

NICJR★
National Institute for
Criminal Justice Reform

National
OVP
Network

A nighttime photograph of a city street in Columbia, Missouri. The street is illuminated by warm yellow streetlights, and light trails from cars are visible. In the background, a prominent white water tower stands out against the dark sky. Various city buildings, including a large brick building with a clock tower, are visible. The sky is a mix of dark blue and orange from the setting or rising sun.

COLUMBIA, MO

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

VIOLENCE REDUCTION PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES

September 2026

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Columbia, Missouri, Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) commissioned the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) to analyze the city's current community violence intervention (CVI) ecosystem in order to guide its efforts to expand and strengthen local violence reduction work. The CVI ecosystem includes eight community-based organizations (CBOs) providing services in two areas of CVI work: reentry and wraparound services. In addition to these organizations, a multitude of CBOs provide community violence prevention and community transformation services in the city.

In March 2026, the Columbia OVP convened representatives from 21 CBOs and two national nonprofits as well as community stakeholders to engage with the violence reduction continuum and CVI ecosystem model. Following the convening, NICJR interviewed the OVP Director and leaders from 14 CBOs and coalitions that were in attendance to gain a deeper understanding of their work, strengths, challenges, and needs. This report outlines the work of the organizations in attendance at the convening, the efforts of the OVP and other key partners, and current violence reduction initiatives in the city.

The newly established OVP has begun to build on the CVI ecosystem, encourage communication and accountability among CVI stakeholders, and engage with the community. City leadership should support the OVP in these continued efforts. Many of the core ecosystem partners have also taken steps to create relationships with other organizations and stakeholders, although these partnerships require further development.

The city's CVI ecosystem has historically focused on at-risk populations, rather than very high-risk populations. Columbia CBOs should work to intentionally engage very high-risk individuals in services. Funding entities should expand available funding to support these services. With guidance from the OVP, CBOs should also continue to build trust, shared values, and seamless partnerships to more efficiently bring services to community members who need them most.



INTRODUCTION

Columbia, Missouri, is home to 130,900 residents.¹ The city's population is 71.7% White, 12.2% Black, 6.9% two or more races, 6.4% Asian, and 4.4% Latino. Just under 20% of the city's population lives in poverty, and the median income is around \$66,500. The city sits in central Missouri, between St. Louis and Kansas City, and is the seat of Boone County.

The rate of gun violence in Columbia has remained close to or below the national rate over the last several years. In both 2021 and 2023, the city experienced five firearm homicides,² for a rate of 3.82 per 100,000 residents. Violence spiked briefly in 2022 and again in 2024, with both years seeing nine gun homicides, for a rate of 6.88 per 100,000 residents. In 2025, the city saw a significant decrease to just three gun homicides, or 2.29 per 100,000. As of June 2026, the city has experienced three gun homicides this year, all within the first three months of the year.

While Columbia has not historically experienced high rates of gun violence, targeted, data-driven efforts can lead to further reductions in gun violence in the city. To this end, the Columbia Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) commissioned the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) to conduct this Landscape Analysis. This report examines Columbia's existing community violence intervention (CVI) ecosystem, as well as some of the key prevention and community transformation partners that collectively make up the city's violence reduction continuum. This report also assesses the strengths and challenges of the ecosystem and provides recommendations to expand and strengthen existing CVI efforts.

Figure 1. Columbia, Missouri Population and Racial Demographics, 2025

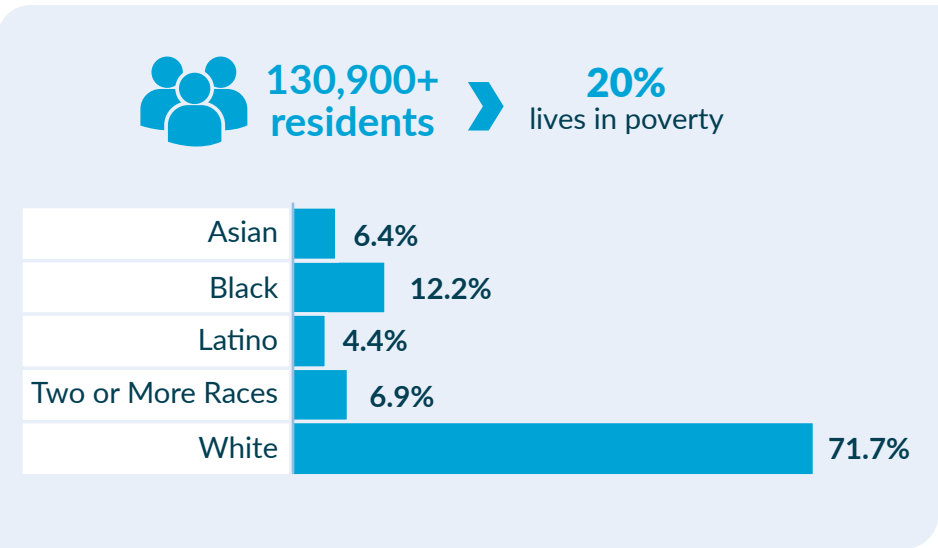


Figure 2. Columbia Missouri Firearm Homicides, 2021-2025



1 US Census Bureau Quick Facts: Columbia, MO

2 Missouri State Highway Patrol: Crime in Missouri Dashboards, Columbia Police Department jurisdiction, violent crime theme, years 2021-2026



METHODOLOGY

In March 2026, NICJR participated in a convening hosted by the Columbia OVP that gathered entities active in the city's gun violence reduction efforts. Attendees included a local government stakeholder, the Boone County Community Services Department; a philanthropic organization, Missouri Foundation for Health; a national nonprofit, Moms Demand Action; and 21 local community-based organizations (CBOs). Attendees engaged with the CVI ecosystem model as it relates to their own organizational efforts and the broader work of Columbia toward community violence reduction.

