



# Shaping a Regional Violence Reduction Strategy

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# About the VRC

- **The Center for the Study and Practice of Violence Reduction** (“the VRC”) offers solutions to community gun violence by combining rigorous research with practical know-how
  - The VRC reviews research, summarizes it, and then makes it available in accessible, easy-to-use formats
  - Also provides practical instruction to cities on how to choose the right combination of anti-violence strategies for their jurisdiction
- Everything we do, we do it for free
- VRC staff have worked with hundreds of public officials to reduce violence locally, nationally, internationally

# About the VRC

- Established in November 2022
- For interested jurisdictions, provides a **Practicum on Partnership-Based Violence Reduction** – an evidence- and community-informed planning process to improve anti-violence practice
- Works with mayors, other elected officials, and key stakeholders to make sure plans reflect practical realities, not just science
- So far, has worked successfully with Knoxville and Boston – practical executed, plans completed, implementation underway
- Lots of interest, limited resources – can only work with 2-3 more jurisdictions



simple: to save lives  
by stopping violence  
using science.”



# What is community violence?

- According to the WHO, community violence is defined as “violence between individuals who are unrelated, and who may or may not know each other, generally taking place outside the home”
- In St. Louis and across nation, community violence (gun violence in community settings) is the #1 driver of homicides

# Why focus on community violence?

- First and foremost, clear moral obligation to keep all citizens safe
- Community gun violence impacts every aspect of urban life: health, education, housing, jobs, economic development
- Every homicide costs \$10-19 million in criminal justice, medical, other costs (McCollister et al., 2010; Cohen et al., 2004; DeLisi et al., 2010)
- In 2022, the 360 homicides in St. Louis MSA cost region between \$3.6-6.9 billion
- GSL Policy Advisory Board: “Crime and public safety are a leading barrier to the success of the STL 2030 Jobs Plan”

# Why focus on community violence?

- Reducing violence can save lives and unlock millions, even billions, in human and economic potential – a 10% reduction in homicides would save St. Louis MSA an estimated \$360-690 million
- Also a social justice and equity issue: impact of violence is not experienced equally, so benefits of reducing violence disproportionately helps most disadvantaged and disenfranchised

# Being evidence-informed

- “*Evidence-informed* means drawing on the best evidence and data currently available. It also means that key decisions should be determined not by politics but instead by what empirical information shows will save the most lives.” (Abt, 2019)
- What does evidence mean here?
- What’s the difference between being evidence-informed and evidence-based?



# Being evidence-informed

- “Evidence: something which shows that something else exists or is true; a visible sign of something.” (Merriam-Webster)
- “Proof legally presented at trial which is intended to convince the judge and/or jury of alleged facts material to the case.” (Law.com)
- “Information that is generated through systematic data collection, research, or program evaluation using accepted scientific methods that are documented and replicable.” (Crimesolutions.gov)

# Being evidence-informed

## **Benefits of using evidence in policymaking:**

- Accountability. Evidence provides a means of measuring success/failure
- Objectivity. Evidence minimizes bias; provides neutral reference point for discussions
- Accuracy: Using evidence is better at explaining past events, predicting future events than other methods
- Certainty: Using evidence involves transparent rules and repeatable procedures for reaching scientific conclusions

# Being evidence-informed

- Evidence-based
  - Assumes evidence strong, complete and permanent enough to control policy, i.e. may create false sense of certainty
  - Can discourage innovation, creativity
  - Ignores that evidence only one consideration in policymaking
- Evidence-informed
  - Gets benefits of being evidence-based without disadvantages
  - More nuanced understanding of role of evidence in policymaking

# Being community-informed

- “Community-informed means the effort will give voice to those most impacted by community violence by listening and inviting participation throughout the policymaking and implementation process.” (Abt, 2019)
  - What does community mean here?
  - What’s the difference between being community-informed and community-based?

# Being community-informed

- Community, in this context, means those impacted most by community gun violence, i.e. residents from areas where rates of violence highest, including those involved in gun violence as victims and perpetrators.
- But who represents the community? Is there one or many communities? And does the community speak with one voice?

# Being community-informed

## **Benefits of involving community in policymaking:**

- Legitimacy. If credible community leaders/members participate, effort more likely to be seen as fair and legitimate
- Sustainability. If seen as fair and legitimate, effort more likely to be sustained over time
- Effectiveness: If community leaders/members participate, will get more accurate information about local circumstances and conditions, leading to more effective strategies

# Being community-informed

- Community-based
  - Assumes “community” can be easily defined
  - Assumes community has all necessary expertise and information
  - Wishes of community not only consideration for policymaking
- Community-informed
  - Gets benefits of involving community without disadvantages of community-based approach
  - More nuanced understanding of the role of community

# Focus, balance, fairness

- “Given the concentrated nature of community violence, as well as the relative scarcity of resources to address the problem, we must design a *focused* response. Being focused means targeting what matters most when it comes to urban violence.” (Abt, 2019)
  - What does being focused mean?
  - Why is it important?



