Addressing Gangs Through Community Violence Intervention

Impact and Insights from the National Gang Center Webinar Series

2,242

Live Event Attendees Across the Series

3,100+

Post-Event Recording Views

Youth violence in the United States is a critical problem with wide ramifications. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), homicide is the third leading cause of death for young people ages 10 to 24 and the leading cause of death for non-Hispanic Black or African American youth. In support of the U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) priority of community violence intervention and in response to the growing problem, the DOJ, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP) National Gang Center (NGC) hosted the **Community Violence Intervention—Addressing Gangs** webinar series from April 2021 through January 2022. This **seven-part series** highlighted the **key components to developing an effective and comprehensive, community-based approach to gang and gun violence reduction**. Through engaging presentations and panel discussions, the series uplifted the voices and experience of practitioners across the United States who are working in real time to promote public safety, build youth resiliency, and reduce violence in their communities, encouraging them to share their insights, best practices, and lessons learned with the field. Intended for a broad range of disciplines, this series reached 47 states in the United States as well as 54 international agencies.

Major Disciplines Represented

- Child protection and advocacy
- City/state government
- Community-based organizations
- Court services
- Detention/corrections
- Education/schools
- Juvenile justice
- Law enforcement
- Mental health
- Probation/parole
- Prosecution
- Social services
- Youth services
- Victim advocacy/assistance
- Housing authorities
- Project Safe Neighborhoods
- U.S. Attorney's Offices

Webinars and Key Insights

Impacting Gang-Involved Youth at the Individual Level

Understanding Youth Gang Involvement

Highlighted the work of two violence reduction programs/organizations—Indy HeartBeat in Marion County, Indiana, and Volunteers of America, Los Angeles, California.

- There is a cumulative, not independent, risk for gang joining.
- Reductions in gang embeddedness, not change in status or identity, should be viewed as the core outcome of gang intervention.
- The responsibility of the program is not to decide how a youth will get out of a gang but to provide them with positive alternatives and help them take ownership and responsibility to achieve their specific goals.
- In addition to connecting the youth to critical services and prosocial activities, building relationships and helping youth repair their relationships with others can be beneficial to them and their long-term success.

Understanding both the reasons behind a youth's decision to join a gang and the youth's level of embeddedness in the gang is instrumental in developing programs and supports for gang disengagement.

Effective Street Outreach

Highlighted the perspectives of two street outreach professionals, each with more than 25 years of experience, from Riverside, California, and Houston, Texas.

- Engaging gang-involved youth, building a rapport, and gaining their respect are crucial but challenging. One strategy to consider is using the same factors that attract them to a gang when building your outreach program—structure, consistency, and accountability.
- The core of outreach is assisting youth through gang-related and real-life situations.
- Without first building a rapport with the youth, having an understanding of the community, and assisting them through difficult situations, an outreach worker will not be able to effectively respond to crises or support gang mediation.

For a violence reduction initiative to make an impact, there needs to be a strong street outreach component. Street outreach is the heart, eyes, and ears of an initiative and the ground-level presence connecting with the community and gang-involved youth.

Operating a Multidisciplinary Intervention Team

Highlighted the work of two projects deploying multidisciplinary intervention teams— IGNITE Youth Alliance in Fort Pierce, Florida, and Juvenile GRANDE Program in Bexar County, Texas.

- The intervention team will look and operate differently in every community based on the population served.
- For successful intervention, each team member needs to work together and contribute information or resources that can be used to build an effective case plan.
- Trust and understanding between partners, especially between law enforcement and street outreach workers, will be critical for success.

A coordinated and multidisciplinary response, such as one through a multidisciplinary intervention team, is essential to addressing the needs and risk factors of high-risk youth or gang-affiliated individuals.