Attendees also collaborated to add local context to field-level definitions for some of the 11 CVI service areas described below by establishing preliminary definitions through small group discussions, and then incorporating feedback from the larger group. See Appendix B for these definitions. Throughout this report, each service area should be understood to align with these definitions. These definitions also guided qualitative data analysis determining where each program sits within the violence reduction continuum, based upon services provided.

Following the convening, NICJR interviewed representatives from 14 CBOs and coalitions, as well as the Director of the Columbia OVP, to delve deeper into their work, and the violence reduction efforts across the city. NICJR conducted all interviews via Zoom. Each lasted 30–60 minutes and took place between March and April 2026. Interviews used open-ended questions to encourage detailed and thoughtful responses and productive discussions. NICJR also reviewed publicly available documentation including organizational reports, news articles, and other relevant materials to describe the programs and services available in Columbia.

NICJR analyzed data from the convening and subsequent interviews to surface themes across these conversations. Based on these themes, NICJR identified strengths, gaps, and challenges in the existing ecosystem. NICJR then developed a list of recommendations for the City to continue to build out its CVI ecosystem.

NICJR VIOLENCE REDUCTION LANDSCAPE FRAMEWORK

This report is organized around NICJR's violence reduction framework, which includes three primary programmatic categories: violence intervention, violence prevention, and community transformation. Violence intervention, prevention, and community transformation each play a distinct but interrelated role in reducing community violence. Each of the violence reduction organizations identified in Columbia fit within one or more of these categories.

Violence Intervention

Violence intervention efforts are designed to prevent the recurrence of violence or intervene and prevent the imminent act of violence. Violence intervention efforts specifically focus on the people who are at the greatest immediate risk of violence. This type of work tends to see the most immediate results in gun violence reduction, typically within one to three years of implementation.

Both violence prevention and intervention hinge on deploying services that identify and address age- and context-appropriate risk and protective factors. However, while violence prevention is a broad field encompassing various types of programs, effective violence intervention is more narrowly defined and focused.

Figure 3: A community violence intervention ecosystem consists of at least these 11 baseline services working to reduce gun violence in the near term by intensively engaging with individuals at the highest risk of immediate involvement in gun violence.



Violence Prevention

Violence prevention refers to the elimination or reduction of the underlying risk factors within individuals that lead to violence, thus preventing violence from occurring in the first place. These programs generally require five to ten years of sustained investment to see significant reductions in gun violence, but they provide critical support for youth prior to reductions in community violence.

Programs and services in this category often orient toward children and youth, with a focus on fostering attitudes, competencies, values, and social skills that contribute to successful transition into adulthood. In particular, youth development programming can increase pro-social attitudes, self-efficacy, academic achievement, and readiness for employment. These positive outcomes serve as protective factors against the root causes of violence.

Figure 4: A community violence prevention ecosystem includes services working with individuals (predominantly youth) who have risk factors that could lead to future involvement in gun violence.



Community Transformation

Community transformation refers to the elimination of systemic factors that give rise to violence in a neighborhood, like poverty, blight, low-performing schools, disinvestment, and chronic unemployment. While community transformation is a long-term strategy that can take 10–20 years to achieve, if successfully implemented, it can also be most effective at permanently reducing violence.

Figure 5: A community transformation ecosystem is made up of services aiming to provide resources and reduce disparities for high-risk communities.



See Appendix B for more details about each of the services shown above.

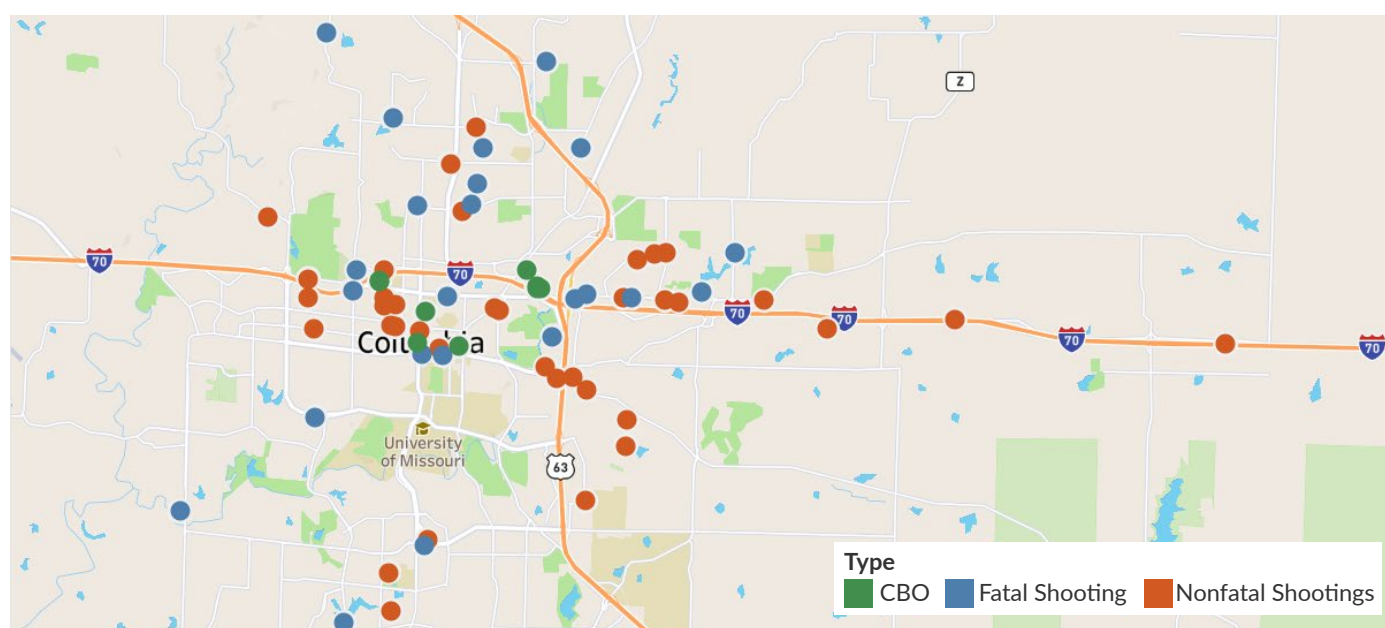
OVERVIEW OF CURRENT COLUMBIA COMMUNITY VIOLENCE INTERVENTION ECOSYSTEM

Relationship Between Community-Based Organizations' Locations and Columbia Gun Violence

Below is a map that displays two sets of data: 1) locations where fatal and nonfatal shootings took place in Columbia, Missouri, from January 2023 through December 2025 and 2) physical locations of CBOs in the Columbia CVI ecosystem.³ All organizations in the CVI ecosystem serve the entire city of Columbia; some also serve locations outside the city in Boone County and beyond. This visualization helps to demonstrate which areas of the city have adequate service coverage and which may need an expansion of services relative to the prevalence of gun violence.