# Focus, balance, fairness

- In U.S. cities, half of murders involve less than .06% of the city's population (Lurie et al., 2018), 4% of geography accounts for half of all crime (Weisburd, 2015)
- Looking across hundreds of evaluations, those focusing on highest risk people and places outperform those that don't
  - True for policing (Braga, 2015), gang prevention (Gravel et al., 2012; Petrosino et al., 2015), reentry (Hollin, 1999; Lipsey & Cullen, 2007); also true for public health (Limbos et al. 2007)
- Displacement a concern, but “over 30 years of research evidence... suggests that crime relocates in only a minority of instances” (Johnson et al., 2014)

# Focus, balance, fairness

- “[B]alancing prevention and punishment works far better than either approach in isolation. We need a range of incentives that promote positive associations and activities while deterring violence—there must be both carrot and stick.” (Abt, 2019)
  - What does being balanced mean?
  - Why is it important?

# Focus, balance, fairness

- Across hundreds of evaluations, evidentiary support for both “soft” and “tough” approaches (Abt and Winship, 2016)
- Prevention diverts future offenders, enforcement deters or incapacitates current offenders
- No city has successfully used only one or the other – must combine sustainability of prevention with immediacy of enforcement

# Focus, balance, fairness

- “The first two fundamentals of anti-violence efforts—focus and balance—are intended to preserve public safety. The third fundamental—*fairness*—is intended to build legitimacy by treating individuals and communities justly. The first two fundamentals concern what to do about community gun violence, while the last concerns how to do it.” (Abt, 2019)
- “A key means of building legitimacy starts with a concept called procedural justice or fairness, which holds that legitimacy depends largely on whether the system’s processes are believed to be fair, not just on the outcomes the system produces.” (Abt, 2019)

# Focus, balance, fairness

- Community gun violence is closely connected to legitimacy: less fairness leads to more violence, e.g. Ferguson, Minneapolis
  - Procedural justice: lack of trust and confidence results in less compliance, more violence (Papachristos, Meares, & Fagan, 2012; Gau & Brunson, 2010)
  - Legal cynicism: when communities do not believe in criminal justice system, they withdraw from it (Kirk & Papachristos, 2011)
- Reforms that enhance legitimacy complement violence reduction strategies and should be done simultaneously

# Focus, balance, fairness

- Procedural fairness has helped police officials rebuild trust, improve compliance, and promote collaboration (Brunson et al., 2015; Donner et al., 2015; Mazerolle et al., 2013); also worked for courts (Bornstein et al., 2016)
- What does it mean to be “procedurally fair?”
  - Respectful treatment
  - Unbiased and transparent decision-making
  - Given opportunity to be heard, i.e. “voice”
- Not just for street encounters – should be part of policymaking process

# People, places, and behaviors

- To make a strategy actionable, use strategies that focus on the people, places, and behaviors driving community gun violence
- For people-based strategies
  - Identify those most at risk, then engage
  - Once engaged, stabilize by providing safety and security
  - Once stabilized, treat unhealthy thinking, unsafe behavior, trauma
  - Once treated, offer educational and employment opportunities
  - Punish those who persist with swift and certain sanctions

# People, places, and behaviors

- For place-based strategies
  - Increase legitimate police presence in violent hot spots
  - Follow up policing with place-making
  - Supplement policing and place-making with community-building
- For behavior-based strategies
  - Broad efforts to address guns, gangs, and drugs not successful
  - To enhance effectiveness, reframe as behaviors facilitating violence, i.e. gun-carrying, gang-banging, violent drug dealing
  - Focus on these behaviors among key people and in key places



# Defining the Problem and the Solution

- To move forward, must start with a common definition of the problem and solution
- Both should be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant, and Time-bound

# Defining the Problem and the Solution

- The Problem: “Unacceptably high rates of lethal and potentially lethal violence, committed in public spaces, as measured by the number of homicides and shootings that result in injury.” (Abt, 2019)
  - Why focus on violence? Why in public? Why lethal and potentially lethal violence? Why homicides and shootings with injury?
- The Solution: “To save lives by reducing homicides and shootings with injury by 10% each year.” (Abt, 2019)
  - Why focus on saving lives? Why 10%? Why annually?

# The need for frameworks

- In order to properly organize a multi-pronged response, frameworks can be helpful to coordinate the activities of multiple stakeholders
- “As the global community recognizes the connection between violence and failure to achieve health and development goals, a resource such as an evidence-based framework could more effectively inform policies and funding priorities locally, nationally, and globally” (National Academy of Sciences, 2014)

# VRC framework, empty

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**Prevention**

**Intervention**

**Enforcement**

**People**

**Places**

**Behaviors**

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# VRC framework, full

	Prevention	Intervention	Enforcement
People	<i>Cognitive behavioral interventions</i> <i>Family-based programming</i>	<i>Cognitive behavioral interventions</i> <i>Focused deterrence</i>	<i>Problem-oriented policing</i> <i>Shooting investigations</i> <i>Focused deterrence</i>
Places	<i>Community building</i> <i>Economic, commercial investment</i>	<i>Blight, nuisance abatement</i> <i>Restoring city services</i>	<i>Problem-oriented policing</i> <i>Hot spots policing</i>
Behaviors	<i>Cognitive behavioral interventions</i> <i>Family-based programming</i>	<i>Cognitive behavioral interventions</i> <i>Focused deterrence</i>	<i>Problem-oriented policing</i> <i>Targeted gun patrols</i>

Let's discuss!