

# At Two Meetings in October, Working Group Highlights the Promise and Challenges of Key Law Enforcement Violence Reduction Strategies, Provides Guidance to Help Leaders Deploy Programs Appropriately

At its sixth and seventh meetings, the Violent Crime Working Group discussed law enforcement-based responses to violent crime. Consistent with the Working Group's mission and its [previous meetings](#), the sessions focused on strategies that local leaders can execute quickly.

On October 13, the discussion featured a presentation by Working Group chair [Thomas Abt](#), Senior Fellow at the Council on Criminal Justice (CCJ) and author of [Bleeding Out: The Devastating Consequences of Urban Violence - And a Bold New Plan for Peace in the Streets](#). On October 27, the Working Group heard presentations by [David Kennedy](#), Founder and Director of the [National Network for Safe Communities](#); [Nancy La Vigne](#), Senior Fellow at CCJ and Executive Director of its [Task Force on Policing](#); and [Tashante McCoy](#), Founder and Regional Manager of [Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice](#)/The OWL MOVEMENT, and a member of the Task Force on Policing.

This bulletin addresses leading law-enforcement strategies for reducing community gun violence. It also covers the issue of police-community trust, an essential element of all strategies and a key challenge for law enforcement more generally.

## Focused Deterrence

### What We Know

- **Focused deterrence is a strategy; Gun Violence Intervention/Ceasefire is a specific application of the strategy.** Focused deterrence is a problem-oriented violence reduction strategy that mobilizes community residents, service providers, and law enforcement officials in response to chronic crime conditions. The approach generally includes detailed crime analyses, partnership between communities and law enforcement, customized support and targeted sanctions, and clear communication

with victims and perpetrators.

The best-known application of focused deterrence is known either as the Group Violence Intervention (GVI) or Operation Ceasefire. GVI/Ceasefire reduces gun violence by identifying high-risk people and social networks, communicating directly to them the commitment of the police and the community to stop such violence, providing special supports and services, and deploying targeted law enforcement sanctions as a last resort.

While the Working Group discussed focused deterrence during its sessions on law enforcement, the strategy is, in fact, a blend of community- and enforcement-based approaches.

- **In most cases, the strategy is effective.** Focused deterrence in general and GVI/Ceasefire, in particular, are supported by a relatively strong base of evidence that includes large impacts on group-related gun violence. In [Boston](#), the strategy reduced youth homicide by 63 percent. In [Oakland](#), it cut gun homicides by 31 percent and group-involved shootings by 43 percent. A [systematic review](#) of the strategy reported favorable results in 22 of 24 studies. Of the anti-violence interventions that have been independently evaluated, focused deterrence appears to have the strongest results, although more rigorous studies could strengthen the confidence of this conclusion.
- **The strategy can be difficult to implement.** To be successful, focused deterrence initiatives require close coordination across multiple partners, making effective implementation hard to achieve and difficult to sustain, particularly in today's hyperpolarized political environment. Another challenge is maintaining the right balance of sanctions and supports. Some early examples of the strategy relied too heavily on arrests and incarceration, although later versions have largely addressed this imbalance.

## What To Do

- **Use GVI/Ceasefire not just as a program, but as a framework.** GVI/Ceasefire is a proven model for reducing group-related gun violence. In addition, other evidence-informed anti-violence strategies, such as street outreach or cognitive behavioral therapy, can be incorporated into the GVI/Ceasefire framework.