In Columbia, shootings over the last three years clustered along Interstate 70, particularly west of Highway 63 and just south of the interstate, around downtown. Offices of the city's CVI organizations are also located in the downtown area, meaning brick-and-mortar service locations are mostly located in the highest-risk area for gun violence. Downtown Columbia features pedestrian-friendly infrastructure and free buses, which helps make these services more accessible to those who need them most, although bus routes can be inefficient or difficult to navigate. To further support those at high risk of gun violence living outside of downtown Columbia, the CVI ecosystem should work to expand brick-and-mortar service locations north and east in the city, especially considering the number of fatal shootings north of the interstate.

Figure 6. Geography of Community-based Organizations and 2023-2025 Fatal and Nonfatal Shootings



³ Two organizations share an office building, and an additional three organizations are located in different units within the same building. The map only shows one of each location.

Policies and Initiatives

Columbia Office of Violence Prevention

The **Columbia Office of Violence Prevention (OVP)** was established in 2023 and began operations in March 2025. As a young office, the OVP is focused on laying the groundwork for intentional, data-informed violence reduction efforts. Office leadership is engaging with City leaders, State and local government agencies that provide funding, and other stakeholders to develop a coordinated, citywide approach to violence reduction. This is being supported by the creation of a Violence Reduction Strategic Plan in collaboration with NICJR.

The OVP is currently working to collect and review data about gun violence in the city, to inform its own approach to violence reduction and the work of its partners. Data collection efforts include this Landscape Analysis and a forthcoming Gun Violence Problem Analysis (also conducted by NICJR), as well as the collection and tracking of key performance indicators. Beyond gun violence incident rates, key performance indicators include community requests for service—an important indicator of the level of trust and engagement CBOs and City agencies have established with the public.

The office also acts as a convener, bringing together practitioners and the community, building relationships among service providers, and developing a continuum of care for individuals at the highest risk for gun violence. Additionally, the OVP is working to expand partnerships with law enforcement and County services and agencies, with a focus on further bolstering a comprehensive approach to violence reduction.

The OVP receives feedback and guidance from an OVP Advisory Committee made up of CBO leaders, city agency staff, and representatives from law enforcement and universities. This committee meets regularly with OVP leadership, acting as a voice for the community and an accountability partner for the OVP. These monthly meetings are also open to the public, encouraging community members to be active participants in violence reduction in their city.

Coalition Against Community Violence

Coalition Against Community Violence includes six local organizations and one national nonprofit working to reduce gun violence across Columbia.⁴ The coalition was created using funding from the Missouri Foundation for Health and focuses on social determinants of health, taking a public health approach to gun violence. The group aims to reduce gun violence by reducing poverty, increasing access to education, supporting families, and healing trauma in communities. The coalition is working to uplift and include community voices by hosting town halls open to residents and other Columbia stakeholders.

Unity in the Community

Unity in the Community is a grassroots, collaborative effort to provide resources and build a community of care for Columbia residents, with a focus on expanding capacity through partnerships rather than competition. This coalition includes approximately 50 organizations working across services areas and populations including youth, justice-involved individuals, and at-risk communities to provide basic needs, reentry services, substance use recovery, mental health care, youth development, and more. Unity in the Community meets monthly to address community concerns, fill service gaps, and build relationships with the community. This coalition bridges infrastructure gaps by meeting residents where they are, delivering essential services directly to neighborhoods during evening hours to maximize trust and accessibility. This effort has received financial support from the Missouri State Legislature.

⁴ [About the Coalition Against Community Violence](#)

Community Violence Intervention

Reentry Services

Connections to Success

Connections to Success began operating in the Columbia area in 2020, but the organization has been serving Missourians since 1998. Connections to Success uses a pathway to success model to assist individuals transitioning out of incarceration as well as other at-risk adults facing poverty and substance use disorder, veterans, and their families. Program participants first complete a 60-hour personal and professional development course, focusing on mock interviews and resume building, self-empowerment, cognitive restructuring, decision-making, the power of choice, trauma and post-incarceration syndrome, and more. The course is taught in cohorts, allowing individuals to build relationships with both their peer mentor facilitators and other participants. Classes are provided in the community and in jails and prisons for individuals preparing to reenter from incarceration.



After finishing the course, each participant works one-on-one with a life coach for approximately 12 months. Together, they set goals across multiple life domains, including emotional, cognitive, employment, family, housing, financial, and health. Life coaches work with participants and their families to achieve their goals, and they provide referrals for additional services as needed. Life coaching is tailored to the needs of each participant and varies in intensity and frequency. Life coaches also work with probation and parole to advocate for participants and document their progress toward positive behavioral change.

Destiny of Helping Our People Excel (H.O.P.E.), Inc.

Destiny of Helping Our People Excel (H.O.P.E.), Inc., has provided reentry services to the Columbia community since 2001. Staff typically make first contact within correctional facilities, where they provide guidance from a certified paralegal and establish referral pathways to support participants upon their return home. Destiny of H.O.P.E. continues working with individuals after their release, helping them to meet remaining sentence requirements and navigate legal systems such as family court. The organization also connects participants with credible messengers who offer peer-led guidance and emotional processing through unstructured meetings designed to promote genuine connections. The organization takes an individualized approach to help identify participants' needs and connect them with the appropriate services to support sustainable life change.



