



Violence Prevention Offices in Local Government

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OBJECTIVE

This report serves as an overview of local offices of violence prevention, how they are established and what kinds of program they offer.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Offices of violence prevention (OVP) in local government have increased in response to rising violence in cities across the United States. Presented as a method of consolidating resources and community efforts, these offices allow cities and/or counties to focus their violence reduction efforts in one location. Programs offered through these offices vary from employment training and criminal justice re-entry programs to media campaigns spreading awareness. These offices vary in staffing levels, from smaller offices composed of general program coordinators to larger ones with dedicated teams for different aspects of violence prevention (suicide prevention, group violence, outreach, data, etc.). Generally, these offices are housed within the Mayor's Office with some exceptions like Los Angeles County and Milwaukee, which house their offices within the Department of Health or Public Health. One common aspect of these programs is some level of case management where liaisons, whether from the local government or with a community organization, will monitor high-risk individuals in specific locations. Challenges associated with establishing these offices are attaining mayoral or leadership approval, mobilizing all relevant stakeholders efficiently and balancing community needs with their concerns.

BEST PRACTICES AND CHARACTERISTICS

There are resources available to cities seeking to establish an office of violence prevention, primarily through the National Offices of Violence Prevention Network.¹ This network was created by the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR), which has worked with OVP directors across the country to establish a network of the nation's OVPs and their corresponding directors, which can be found on their website.² The network hosts convenings of offices, conducts trainings on effective practices, coordinates learning exchanges, provides leadership development and support OVPs in data collection, and funds development and communications/media. They also "support the creation of new OVPs in cities interested in developing such agencies."³

The National League of Cities also provides resources for reducing neighborhood violence and suggests establishing an Office of Violence Prevention and supporting intervention programs. The League identifies first steps for these offices as the following:⁴

- Inventory all violence prevention efforts in city
 - Identify strengths and weaknesses
- Mobilize diverse stakeholders to identify common goals/strategies
- Ensure that approaches are data/community driven

¹ <https://ovpnetwork.org/>

² <https://ovpnetwork.org/about-us/>

³ <https://ovpnetwork.org/about-us/>

⁴ <https://www.nlc.org/article/2023/06/28/action-on-gun-violence-why-every-town-matters/>

Everytown for Gun Safety's City Gun Violence Reduction Insight Portal (CityGRIP) also provides guidance on establishing an effective OVP.⁵ After common goals have been identified, the office is typically responsible for distributing resources and prioritizing high-risk communities. The office should also take charge in guiding data collection on gun violence in the area as well as program/policy outcomes. This data should later be used for analysis and assessing impacts. Generally, the office is designed to keep stakeholders accountable, allocate resources, implement policies and evaluate outcomes.

CHALLENGES

Everytown for Gun Safety also identifies common barriers to the establishment and effectiveness of OVPs.⁶ Firstly, mayoral or leadership buy-in and subsequent available funding may serve as barriers to entry in establishing an office.

Even after the establishment of an OVP, engaging stakeholders may be challenging due to the diversity of perspectives and commitments. However, emphasizing commonalities and identifying specific ways they may contribute to the policy or program at hand can minimize these barriers.

Additionally, the community may not be responsive to program suggestions. Discussed in further detail in the peer cities section, the City of Syracuse's proposed gun violence prevention plan was criticized by the community and stakeholders for a controversial aspect of the program.⁷ This portion of the plan was later removed, but similar concerns would require a balance of community and stakeholder concerns.

⁵ https://citygrip.org/practice_area/mayors-office-of-gun-violence-prevention-2/

⁶ https://citygrip.org/practice_area/mayors-office-of-gun-violence-prevention-2/

⁷ <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/central-ny/news/2023/03/08/syracuse-mayor-s-office-unveils-plan-to-combat-gun-violence>

PRACTICES FROM OTHER JURISDICTIONS

| Promising Practices for Offices of Violence Prevention | Milwaukee | New York City | Portland | Baltimore | Los Angeles County | Syracuse | Rochester |
|--|-----------|---------------|----------|-----------|--------------------|----------|-----------|
| Established within the Mayor’s Office | | X | | X | | X | X |
| Housed within a public health or health department | X | | | | X | | |
| Housed within the Community Safety Division | | | X | | | | |
| Provides employment training for at-risk individuals | | | | X | | X | X |
| Smaller staff with general duties | | X | | | | X | |
| Larger staff with specialized duties (ex. Youth violence, victim services, suicide prevention, etc.) | | | X | X | X | | |
| Public health approach to violence | X | | X | X | X | | |
| Provides a program with case management overseeing high-risk individuals | | | X | | X | X | X |