- **Get training and technical assistance from experts in the field.** As with other violence reduction strategies, local jurisdictions should resist the temptation to “go it alone” with GVI/Ceasefire. The approach is complex and requires careful attention to strong implementation. Experienced professionals, such as the [California Partnership for Safe Communities](#), [Center for Police Research and Policy](#), [Crime and Justice Policy Lab](#), [National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform](#), and the [National Network for Safe Communities](#), are available to provide training and technical assistance.
- **Get the balance right.** GVI/Ceasefire works best when it is led by a robust partnership involving community leaders, city officials, and law enforcement, and when city and agency leaders explicitly commit to the framework as a central strategy to address violence. This helps to ensure fidelity to the model, as well as a balanced approach. If too much emphasis is placed on arrests and incarceration, it can limit the strategy’s effectiveness and create community resentment and resistance. It is also critical to ensure the intent of the program is clear to all: the goal is to keep participants safe and out of prison.
- **Always keep your promises.** GVI/Ceasefire makes a series of promises to those at the highest risk for violence: *Your life matters. We are here to help you, but if the shooting doesn’t end, we are here to stop you.* Promises to assist participants must be kept with the prompt delivery of meaningful services and supports. Promises to hold participants accountable for further violence must be followed up with swift and certain sanctions. Effective management is essential to deliver on these commitments and maintain credibility.

## Proactive Policing

### What We Know

- **Proactive policing is about preventing crime, not reacting to it.** Proactive policing refers to police strategies intended to prevent and reduce crime. These strategies differ from traditional policing strategies that focus primarily on responding to crime once it has occurred. Proactive policing includes several different strategies, but the most widely implemented and evaluated are hot spots policing and problem-oriented policing.

Hot spots policing focuses police patrols and other resources on the micro-locations known as “hot spots” where crime concentrates. Problem-oriented policing uses the Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment (SARA) framework to analyze and then address the underlying causes of crime problems using a wide variety of methods.

- **Generally speaking, proactive policing is effective in reducing crime and violence.** In an authoritative report examining the effectiveness of policing strategies, the [National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine](#) concluded that “a number of proactive policing practices are successful in reducing crime and disorder, at least in the short term.” In addition, a systematic review of [hot spots policing](#) demonstrated “small but meaningful” crime control gains across 65 studies with little to no crime displacement. A systematic review of [problem-oriented policing](#) indicated similar results across 34 studies. Many other independent reports, reviews, and studies have reached similar conclusions. In short, a very wide body of evidence indicates that proactive policing strategies are an effective tool for addressing high rates of crime and violence.

*“What the effective strategies have in common is their effort to more tightly specify and focus police activities. In contrast, generalized, aggressive enforcement tactics such as stop-question-frisk used indiscriminately across a city, or broken-windows policing programs that rely on a ‘zero tolerance’ generalized approach to misdemeanor arrests, do not show evidence of effectiveness.”*

- **Proactive policing works best when focused on high-risk people and places.** The Academies’ report made a key observation in relation to these strategies: “What the effective strategies have in common is their effort to more tightly specify and focus police activities. In contrast, generalized, aggressive enforcement tactics such as stop-question-frisk used indiscriminately across a city, or broken-windows policing programs that rely on a ‘zero tolerance’ generalized approach to misdemeanor arrests, do not show evidence of effectiveness.”  
Overbroad policing approaches that fail to focus on the most dangerous people, places, and offenses are less effective and more likely to have more collateral consequences. New York City’s controversial use of “stop-and-frisk” policing, an effort associated with an enormous rise in stops and searches in the city’s poorest communities, is perhaps the most famous example of a proactive policing strategy gone awry.

- **Proactive policing works best when focused on specific crime problems, in partnership with community and other stakeholders.** In the systematic reviews described above, the blending of hot spots and problem-oriented policing (e.g., adopting problem-oriented strategies in crime hot spots) was recommended as especially effective. Even when effective, however, the crime reduction effects are likely to be moderate at best, meaning that proactive policing should be paired with effective non-policing strategies and partners.
- **Strong oversight of these strategies is crucial for success.** Like focused deterrence, problem-oriented strategies can be complex and difficult to implement. As a result, police agencies using such strategies must be especially mindful in their implementation. This requires strong oversight from senior police leadership as well as training for rank-and-file officers to ensure they develop the appropriate problem-solving and partnership-oriented mindset.
- **More research is needed.** While there is significant evidence supporting the short-term effectiveness of proactive policing strategies, significantly less is known about their long-term impacts on important issues such as community cohesiveness and racial disparities. More research is needed in these areas.