In2Action, established in 2011, is a faith-based, residential transition program for adults with criminal justice involvement and substance use disorder. This program uses a social model of recovery to support individuals as they make changes in their lives to improve well-being across six domains: thinking, social connection, spirituality, physical health, managing emotions, and finances. The social model uses immersion to teach participants how to reintegrate into their communities and socially transition from prison, social networks related to substance use, and/or gang life.

In2Action participants live on site, where they build relationships with each other and with peer support specialists. Peer support specialists provide guidance and support as participants make radical life changes, establishing genuine connections with them and partnering with them in formal sessions to set and work toward goals. In the first phase of the program, participants engage in professional development classes and in life skills classes focused on decision-making, relapse prevention, money management, and more. Participants also receive stabilization support, including referrals for medical care, mental health care, and/or medication-assisted treatment; support securing vital documents; and connections to social services. During later program phases, which intentionally have a less rigid structure to foster independence, participants begin full-time, off-campus employment. Participants typically remain in the program for about one year, and In2Action partners with the Reentry Opportunity Center to ensure follow-up support for all participants beyond this period.

In2Action is Missouri Coalition of Recovery Support Providers (MCRSP) / National Association of Recovery Residences (NARR) accredited.⁵

The Reentry Opportunity Center (ROC)

The Reentry Opportunity Center (ROC) has been serving the Columbia community for eight years, providing reentry services for individuals returning to the community from incarceration and individuals on probation or parole. The ROC takes a holistic approach in working with each participant to identify and address their unique needs. For example, the Center provides transportation support; housing support such as rental assistance and help identifying rental options; employment support, including connections to training; and assistance obtaining documents and basic needs such as clothing. The ROC partners with many organizations throughout Columbia, receiving and providing referrals.



⁵ State Opioid Response Recovery Housing Directory

TMT Consulting is a licensed mental health provider offering accredited anger management and batterer intervention programs that are court mandated for individuals charged with or convicted of domestic violence or who have a protection order in place. These programs can be mandated as a part of probation or parole, as a diversion option, or as part of reentry from incarceration. TMT's batterer intervention programming for men and women focuses on conflict resolution, deescalation, healthy relationships, and the impact of past trauma. TMT Consulting also offers trauma-informed and strengths-based clinical mental health counseling (see Community Violence Prevention for more information).

Wraparound Services

Job Point

Job Point is an employment center and community development corporation that has provided services to the city for more than 60 years. Participants are often referred to programming from probation or parole, treatment court, prisons, juvenile detention, drug court, and other Columbia CBOs. Job Point recruiters also regularly attend court and visit correctional facilities to engage qualifying individuals in the program. The organization offers eight trade certification programs, seven of which are open to justice-impacted individuals. Job Point works with each participant individually to identify barriers and help them reach their goals, including and beyond meaningful employment. This includes addressing basic needs such as food, clothing for interviews, and vital document acquisition; engaging in soft and professional skills development; and providing job matching assistance. Job Point's services are also available to individuals who are not justice impacted. This includes workforce development for youth aged 16–24 as a part of the city's violence prevention efforts (see Community Violence Prevention for more information).



Powerhouse Community Development Corporation (CDC)



Powerhouse Community Development Corporation (CDC) works with justice-involved individuals who have experienced substance use, gun violence, incarceration, supervision, and similar events to provide individualized, holistic services. Participants often enter the program through alternative courts, probation, parole, department of corrections, child welfare, or voluntarily. Each participant works with a case manager to identify and address their unique needs. Through referrals and in-house programming, they access intensive services related to substance use disorder, mental health challenges, employment,

and basic needs. Participants also engage in evidence-based curriculums related to life skills, parenting and co-parenting, and trauma. Additionally, the organization assists with family reunification and rebuilding, providing support for the whole family as participants navigate healing relationships impacted by substance use or crime. Powerhouse CDC also provides court-ordered batterer intervention programs for individuals accused or convicted of domestic violence.

Powerhouse CDC also plays a key role in the city's violence prevention and community transformation efforts. See Youth Development, Healthy Food Systems, and Public Transit Investment & Reform for more information.

Love Columbia

Love Columbia is a nonprofit organization that coordinates with churches, volunteers, businesses, and many other CVI organizations in the city to help individuals and families find resources, build stability, and take their next steps forward. Love Columbia serves participants in other CVI programs, as well as low-income families across the city.

Coaches specializing in various life domains support participants in securing housing, furniture, clothing, transportation, loan forgiveness, employment, and/or financial assistance as well as accessing healthcare, reentry services, and other resources. The organization also provides classes for financial literacy and budgeting, first-time home buyers, parenting, and more. For individuals requiring a higher level of care or who have multiple concerns, Love Columbia provides ongoing case management through the Path Forward Program, which helps individuals to identify and reach their goals across life domains. As needed, the program also provides relocation assistance for those facing place-based community or domestic violence. This includes financial support, moving assistance, provision of storage units, connections to housing, and transportation assistance.



Community Violence Prevention

Social and Emotional Learning

Boyz 2 Men Consulting LLC

Boyz 2 Men Consulting LLC engages with high school-aged boys who are currently involved or at high risk of involvement with gangs to empower them to change their lives. The agency focuses on social emotional learning, teaching participants to identify their own strengths, recognize opportunities beyond affiliation with a gang, empathize with others, and engage in conflict resolution. Typically, the court system refers participants, or the program recruits youth to participate following justice involvement.

Good Dads



Good Dads, established in 2015 in Missouri, began work in the Columbia area almost three years ago. The organization works with at-risk fathers, with or without justice-system involvement, to encourage healthy family relationships, which are an important protective factor against violence. Good Dads' Forged Fatherhood program consists of two evidence-based curriculums developed by the organization: Good Dads 2.0 and Healthy Relationships are Within My Reach. Good Dads 2.0 is a parenting class that focuses on decision-

making, self-confidence, asking for help, emotion regulation, child development, and more. Healthy Relationships classes explore personalities, adverse childhood events and trauma, toxic relationships, and communication. Through these classes, fathers explore important topics while also building relationships between themselves, which often leads to long-lasting friendships and support networks. Good Dads also provides case management to connect participants with referral resources that meet their individual needs.