Milwaukee, WI

The City of Milwaukee Health Department has an Office of Violence Prevention which includes a focus on gun violence. The Office of Violence Prevention provides strategies, direction and oversight for the City in an effort to reduce violence alongside nonprofit, neighborhood, and faith-based organizations. The staff is extensive with a total salary budget being \$1,050,614. Positions include a Violence Reduction and Prevention Program Director, Administrative Assistant, Injury and Violence Prevention Program Coordinators (2), Violence Prevention Research Coordinator, ReCAST Program Coordinator and

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Manager, Violence Prevention Manager, Family Injury and Violence Prevention Manager, Crisis Response Coordinator, Grant Coordinator, Senior Operations Manager, Fiscal Coordinator, Suicide Prevention Manager, Youth Violence Prevention Manager and Community Outreach Specialist.⁸ As of 2022, the Office of Violence Prevention had a \$5.6 million budget funded by the City, though this is a much larger budget than past years as it reflects the impacts of COVID-19. The Office of Violence Prevention uses this money to fund its programs.⁹ One such program is 414 Life, which takes a public-health approach in addressing the many factors that influence violence.¹⁰ The aim for the Gun Violence Prevention subdivision is to promote policy that keeps guns out of the hands of criminals, support gun violence prevention programs that target at-risk populations, conduct community outreach campaigns to raise awareness, facilitate action plans and projects for other organizations interested in reducing gun violence, build partnerships with local, state and national experts, and act as a resource to the City with regard to local and national gun policy. Another initiative out of the office released gun safety brochures in both English and Spanish.¹¹

New York City, NY

The New York City's Mayor's Office to Prevent Gun Violence (OPGV) works to coordinate the city's various anti-gun violence initiatives, amplify community-based intervention and prevention services, and introduce technological solutions to prevent gun violence to create safe, empowered and interconnected communities in New York City.¹² The office combines initiatives that are centered around law enforcement, engaged residents, and community-based organizations. The office has a staff of four, including an Executive Director and three Community Coordinators.¹³ Examples of their efforts include:

- Coordinate
 - Synergize the city's anti-gun violence initiatives
 - Align government, law enforcement and community efforts, to systematically employ appropriate resources to reduce gun violence
 - Conduct policy and procedural analysis and recommendations to better inform justice partners and practices.
- Amplify
 - Strengthen and expand the New York City Crisis Management System
 - Empower residents to produce public safety in their community
 - Create citywide anti-gun violence campaigns
 - Provide grant opportunities for residents to conduct anti-gun violence activities
 - Implement antiviolence and youth empowerment curriculum in schools
 - Develop a public safety toolkit and resource guide for NYC neighborhoods that are kept up-to-date
 - Operate a year-round employment program for over 500 at risk young people between the ages of 16-24

⁸ <https://city.milwaukee.gov/ImageLibrary/User/crystal/Budget-Books/2023AdoptedBudgetBook.pdf>

⁹ <https://tmj4.com/news/local-news/milwaukee-alder-wants-office-of-violence-prevention-to-prove-through-data-that-funding-is-making-a-difference>

¹⁰ <https://city.milwaukee.gov/414Life>

¹¹ <https://city.milwaukee.gov/Health/Services-and-Programs/staysafe/gunViolence>

¹² <https://www.nyc.gov/site/peacenyc/index.page>

¹³ <https://www.nyc.gov/site/peacenyc/about/meet-the-team.page>

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- Utilize Technology
 - Maintain a citywide shooting incident map and a community resource tracker
 - Work with Crime Lab NYC and agency partners to implement web-based safety tools
 - Collect data on the operation of illegal gun markets in NYC
 - Create grant opportunities for innovative anti-gun violence initiatives
 - Create request for proposal opportunities for entities interested in implementing a high-visibility public education and engagement campaign.¹⁴