## What To Do

- **Prioritize preventing violence, not making arrests.** When using proactive strategies, police agencies must remain committed to solving the problem of community gun violence, rather than overcommitting to particular tactics such as low-level arrests. For instance, if the intent of increasing patrols in a particular location is to deter criminal activity, making low-level arrests could be counterproductive because police must leave the area to process the arrest. In addition, [analyses should be conducted](#) to identify the people and places at the highest risk for violence, and specialized units should be created to engage those people and places.
- **Don't go it alone - work with partners.** While it can be effective, proactive policing by itself is simply not enough. Police agencies must also engage with partners inside and especially outside the criminal justice system, such as community members, street outreach workers, service providers, researchers, and others. One crucial aspect of such partnerships is the sharing of information in order to coordinate the engagement of high-risk people and investment in high-risk places. Police must be willing to provide such information, even if they receive no information in return.

- **Put a management framework into place.** Police agencies are bureaucracies, and as with any other bureaucracy, changes can be difficult to make and sustain. To successfully implement proactive policing strategies that engage outside partners and focus on those at the highest risk, agency leaders must closely manage the effort each step of the way, and pay careful attention to performance metrics and reward structures. Emphasizing the wrong metrics, such as arrests, can lead to [harmful results](#). Instead, metrics should be focused on anti-violence outcomes such as reduced victimization, not just law enforcement outputs. Staffing is another critical management issue, one made more challenging given the [recruiting and retention issues](#) the profession is facing.

## Illegal Gun Carrying

### What We Know

- **Illegal gun carrying, a precursor to gun violence, is on the rise.** According to FBI statistics and a recent [CCJ report](#), the percentage of homicides involving firearms has increased over time, reaching a peak of 77% in 2020, compared to 73% in 2019. Background checks for gun sales surged during the pandemic, but [research indicates](#) these sales were not associated with national increases in gun violence, at least in the short term. On the other hand, [police data](#) from Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC indicates that illegal gun carrying increased in those cities during the pandemic. The Working Group examined the challenge of illegal gun carrying, as it is often a precursor to community gun violence.

Some strategies to reduce illegal gun carrying focus on restricting the supply of guns generally. One especially promising initiative in this area is the adoption of firearms purchaser licensing laws that require individuals to apply to local or state law enforcement to obtain a license before purchasing a gun. These policies reduce the diversion of guns for criminal use and homicides.

Group members focused primarily on police strategies to reduce illegal gun carrying, as they can be implemented quickly without new legislation. Such measures generally involve encouraging officers to make pedestrian and car stops to search for illegal weapons, both to recover the weapons and deter future illegal gun carrying.

- **Targeting illegal guns can reduce gun violence, but there are risks.** As with proactive policing strategies, evidence suggests that police initiatives targeting illegal gun carrying can reduce shootings and killings, but the strategies come with an even greater risk of misuse or even abuse. One [systematic review](#) found that specialized gun law enforcement units targeting high-risk places and individuals significantly reduced gun crime. That said, the review included only four quasi-experimental studies, and there have been no randomized controlled studies of this approach. It is also noteworthy that many gun “crackdowns” have been associated with widespread violations of civil rights and liberties, and even criminal misconduct.

The recent experience of Baltimore is instructive here. According to a 2020 [report](#) from the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research, while the Baltimore Police Department’s (BPD) deployment of the highly focused Violent Crime Impact Section resulted in a 13% reduction in homicides and 17% reduction in nonfatal shootings, the department’s more generalized anti-gun efforts had no impact. Additionally, the BPD’s aggressive enforcement, coupled with a lack of training and oversight, led to extensive violations of Fourth Amendment protections that disproportionately impacted the city’s Black residents. Another outcome: a [scandal](#) leading to the criminal convictions of nine police officers.