Sports and Recreational Activities

Day Dreams Foundation

Day Dreams Foundation provides renewable scholarships for lessons, participation fees, and equipment so youth can pursue extracurricular activities of their choice. Scholarships are available to youth aged 5–18 who are enrolled in public school and eligible for free or reduced lunch.⁶ Day Dreams also provides grant funding to support extracurricular activities in schools as well as college scholarships for students who participated in extracurricular activities.

Jabberwocky Studios

Jabberwocky Studios is an art and enrichment program for youth aged 6–15 who receive free or reduced lunch in Columbia.⁷ The program provides affordable or free afterschool programs that allow youth to explore their interests. Camps and classes cover a variety of topics, including dance, theater, music, science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM).

Therapy and Other Behavioral Health Services

Fresh Start Sober Living

Fresh Start Sober Living offers long-term substance use recovery services for adults and their families in Columbia. The organization serves individuals who do not have a recent violent conviction. Participants often come to Fresh Start from shelters, while reentering the community from incarceration, or via referrals from courts and treatment centers. Many participants are seeking support after short-term programs. Fresh Start

⁶ Day Dreams Foundation

⁷ Jabberwocky Studios

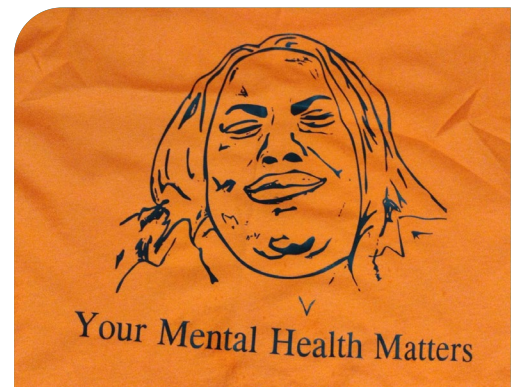
operates 31 accredited sober living houses and rental homes, with less-restrictive program requirements and accommodations for couples and families. The organization's shared communities allow individuals to engage in a social model of recovery, building connections with peer specialists and other participants as they navigate sobriety.

Each participant works with a peer support specialist with lived experience to set individualized goals and identify a housing placement based on their needs, budget, and family size. Peer support specialists also provide ongoing case management, working with participants on life skills, stabilization, document acquisition, medical care, and financial literacy. Fresh Start also specializes in family reunification, advocating for participants within systems like child welfare and family court while offering emotional support, parenting classes (led by Good Dads), and guidance through life changes while maintaining sobriety.

Fresh Start Sober Living is MCRSP/NARR accredited.⁸

TMT Consulting

TMT Consulting, in addition to providing anger management and batterer intervention programming, is a licensed mental health provider offering trauma-informed and strengths-based clinical counseling. TMT Consulting works with individuals from all backgrounds, with an emphasis on treatment from those from marginalized communities, addressing substance and/or alcohol use, depression, trauma, and developmental disorders. Participants receive treatment one-on-one through individual sessions or in groups with families or support groups. See Reentry Services above for more information about TMT.



Workforce Development

Flourish

Flourish works with youth in Columbia by providing emergency services, educational support, and workforce development.⁹ For students in grades 6–12, Flourish helps youth earn and save money for higher education. As participants get older, 11th grade through college, Flourish helps connect students to paid internship opportunities and scholarship opportunities which gives youth on the job experience while continuing to bolster funds dedicated to their education and professional development. The program also provides emergency housing and resources to youth 16–24 experiencing homelessness often engaging these youth through street outreach.¹⁰

⁸ State Opioid Response Recovery Housing Directory

⁹ Flourish: Our Story

¹⁰ Flourish: Housing & Basic Needs Assistance

Job Point

Job Point also provides workforce development services for at-risk youth 16-24 years old including those with disabilities, children of incarcerated adults, and those who did not complete high school through the Youth Build program. The program engages youth in education; such as obtaining a GED, career pathways; including credentialing, and system navigation; including providing driver's education, obtaining documents, and securing housing and other resources through partnerships with other Columbia CBOs. See Wraparound Services above for more information about Job Point.

Youth Development

Boys & Girls Club of Columbia

Boys & Girls Club of Columbia provides holistic afterschool and out-of-school programming for youth in grades K-12.¹¹ Youth who attend programming receive a meal and can engage in academic tutoring; mentorship; mental health support; social and emotional learning; STEAM activities; and recreational activities such as sports and games.

Girls on Fire

Girls on Fire is an afterschool program established in 2025 that serves girls aged 8-18. Through two 15-week empowerment curriculums (tailored to a younger and an older age group, respectively), the program teaches girls about healthy relationships, managing their emotions, and workforce development. Participants also receive help with homework and individualized support from staff.

Spread Your Wings

Spread Your Wings facilitates Spread Your Joy workshops for girls aged 5-12.¹² These workshops provide girls a safe environment to explore their interests, foster connections with their peers, and build confidence. Each workshop features an activity designed to allow girls to learn a new skill, develop leadership, and engage in self-discovery. Spread Your Wings also holds regular sneaker drives to provide shoes for school-aged children.

The People Embracing Another Choice Effectively (P.E.A.C.E.) and Helping Our People Excel (H.O.P.E.) Center for Youth

The People Embracing Another Choice Effectively (P.E.A.C.E.) and Helping Our People Excel (H.O.P.E.) Center for Youth is co-owned and operated by Destiny of H.O.P.E. and P.E.A.C.E. At the Center, underserved and opportunity youth aged 7-17 can explore their interests such as music or podcasting; play games; and engage with their peers in a safe, fun environment. At the same time, staff work with youth to build social-emotional learning skills; channel their strengths, creativity, and energy into prosocial activities; and develop workforce skills through training programs in areas such as barbering. In the summer, the Center for Youth provides experiential learning and travel opportunities where youth and their families can visit historical sights and museums. The Center also provides higher education scholarships for youth who are often excluded from scholarship opportunities.