REVIEW REFERRALS   CONDUCT IN-DEPTH CLIENT REVIEWS   DISCUSS CRISIS SITUATIONS   DISCUSS GANG DYNAMICS/ SAFETY ISSUES

Building a Comprehensive and Systemic Approach

Understanding Violence in Your Community

Highlighted violence reduction efforts in Baltimore, Maryland, and Newport News, Virginia.

- An assessment is critical to diagnosing both the problem and the capacity of key stakeholders to respond to the problem; it will help to focus the response on the greatest issue.
- The assessment will look different in every community, because gangs look different in every community.
- With a plan backed up by an assessment, you know where you are going and have a road map to get there. Without one, it can be easy to get off track.
- For smaller communities with limited capacity, start with what you have. Consider conducting surveys or focus groups with youth or stakeholders. Explore partnerships with local universities to support the assessment.

An incorrect diagnosis of the gang problem can result in an incorrect use of resources or in the worsening of the problem.

Essential Partnership for Leading a Community-Based Response

Highlighted the perspectives of those involved with violence reduction initiatives, including a project director from Trenton, New Jersey, and a Steering Committee member from Fort Pierce, Florida.

- When you are identifying the essential partners, you need a clear understanding of what you want to do and achieve. Identify the partners related to that specific issue.
- When engaging partners, the partners have to understand the value of the collaboration for them. Express how you can support one another's goals.
- Allow partners to own and leverage their expertise for the initiative.
- In communities where partners may not be comfortable working together, bring them together in smaller groups first to make sure everyone is comfortable.

Because of the complexities that drive violence, it is nearly impossible for one organization to address all of the issues to achieve overall reductions. A collaborative response from a diverse group of stakeholders is required.

Coordinating a Comprehensive Response

Highlighted the work of Project Imagine in Danville, Virginia; Un-Repeating the Cycle in Jacksonville, Arkansas; and Cumberland County Identify, Notify, Care (INC) in New Jersey.

- The development of a strong program infrastructure and effective project management are best practices in the implementation and sustainment of responses to youth violence.

- The best lead agency and administrative structure for an initiative will look different, depending on the local context (i.e., credibility in the community, capacity to bring partners together). Be aware of distrust that a community may have with a specific agency and how that could impact perception of the initiative.

- Many entities want to be involved in an initiative but do not know their place—it is the role of the project coordinator to show where they fit in.

- A project coordinator should take the time to build relationships with stakeholders and engage with the community. Being consistent in these relationships will build credibility and legitimacy for the initiative.

When starting a project from scratch, it is important to take the time to build out a well-thought-out program infrastructure and strategies.

IMPLEMENTATION

Prevention

Street Outreach

Intervention

Intervention Team

Suppression

COMMUNITY

Steering Committee

Project Coordinator

Assessment Workgroup

Research Partner

ORGANIZATION

How Does a Comprehensive Response Come Together?

OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model

Highlighted the perspective of a practitioner with more than 20 years of experience leading the strategic planning, development, and implementation of violence reduction projects across the country and provided examples of the core strategies in action.

- Public trust is critical to the success and sustainability of any violence reduction project. Under the Model, the community plays a large role and serves as an equal partner. A diverse group of community stakeholders should have an equal say in the role with a voice and ownership over project activities.

- The most important factors to consider when exploring approaches to respond to gang violence are a balance of strategies, utilization of a diversity of partners, alignment of strategies with the results of an assessment, and strategic utilization of resources for project sustainability. The Model creates a structure to fulfill each of these factors.

The Model is an adaptable framework of five interrelated core strategies that offer a comprehensive, collaborative approach designed to prevent and reduce gang violence.

Community Mobilization—community engagement and collaboration

Opportunities Provision—education, training, and employment programs

Social Intervention—outreach and access to provision of services for gang-involved youth and their families

Suppression—community policing with formal and informal social controls and accountability measures

Organizational Change and Development—development of policy for effective use of resources

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> **CONTACT US**
> Website: https://nationalgangcenter.ojp.gov/ • Email: information@nationalgangcenter.gov
> Twitter: @NatlGangCenter