Such results led the authors of the report to conclude: “Policing that deters illegal gun possession by individuals at high risk for involvement in violence reduces shootings, especially in the short term. But broad use of stop-and-search practices that are unconstitutional or otherwise harmful to innocent people not at high risk for violence involvement are counterproductive to the promotion of public safety, justice, and public trust in police.”

Rather than encouraging officers to increase gun-related arrests, the report’s authors recommended, “BPD should focus on improving the quality of gun-related arrests (legal searches, meticulous evidence collection); concentrating on violent individuals; developing systems to identify and correct officers’ practices that yield bad outcomes from proactive gun law enforcement; and enhancing transparency with respect to key metrics to promote public accountability.”

## What To Do

- **Focus gun law enforcement on the highest risk people in the highest risk**

**places.** Police agencies should ensure that aggressive enforcement is limited to those most closely associated with gun violence. To do otherwise creates a significant risk of misuse, often with racially disparate impacts.

- **Avoid overbroad and indiscriminate tactics.** General messages that simply instruct officers to “get the guns off the streets” may lead to violations of civil rights as well as breakdowns in police/community trust.
- **Do not allow impunity for gun offenses.** The carrying of an illegal firearm is a serious offense and should be treated as such. That said, the justice system’s emphasis should be on delivering swift and certain sanctions, not necessarily severe ones. Impunity can be created at multiple stages, from arrest to prosecution to sentencing. Police must take care to respect rights and collect evidence, prosecutors must file appropriate charges without excessive plea bargaining, and, when people are convicted, judges must impose commensurate sentences.

## Shooting Clearance Rates

### What We Know

- **Clearance rates in cases involving shootings are low and getting worse.** According to FBI data and a recent [CCJ report](#), homicide clearance rates declined significantly in 2020, continuing a downward trend that began in the 1970s. The homicide clearance rate was 82% in 1976. In 2019, the rate was 55% and by 2020 it had fallen to 50%, a 5% decrease that marked the largest single-year drop since 1989. A 2018 investigation by the [Washington Post](#) highlighted stark racial disparities in homicide clearance rates, noting that while 63% of murder cases involving White victims had been cleared, the proportion was only 47% for cases involving Black victims. Clearance rates for non-fatal shootings are approximately half as high as homicide clearance rates. Low clearance rates frustrate efforts to hold offenders accountable, provide victims with justice, and disrupt cycles of violent retaliation. Research is limited in this area, but evidence suggests that declining rates are likely due to a combination of more difficult cases, lack of community trust, and a lack of attention to and resources for gun violence investigations.
- **Clearance rates can be improved with more resources and better**



**management.** For many years, the prevailing view among many scholars has been that follow-up investigations provide little value in terms of crime reduction. [Recent research](#) indicates, however, that enhanced investigative resources, improved management structures, and oversight processes can increase shooting clearance rates and improve the chances of arrest in even the most difficult cases.

## What To Do

- **Invest in investigations.** Police agencies must invest significantly more time, attention, and resources into investigating fatal and nonfatal shootings, and should rigorously evaluate the results of these investments. Staffing must be increased. Management must be improved. Best practices must be identified, shared, and implemented.

*“Every life matters, no matter what. I don’t really care whether that person was a drug dealer or gang member, it doesn’t matter. You approach that case like you would any other. And you treat the victims, the family members, the friends, just the same.”*

- **Show that every victim deserves justice.** It is imperative that police agencies constantly reinforce the message – via words and actions – that all life is sacred and that every victim deserves justice. As one group member put it, “Every life matters, no matter what. I don’t really care whether that person was a drug dealer or gang member, it doesn’t matter. You approach that case like you would any other. And you treat the victims, the family members, the friends, just the same.”
- **Establishing trusting relationships within impacted communities.** Without trust, community members provide less information. Without information, shooting cases are harder to solve. As described below, establishing trust is a critical task for police agencies, especially in the communities most impacted by crime and violence.