¹¹ Boys & Girls Clubs of Columbia: Programs

¹² Spread Your Wings



Powerhouse CDC also works with youth from elementary through high school to provide classes and mentoring. The program uses an evidence-based curriculum to teach life skills and address trauma. Mentors and counselors also engage with youth one-on-one for more personalized attention. See Wraparound Services above for more information about Powerhouse CDC.

Community Transformation

Community Development

Como Comunidad

Como Comunidad works to break down barriers and bring resources to the Hispanic community in Columbia.¹³ The organization provides culturally-relevant, Spanish-language classes to foster understanding of American systems related to topics such as financial services or purchasing a home. Como Comunidad also provides translation services and consults with businesses to increase accessibility for Spanish-speaking individuals, including in healthcare settings. Como Comunidad also recently launched an emergency line to connect families to legal services, trauma counseling, and emergency planning.¹⁴

Economic Development

Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)

Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) is a national nonprofit organization with a local chapter in Columbia. The organization was founded in 1957 following the Montgomery Bus Boycott.¹⁵ SCLC works to eradicate racism and foster economic justice and civil rights.¹⁶ The organization approaches poverty as a public policy concern, advocating for reform to reduce economic inequality and achieve justice. SCLC advocates for legislation; engages in community organization; and provides education on personal responsibility, entrepreneurship, and community service.

¹³ Como Comunidad: Quienes Somos

¹⁴ Como Comunidad: Fondo de Respuesta a Emergencias

¹⁵ SCLC: History

¹⁶ Ibid.

Healthy Food Systems

Powerhouse CDC

Powerhouse CDC also connects at-risk and low income families across Columbia to healthy food and other basic needs through their 16 permanent and one mobile food pantries. See Wraparound Services above for more information about Powerhouse CDC.



Housing Infrastructure and Affordability

Arise Dwellings

Arise Dwellings is a faith-based organization working to improve housing affordability and prepare community members for home ownership.¹⁷ The organization uses in-kind and labor donations from industry experts, volunteers, and suppliers to renovate existing properties in the Columbia area, creating homes that are high quality and below market value. Arise Dwellings also provides potential home buyers with education, connections to lenders, credit assistance, and guidance through the homebuying and contracting process. Additionally, the organization provides follow-up check-ins and assistance throughout the first year of home ownership.

Public Transit Investments & Reform

Powerhouse CDC

Powerhouse CDC's Community Navigation Liaison program promotes safety on city buses by placing credible messengers with mental health first aid training on high-need bus routes to provide crisis intervention and connect unhoused individuals and others to vital resources. See Wraparound Services above for more information about Powerhouse CDC.

¹⁷ Arise Dwellings

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Strengths

The City of Columbia has taken a significant step toward establishing a comprehensive CVI ecosystem by establishing the Office of Violence Prevention. An OVP works with community leaders, CBO leaders, and other stakeholders to coordinate violence intervention efforts, support organizations, and act as an accountability partner. In its first year, the Columbia OVP has begun to convene and foster communication across organizations. The OVP has also worked to garner support from City leadership for violence reduction efforts, and it has engaged national experts for training, technical assistance, and research that will inform evidence-based decision-making. The OVP is also working with NICJR to develop a Violence Reduction Strategic Plan that will guide the city's violence reduction efforts.

Many CVI organizations in Columbia have already built significant relationships with one another and with other stakeholders. Some CBOs provide classes to participants from other organizations, some have built reciprocal referral processes, and some have shared resources to help one another continue or expand their work. These existing relationships are an important first step to building a truly collaborative ecosystem and continuum of care for individuals at the highest risk of gun violence.

Many organizations have also built relationships with government agencies to better serve their clients. In particular, the Missouri Department of Probation and Parole works closely with many CBOs to refer individuals on its supervision caseloads to services, with a focus on keeping individuals in the community and avoiding reincarceration. The Boone County Community Services Department and Missouri Foundation for Health have also provided significant funding for violence reduction services across the city, especially violence prevention.

CVI service providers across Columbia have made significant, intentional efforts to maintain a strong focus on family relationships and reunification. Many organizations assist participants in navigating the family court and child welfare systems, in addition to providing emotional support and fostering healthy relationships as families navigate their loved ones' reentry, sobriety, and other significant life changes. Within most organizations, services are available to the whole family through direct assistance or referrals.

Another strength is the level of engagement within the community. Columbia residents have often done volunteer work with many organizations in the CVI ecosystem, and the community has offered consistent support to residential reentry and substance use programs in the city. Residents are willing to come together to help their neighbors and encourage those who are working to change their lives. The Columbia community is small, and those who live and work in the city have developed significant social cohesion.

Challenges

Despite the strengths described above, Columbia currently only provides limited community violence intervention services, instead focusing almost exclusively on prevention and community transformation. Among the organizations providing intervention services, work with individuals who are at very high risk for gun violence largely occurs incidentally as a part of resources offered to otherwise at-risk groups, such as those struggling with substance use, poverty, past incarceration, or disengagement from work or education. These at-risk populations deserve resources, and these services do already touch *some* individuals at imminent risk

for gun violence, but they may not be sufficiently intense for the highest-risk population, and other high-risk individuals are likely going completely unserved. Additionally, services dedicated to victims of gun violence are lacking in the ecosystem.

There are several individuals in Columbia with lived experience who engage the very high-risk population outside of established programs. Some conduct street outreach on their own time, without pay or support, while others are working toward launching or expanding organized programs to encompass this work. These individuals are willing and able to leverage their experiences and credibility to forge genuine relationships with community members who are at imminent risk for violence. They are an incredible resource that is currently underutilized in the CVI ecosystem.

Relatedly, CBOs in the city largely receive funding from State and local agencies through grants, which primarily focus on at-risk youth and adults rather than very high-risk individuals. While the amount of financial support Missouri and Columbia have invested in these organizations is critically important, available grants have historically left out intervention work. Organizations have had to align their services to the requirements of available grant opportunities, rather than making data- and mission-driven decisions about who to serve. Even service providers with the expertise and desire to engage in a wider array of CVI services do not currently have the support needed to do so.