Portland, OR

The City of Portland’s Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) was created on July 17, 2006 to help build a more family-friendly city and increase public safety. The office views gun violence as a public health problem, and believes that by addressing the root causes and social determinants of violence, upstream programs can prevent violence from occurring.¹⁵ In the FY2022-2023 Decision Package Summary, \$5,369,806 of ARPA funding was dedicated to the OVP, particularly “to increase our service outreach in communities most affected by gun violence.”¹⁶ In addition to this ARPA funding, the Mayor’s proposed budget dedicated \$10.2 million to the office.¹⁷ Office staff include a manager, a community engagement specialist, two program managers, a youth against violence program director, and two prevention specialists.¹⁸ The office’s strategies include:

- Primary Preventions
 - Aims to prevent violence before it occurs. This lane focuses on upstream efforts that address root causes that contribute to long-term gun violence reductions. It consists of efforts to promote healthy development in the general population, such as curriculum that teaches children to resist negative peer influences and resolve conflict peacefully.
- Secondary Preventions
 - Focuses on treating immediate injury and harm resulting from violent incidents. Early interventions involve assistance for individuals who are at increased risk for violence, such as mentoring programs or conflict mediation assistance.
- Tertiary Preventions
 - Focuses on a range of activities aimed at addressing the medium and long-term effects of violence and abuse which includes therapy and other rehabilitation efforts. Consists of intensive services for individuals who have engaged in some degree of aggressive behavior and benefits from efforts to prevent a recurrence or escalation of aggression.

Examples of programming out of Portland’s office include their Street Level Outreach program, which works to engage youth and young adults who are at risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence. Street outreach workers are contracted through culturally specific community based organizations, and attend after school and community events while monitoring designated hot spots in the city. The office

¹⁴ <https://www.nyc.gov/site/peacenyc/about/about.page>

¹⁵ <https://www.portland.gov/community-safety/oyvp/work-office-violence-prevention>

¹⁶ <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/cbo/article/798626>

¹⁷ <https://www.portland.gov/cbo/documents/fy-2022-23-proposed-budget/download>

¹⁸ <https://www.portland.gov/community-safety/oyvp/http-safeyouthcom>

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also supports an intensive case management program to work with those at the highest risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator of gun violence. Other programs that the office supports include a restorative justice program, a hospital-based intervention program, the Portland Restoration Academy, the Portland City Council Gun Violence Reduction Program, and a variety of sponsorship programs.¹⁹

Baltimore, MD

The Baltimore Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement empowers community partners and city agencies to play a more active role in the co-production of public safety and prevention of violence through a trauma-responsive, healing-centered, and equity-based approach for the benefit of all Baltimoreans. The office is centered around the values of being equity-based, healing-centered, trauma-informed, justice-oriented, partnership-based, transparent, data and research-driven, and results-oriented.²⁰ In the adopted 2023 budget, \$20.7 million of ARPA funding was provided to the office to promote “a variety of crime-prevention programs, with a focus on the group violence reduction strategy (GVRS), re-entry services, victim services, and youth and trauma services” along with adding nine positions to the office.²¹ \$7.7 million was dedicated to the office from the General Fund and \$17 million was provided from grant funding. The following table depicts violence prevention program funding which is sourced from the office.

| Funding Area | FY22 | FY23 | FY24 | FY25 | All Years |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Administration | 1,268,058 | 2,301,646 | 2,287,446 | 0 | 5,857,150 |
| Gun Violence | 3,350,000 | 7,575,000 | 7,475,000 | 0 | 18,400,000 |
| Neighborhoods | 725,000 | 625,000 | 275,000 | 0 | 1,625,000 |
| Re-entry | 2,950,000 | 5,745,000 | 4,995,000 | 0 | 13,690,000 |
| Transitional Employment for GVRS | 255,000 | 2,500,000 | 2,500,000 | 0 | 5,255,000 |
| Victim Services | 453,770 | 479,540 | 479,540 | 0 | 1,412,850 |
| Youth and Trauma | 1,255,000 | 1,505,000 | 1,000,000 | 0 | 3,760,000 |
| Project Total | 10,256,828 | 20,731,186 | 19,011,986 | 0 | 50,000,000 |

Figure 1. Violence Prevention Funding. Sourced from the 2023 Adopted Budget.
https://bbmr.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/FY23_SOTA_final_Update.pdf