## Building Community Trust

## What We Know

- **Trust in police is essential to a free and safe society.** Without trust, citizens will not voluntarily cooperate with their government, and such collaboration is the lifeblood of effective public safety strategies. Cooperation takes many forms, including complying with laws, reporting crimes and providing information to police, serving as witnesses and jurors in court, and partnering with police on crime prevention initiatives.
- **In the communities most impacted by violent crime, trust in law enforcement is low.** In an Urban Institute [six-city survey](#) of 1,278 residents from neighborhoods suffering from high rates of disadvantage and crime, many residents held negative views about police. Only about one in four (26%) residents believed that police “make fair and impartial decisions.” Less than a third (30%) agreed that police “respect people’s rights.” Slightly over half (55%) stated that police officers “will treat you differently because of your race/ethnicity.”
- **Despite limited trust, impacted communities still believe in the law and are willing to cooperate with law enforcement.** Prior to any intervention, three in four (74%) of the same residents agreed “all laws should be strictly obeyed.” Seven in ten (71%) would call the police to report a crime and a meaningful majority (64%) would provide information to help find a suspect. These findings suggest that, even in the most difficult circumstances, there is a base of community support from which to build.
- **There is no single solution to building trust between police and communities, and while it is difficult, it can be done.** As demonstrated through the [National Initiative on Building Community Trust and Justice](#), police training in respectful interactions with community members, changes in policies and practices, and authentic engagement with residents led to statistically significant [improvements](#) in measures of trust. These findings are echoed in the recommendations of the CCJ [Task Force on Policing](#), which culled the evidence associated with over two dozen proposed policing reforms, including those focused on improving the relationship between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve.

Building trust requires not just refraining from abuses, but also actively engaging community members in dialogue. Evidence in this area is limited but suggests that ending “no-knock” warrants, establishing “early warning” systems, and requiring police to de-escalate potentially dangerous conflicts and report and intervene when they witness misconduct by other officers can help curb incidents of excessive force. In addition, procedural justice policies and improved training can enhance police

relationships both externally and internally, while engaging in reconciliation and restorative justice efforts can begin to heal past injuries and divisions. Better understanding the impacts of trauma both among community members and police officers can further promote mutual understanding.

## What To Do

- **Get started, stay committed.** A Chinese proverb states, “The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second-best time is now.” While relationships between many police agencies and communities they serve are currently strained, the process of engaging must start immediately. This engagement must be consistent, sustained over time, and include rank-and-file officers, not just leadership.
- **Acknowledge trauma, emphasize healing.** Tashante McCoy, who has lost loved ones to police violence, reinforced to group members that the need for healing is a central theme in the “courageous conversations” that should happen between police and impacted communities. [Trauma-informed policing](#) can assist police officers in understanding their own trauma and that of others.
- **Put a management framework into place.** As noted above, police agencies are bureaucracies that, like other bureaucracies, are naturally resistant to change. To build and sustain trust, organizational change must be supported by engaged leaders who put a clear management structure in place with appropriate performance metrics and reward structures.

## Where to Go

- Presentations to the Working Group:
  - [Evidence Recap: Proactive Policing, Illegal Gun Carrying, Clearance Rates](#) (Thomas Abt, Violent Crime Working Group)
  - [Focused Deterrence in the Current Moment](#) (David Kennedy, National Network for Safe Communities)
  - [Police-Community Trust](#) (Nancy La Vigne and Tashante McCoy, CCJ Task Force on Policing)

- For more information on focused deterrence:
  - [A Case Study in Hope: Lessons from Oakland’s Remarkable Reduction in Gun Violence](#) (Giffords Law Center)
  - [A Framework for Addressing Violence and Serious Crime](#) (Anthony Braga, David Kennedy)
  - [Focused deterrence strategies effects on crime: A systematic review](#) (Anthony Braga, David Weisburd, Brandon Turchan)
  - [Group Violence Intervention: An Implementation Guide](#) (National Network for Safe Communities)
  - For training and technical assistance, contact: [California Partnership for Safe Communities](#), [Center for Police Research and Policy](#), [Crime and Justice Policy Lab](#), [National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform](#), and [National Network for Safe Communities](#)
  