Further, funding limitations have contributed to difficulties in daily operations for some organizations. Because some providers have not received sufficient funding, several (not all) programs are fee based. Some have a sliding scale, option to waive fees, or ability to accept insurance, but others do not.¹⁸

Funders also often require extensive collection and reporting of data on program participants. Consequently, individuals served by multiple organizations often have to complete similar, sometimes burdensome paperwork that can dissuade those who are already hesitant to enter into a program, or even contribute to retraumatization. While accountability for funding is important, overly intensive reporting requiring repetitive, arduous paperwork can stand in the way of getting services to the city's most vulnerable populations.

While the OVP is taking steps to encourage more productive discussions, a number of CBO staff reported concerns about being excluded from the planning and implementation of gun violence reduction efforts. Related to this, there has been limited communication and collaboration between government and CBOs to build a coordinated, baseline CVI ecosystem.

Although many CBOs in Columbia have built strong relationships, work across the ecosystem as a whole remains segmented. A contributing factor to this disconnection has been a lack of trust between organizations. In some cases, the values and practices of one organization may be in conflict with or misunderstood by another organization, which can cause broken or one-sided referral pathways. This lack of trust, along with capacity gaps (particularly in housing and mental health care), have led some organizations to feel the need to expand their work. When organizations do not have a trusted or available referral partner, many take a "we find a way to get the client what they need" approach. This overextension thins organizational resources and forces providers to operate outside of their core expertise, rather than collaborating with specialized partners.

¹⁸ In some cases, providers intentionally choose not to accept insurance to allow for more flexibility in services.

Recommendations

1. Establish infrastructure and capacity to identify and intensively engage those at the highest risk for involvement in gun violence.

- a. Columbia has an array of violence prevention and community transformation services but extremely limited intervention services. Services should be expanded to include other areas of the CVI work, such as street outreach, violence interruption, school-based violence interruption, and hospital-based violence intervention. While the relatively low volume of gun violence in Columbia does support an emphasis on prevention and community transformation, violence intervention services are necessary to reduce gun violence.

2. Eliminate financial and administrative barriers to entry for services.

- a. Some providers in Columbia require participants to pay fees for services. Very high-risk individuals are in significant, urgent need of specialized services to promote safety. These services should always be available at no cost to participants. Funding for CVI services should be sufficient to pay providers for their work without charging participants for services.
- b. Funding agencies should align reporting requirements to streamline data collection across the agencies they fund. CBOs should coordinate the use of common intake forms and data sharing across organizations, to reduce barriers created by arduous and repetitive intake processes.

3. Clarify service types and increase collaboration and coordination.

- a. Organizations should strive to clearly define their role in the CVI ecosystem, homing in on the services they have the most expertise in while collaborating with other organizations to provide participants with additional needed services. With guidance and organization from the OVP, CBOs should continue to build partnerships and referral pathways for participants. To this end, CBO leaders should:
 - i. Familiarize themselves with the services of other organizations in their community.
 - ii. Communicate with CBOs that provide similar services to foster collaboration, not competition.
 - iii. Build trust and shared values for engaging with participants. Shared values should:
 - 1. Be culturally relevant.
 - 2. Align with best practices and evidence.
 - 3. Be built through open-minded collaboration between organizations, not mandated by City leadership.
 - 4. Allow for different theories of change and program adaptations.

APPENDIX A: ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS IDENTIFIED THROUGH THE CONVENING

The following organizations are not currently part of the core violence reduction work in Columbia but were identified by convening attendees as important partners in community violence intervention and prevention efforts. These organizations are either newly established or have not, at the time of this report, been part of organizing a cohesive violence reduction continuum of work in the city.

Community Violence Intervention

Street Outreach

Just Us Free Us

Just Us Free Us is an emerging organization in Columbia that is led by a person with lived experience. Leveraging existing relationships in the community, the organization focuses on engaging youth and young adults who are group involved and/or have a history of gun violence involvement, to make positive change in their lives. Just Us Free Us is actively working to establish connections with existing CBOs and develop programming with a specific focus on individuals who are at very high risk for gun violence involvement. This includes healing circles that will provide a safe place for very high-risk individuals to work through trauma as they build community.

Victim Services

True North of Columbia

True North of Columbia has served victims of domestic and sexual violence since the 1970s,¹⁹ with a focus on safety, healing, and education. The organization provides emergency shelter, a 24/7 crisis hotline, counseling and support groups, and hospital bedside advocacy and crisis management. True North also works alongside the Columbia Police Department and Boone County Sheriff's and Prosecutor's Offices to respond to incidents of domestic violence via the Domestic Violence Enforcement Unit. Additionally, True North engages with the community to provide education on the dynamics of domestic violence and raise awareness about domestic violence services.

¹⁹ True North of Columbia: *Who We Are*

Community Violence Prevention

Academic Support and Tutoring

Cornerstones of Care Youth Educational Success (YES) Program

Cornerstones of Care Youth Educational Success (YES) Program works with youth aged 17–23 who are involved in the foster care system to overcome academic barriers.²⁰ The program provides individual academic assistance to students pursuing post-secondary education. YES helps students to navigate the educational system, access necessary resources, and plan for their future with career counseling.

Therapy and Other Behavioral Health Services

Burrell Behavioral Health

Burrell Behavioral Health provides a variety of clinical mental health services for individuals living with autism, substance use disorder, severe mental health diagnoses, and other behavioral health needs. Services include psychiatry, case management, and forensic psychology as well as individual and group therapy and residential care. Services are also available in the community and, for youth, at school. Burrell works to ensure affordability through insurance, financial assistance, and discounted rates.²¹

Compass Health Network

Compass Health Network is a nonprofit, sliding scale healthcare provider offering services throughout Missouri.²² The organization provides behavioral health care to youth and adults, including support for domestic violence survivors, psychiatry, psychological assessments, school-based therapy, evidence-based mental health therapies, and support for chronic behavioral disorders. In addition to mental health services, Compass provides primary and dental care.