The office has an extensive staffing structure, including six staff members focused on gun violence prevention (a Community Violence Intervention Deputy Director, two Community Violence Intervention Outreach Liaisons, a Group Violence Reduction Strategy Deputy Director, a Group Violence Reduction Strategy Service Partnership Manager, and a Group Violence Reduction Strategy Community Partnership Manager). The office also has 11 staff persons under Victim Services, 6 under Policy and Research, 3 under Communications, 6 under Finance, and 3 under Community Engagement and Opportunity.²²

¹⁹ <https://www.portland.gov/community-safety/oyvp/programs-services>

²⁰ <https://monse.baltimorecity.gov/>

²¹ https://bbmr.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/FY23_SOTA_final_Update.pdf

²² <https://monse.baltimorecity.gov/meet-our-team-0>

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Programs operated by the office include Community Violence Intervention, Safe Streets, Group Violence Reduction Strategy, the Public Safety Advisory Commission, the Violence Prevention Task Force, and the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council.²³

Los Angeles, CA

The Los Angeles County Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) is housed in the Department of Public Health and developed the region's 40-point Gun Violence Prevention Platform in June of 2022.²⁴ The FY2022-2023 budget dedicated \$3.4 million for the OVP.²⁵ Due to state and local revenue increases, the county was also able to increase funding for the following programs from supplementary budget realignments, in addition to the dedicated office funding:

- Core program: \$2.3 million
- Trauma Prevention Initiative (TPI): \$0.3 million
- Trauma Prevention Initiative (TPI) Expansion Program: \$4.1 million
- Crisis Response and Violence Intervention Program: \$0.4 million

The office has an extensive staffing structure, with two individuals in communications, four in data and reports, one in health education, one overseeing the crisis response team, one overseeing the regional violence prevention coalitions, one overseeing suicide prevention efforts, one overseeing the trauma informed and healing centered care, eight working in the trauma prevention initiative, and four working with the American Rescue Plan Trauma Prevention Partnerships.²⁶

The office's Gun Violence Prevention Platform highlights several strategies, including:

- Supporting robust common sense gun safety legislation including the reinstatement of the federal ban on assault weapons and large capacity magazines and a federal law mandating universal background checks for all gun sales, including those conducted by private sellers.
- Increasing access to comprehensive culturally relevant physical and mental health services for all students, K-12 and enhancing school safety.
- Promoting social connection and healing through access to safe spaces and programs that address harm, trauma, and the impact of violence.
- Increasing violence prevention, intervention, and healing programs to promote a culture of peace within neighborhoods.
- Increasing awareness of Gun Violence Restraining Orders (GVROs) through a public awareness campaign that will inform and educate the public on California's landmark GVRO law including what GVROs are, how to apply for one, who can apply for one, the application process, and how to access resources that can provide assistance.
- Developing a communications plan to elevate the issue of gun violence as a critical public health issue, and that creates clear statements on the root causes of gun violence, GVP activities, and gun violence as predictable and preventable.

²³ <https://monse.baltimorecity.gov/our-programs-0>

²⁴ <http://ph.lacounty.gov/ovp/index.htm>

²⁵ <https://ceo.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/2022-23-Supplemental-Budget-Transmittal-Letter.pdf>

²⁶ <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/ovp/GunViolencePreventionPlatform.htm>

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The office also oversees a diverse group of over 30 county and community partners to establish the Gun Violence Prevention Workgroup. The Workgroup prioritizes four key areas for action to address the public health issue of gun violence, including legislation, social connections & healing services, gun violence restraining orders awareness and enforcement, and school safety and services.²⁷

Syracuse, NY

The Mayor's Office to Reduce Gun Violence is tasked with identifying the root causes of gun crime in the city and creating solutions to the problem, after the city saw a near record of homicides in 2021.²⁸ The FY2023-2024 budget dedicated \$270,000 to the office.²⁹ The office has a full-time director, and a fellow through the Bloomberg Harvard City Fellowship program. The office created a Community Violence Intervention Plan, which they began implementing as a pilot program in 2023 with 50 individuals identified as drivers of gun violence in Syracuse. The pilot program is intended to help the office improve the current methodology and introduce and test national strategies.³⁰ The components of the program are outlined below:³¹

