities where gun violence is prevalent. This makes it important to secure their support and partnership in interventions without losing the trust of people who mistrust them.

5. Collect and share data to refine practices and assess effectiveness.

Antiviolence intervention stakeholders need to collect and report data to ensure antiviolence work is done well, to make changes when needed, and to build and sustain efforts. This requires investing in data and analysis capacity and committing to use data to inform decisions.

HOW TO DEVELOP EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS AND INTERVENTIONS

6. Assess the problem to focus attention and resources. Youth gun and gang/group violence dynamics vary from place to place, so doing an up-front analysis to determine local risk dynamics, needs, and resources—and tailoring interventions to local conditions—is critical to success.

7. Build positive relationships with young people at high risk of gun and gang/group violence. The fact that a relatively small number of people are at the highest risk of perpetrating or being victimized by youth gun and gang/group violence creates an opportunity to prevent that violence by engaging with them directly (using credible messengers) in a way that builds trust with and supports them.

8. Interrupt and mediate conflicts. Because a large share of gun violence is based on intergroup dynamics and retaliatory cycles, intervening in active conflicts is a core part of addressing youth gun and gang/group violence. Conflict interruption has two key aspects: responding to particular incidents of violence to prevent them from prompting more violence, and working proactively to mediate emergent or ongoing intergroup conflicts.

9. Use suppression and enforcement precisely and sparingly. Building trusting relationships with young people at high risk of perpetrating or being victimized by violence when they are targets of focused surveillance and sanctioning from justice agencies will not work unless the young people have space to succeed. For efforts to reduce youth violence to succeed, the purposes of suppression and enforcement have to therefore be carefully defined and limited.

ADDITIONAL READING

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

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ABOUT THIS PROJECT

In 2018, the Urban Institute received funding from the National Institute of Justice and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to develop a research-based practice guide to reduce youth gun and gang/group violence.

To develop the guide, Urban researchers used three methods: (1) we engaged 16 leading experts to inform the guide's scope and development, (2) we reviewed the current literature on the efficacy and implementation of youth gang/group and gun violence reduction strategies and synthesized key findings, and (3) we conducted a scan of practices for preventing and reducing gun and gang/group violence.