- For more information on proactive policing:
  - [Five Things You Need to Know about Hot Spots Policing & the “Koper Curve” Theory](#) (Police Foundation)
  - [Hot Spots Policing of Small Geographic Areas Effects on Crime](#) (Anthony Braga, Brandon Turchan, Andrew Papachristos, David Hureau)
  - [Proactive Policing: Effects on Crime and Communities](#) (National Academies of Science, Engineering, Medicine)
  - [Problem-Oriented Policing for Reducing Crime and Disorder: An Updated Systematic Review](#) (Joshua Hinkle, David Weisburd, Cody Telep, Kevin Petersen)
  
- For more information on illegal gun carrying:
  - [Guns and Crime](#) (Anthony Braga)
  - [Police Crackdowns on Illegal Gun Carrying: A Systematic Review of their Impact on Gun Crime](#) (Christopher Koper, Evan Mayo-Wilson)
  - [Policies That Reduce Gun Violence: Firearm Purchaser Licensing](#) (Cassandra Crifasi)
  - [Reducing Violence and Building Trust: Data to Guide Enforcement of Gun Laws in Baltimore](#) (Daniel Webster, Cassandra Crifasi, Rebecca Williams, Marisa Doll)

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- For more information on shooting clearance rates:
  - [Improving Police Clearance Rates of Shootings: A Review of the Evidence](#) (Anthony Braga)
  - [Policing Guns: Why Gun Violence Is Not \(Just\) a Public Health Problem](#) (Philip Cook, Jens Ludwig)
- For more information on building community trust:
  - [Council on Criminal Justice's Task Force on Policing](#)
  - [Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing](#) (Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing)
  - [National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice](#)
- **For community-based approaches, there are multiple federal funding programs that can support violent crime-prevention and intervention strategies.** As of publication, this includes a wide range of opportunities in the \$1.9-trillion American Rescue Plan, which the Council on State Governments usefully summarized [here](#). In early November, Congress was also [debating](#) whether to appropriate \$5 billion for community violence intervention programming as part of the reconciliation, which includes \$2.5 billion allocated to the grant-making offices in the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ).

Federal grant-making agencies typically publish funding solicitations in late winter or early spring and announce awards in late September or early October. To learn about these opportunities, visit [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov), which provides guidance on how to apply for federal funds and allows for searches by key words and federal agency.

For federal funds administered by state and local governmental agencies, as well as state and local funds, identify your state and local administrative agencies and learn about the policies and procedures that govern their grant making.

- **For law enforcement agencies, several federal funding programs currently support law enforcement violence reductions strategies.** In addition, for the

\$350 billion of State and Local Recovery Funds in the, President Biden [highlighted](#) that State and Local Recovery Funds from American Rescue Plan can be used to address violence associated with the pandemic through supporting law-enforcement strategies, including hiring officers, paying overtime, and purchasing technology and equipment.

At the national level, the DOJ's grant-making offices often publish competitive solicitations in winter or early spring to support law enforcement strategies in addressing violent crime. To learn about these solicitations, visit the individual office's website, including the [Office of Justice Programs](#), the [Office of Community Oriented Policing Services \(COPS\)](#), and the [Office of Violence Against Women](#).

At the state and local level, the DOJ makes several formula awards and discretionary grants to State Administering Agencies as well as county and municipal governments that can support law-enforcement violence reduction programs. The most relevant formula award is the [Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant \(JAG\) Program](#), though state and local officials should also look to the [Victims of Crime Act \(VOCA\)](#), [STOP Violence Against Women Formula Grant Program](#), the [National Criminal History Information Project \(NCHIP\)](#), and the [NICS Act Record Improvement Program \(NARIP\)](#). To learn more about federal funds administered by state and local governmental agencies, identify your [State Administrative Agency](#) and learn about the policies and procedures that govern their grant making.