- Conflict Management
 - Hired outreach workers would stay in contact with individuals, track conflict sources and intervene in conflict
 - Purpose: Identify underlying factors in rivalries between gang associates, provide peaceful agreements
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
 - Therapist works with individual to identify thoughts that lead to violence, learn healthier coping mechanisms
 - Groups of 5-7 individuals, leverages social pressure
 - Purpose: Studies associated with effectiveness of CBT in high-risk individuals
- Mentorship/Case Management
 - Supervision and guidance as well as advocacy/referrals
 - Mentors advocate for individuals and provide emotional support
 - Purpose: Acts as case manager to make sure members avoid violent behavior and attend all aspects of program

The plan also discusses the advancement of economic opportunities. Among the programs listed in the original Community Violence Intervention Plan, there included a program which was intended to provide a \$100/week stipend to alleviate poverty in high-risk individuals and serve as positive incentive to stay

²⁷ <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/ovp/GunViolencePreventionPlatform.htm>

²⁸ <https://www.syr.gov/Departments/Mayor-Office/Mayors-Office-Initiatives/CVI>

²⁹ https://www.syr.gov/files/content/public/departments/budget/city-budget/2023-2024-budget_1.pdf

³⁰ <https://www.syr.gov/Departments/Mayor-Office/Mayors-Office-Initiatives/CVI>

³¹ <https://www.syr.gov/files/sharedassets/public/2-departments/mayors-office-to-reduce-gun-violence/documents/mayors-office-to-reduce-gun-violence-cvi-plan-3-10-23.pdf>

engaged. However, this portion of the plan was not adopted due to concerns from the community.³² Instead, further funding was provided for workforce preparation and therapy.³³

Rochester, NY

The Rochester Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) was established to create and implement a community-based intervention and prevention strategy to combat and eliminate violence.³⁴ The FY2022-2023 adopted budget dedicated \$666,500 to the office.³⁵ The funding was “transferred from the Bureau of Human Services to the Mayor’s Office along with a partial year of funding.” The newer office has one member, the Coordinator of the Office of Neighborhood Safety. It aims to foster a city-wide approach to reducing violence as a central hub to coordinate the development of a violence reduction strategy to guide investments into social programs.

The office is responsible for the Community-Wide Neighborhood Safety Plan and oversight of the Mayor’s Peacemaker Fellowship, which identifies residents at a high likelihood of becoming victims of gun violence and enroll them in a personal development program.³⁶ The Neighborhood Safety Strategic Plan is composed of the following steps:³⁷

- Mapping: Office of Neighborhood Safety and Aria Strategies effort to map resources, stakeholders and incidents in 2021
- Public meetings: 5 public meetings (3 in direct impact areas, 2 online, 1 primarily in Spanish)
- Small group engagements: Stakeholder groups gathered and asked to share thoughts with Aria Strategies team
- Surveys: One round of surveys for event attendees during holiday weeks, another for stakeholder groups

Current programs from the office also include a Reentry Program to assist individuals in transitioning from prison to civilian life as well as the Rochester Peace Collective composed of 20 organizations that manages local funding for innovative violence reduction programs.³⁸ A 2023 communications campaign created by the office in collaboration with local filmmaker Shabaka Mu Ausar entitled “Choose Wisdom” can be viewed here: <https://rocovp.com/> The campaign includes real stories from other Rochester residents affected by violence and elevates resources available through OVP.³⁹ The website will be updated throughout the year.

RECOMMENDED POINTS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- Determine where the office would be located, necessary staff and funding.

³² <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/central-ny/news/2023/03/08/syracuse-mayor-s-office-unveils-plan-to-combat-gun-violence>

³³ <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/central-ny/public-safety/2023/08/09/-syracuse-safer-streets-program--set-to-move-forward>

³⁴ <https://www.cityofrochester.gov/ONS/>

³⁵ <https://www.cityofrochester.gov/ONS/>

³⁶ <https://www.cityofrochester.gov/article.aspx?id=21474847716>

³⁷ <https://www.cityofrochester.gov/article.aspx?id=21474847716>

³⁸ <https://www.cityofrochester.gov/article.aspx?id=21474852520>

³⁹ <https://www.cityofrochester.gov/article.aspx?id=21474852520>

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- Which stakeholders would be engaged after the establishment of an OVP?
- What existing programs could be incorporated into the office? What new programs would be developed?
- How will the office respond to community concerns with proposed policies?

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