Youth Development

Mary Lee Johnson Community Center

Mary Lee Johnson Community Center is the oldest daycare in Columbia.²³ The Center works with low-income families, providing early learning and childcare for infants and children up to six years old. The Center also provides parent resources and parenting classes as well as academic and social skills education, including early literacy and early nutrition education.

²⁰ Cornerstones of Care: Youth Educational Success

²¹ Burrell Behavioral Health

²² Compass Health Network: Behavioral Health

²³ Mary Lee Johnson Center: Our Child Care Programs

APPENDIX B: COMMUNITY VIOLENCE REDUCTION SERVICES GLOSSARY

Field-level definitions of intervention, prevention, and community transformation service activities are below. During the Landscape Analysis Convening, participants provided input to make some definitions related to intervention more culturally relevant to the Columbia community.

Crisis Management - Rapid, coordinated response to violent incidents, credible threats, or community-wide trauma that involves the deployment of mediation, violence intervention, and community outreach services to those in need. This includes supporting families after shootings, managing group conflicts, ensuring safe gatherings, preventing retaliation, and stabilizing situations that could trigger additional violence. Crisis management and neighborhood stabilization often occur simultaneously if the crisis is related to gun violence.

Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs (HVIP) - High-risk intervention programs that begin at the bedside of individuals who arrive at a hospital with violent injuries. HVIPs use the “teachable moment” after injury to provide crisis intervention, safety planning, trauma counseling, and linkage to long-term intensive services, thereby dramatically reducing re-injury and retaliation. They take a multidisciplinary approach to provide care coordination and connect patients with hospital- and/or community-based resources that target the underlying risk factors for violence. HVIPs and hospital-based intervention programs should be Health Alliance for Violence Intervention certified.²⁴

Life Coaching - Intensive, long-term, relationship-based support provided by trained mentors or credible messengers who help high-risk individuals navigate goals, crises, and life transitions. Life coaches offer guidance, accountability, and consistent engagement to reduce violent behaviors and build stability. A life coach should have no more than eight people on their caseload due to the intensive frequency of contact they must have with participants. Best practice stipulates that life coaches have daily contact and three times per week in person connection with participants.

Neighborhood Stabilization - A coordinated, trauma-informed, and placed-based approach to violence prevention that mobilizes local agencies and community-based partners to embed critical, readily accessible resources for a sustained period in communities that experience acts of violence or other traumatic events. These responses should be informed by data from city agencies and emergency services for the given community to ensure that each activation is specifically tailored to the response area.

Reentry Services - Holistic, comprehensive transitional services for justice-involved individuals. These services promote whole, healthy, safe, and prosperous families and communities for overall optimal functionality and recidivism reduction.

School-Based Violence Intervention Programs - Programs that provide proactive coping, social, and life educational services to high-risk youth that reduce negative behaviors and promote positive self-imagining. These programs partner with school faculty to shift the cultural norms of violence and provide restorative practices to combat violent behavior through four intervention strategies: essential life skills training, conflict

²⁴ The HAVI: Violence Prevention Professional Training

mediation training, academic remediation, and emotional wellness supports. These programs also provide training to staff in cultural competency and trauma-informed care.

Street Outreach - Work most often carried out by credible messengers who have similar lived experiences as the people they are serving, who go into the field to interact with those at risk of gun violence involvement and their parents, families, groups, and group leaders. Through willingness and determination, workers canvas neighborhoods with a focus on eliminating or reducing violent incidents in areas where individuals do not feel safe.

Victim Services - Trauma-responsive supports for individuals who have been shot, injured, or directly impacted by violence. Services may include crisis counseling, safety planning, relocation assistance, compensation support, and connection to case management. High-quality victim services reduce retaliation, trauma-related escalation, and continued exposure to harm.

Violence Interruption - Urgent, immediate, on-the-ground efforts to defuse conflicts before they escalate into shootings. Violence interrupters—typically credible messengers—use direct engagement, mediation, and intervention strategies to stop imminent violence, often in real time. This includes disputes between individuals, groups, crews, or neighborhoods and may occur before or during a violent incident as well as after a violent incident (to prevent retaliation). Violence Interrupters also respond to shooting scenes to engage families and friends, reduce tensions, and begin the process of thwarting retaliation.

Wraparound Services - Services that are person-centered; provide multiple, comprehensive services to promote individual sustainability and life progress; and connect high-risk individuals and their families to proper resources.

Youth Diversion - Supportive, community-based services that address underlying needs, promote accountability, and reduce the likelihood of future offending. These programs engage and empower youth by providing services and opportunities to reduce and eliminate barriers to success; break generational cycles; prevent engagement in community violence and risky behaviors; and keep them connected to school, family, and pro-social environments.

Violence Prevention

Academic Supports and Tutoring - Structured instructional services that provide students with targeted assistance to strengthen their understanding of academic content, build foundational skills, and improve performance in specific subject areas. These services may include one-on-one tutoring, small-group instruction, homework assistance, skill-building activities, and individualized learning plans designed to accelerate student progress and close learning gaps.

Mentoring - Structured, purposeful, and supportive relationship in which a more experienced or trained individual (the mentor) provides guidance, encouragement, role-modeling, and consistent support to a less experienced person (the mentee) to promote their positive development, skill-building, and overall well-being.

Restorative Practices - A set of relational approaches and strategies that proactively build community, strengthen relationships, and repair harm through inclusive, collaborative processes. They emphasize accountability, healing, and the restoration of trust rather than punishment, and they aim to improve social capital, increase empathy, reduce conflict, and support the well-being of individuals and communities.

Science, Technology, Arts, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEAM) Programs - The integration of the disciplines of science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics into a cohesive, interdisciplinary learning model

that uses creative processes, design thinking, problem-solving, and project-based learning. STEAM emphasizes real-world application, innovation, collaboration, and the development of both technical and creative skills to prepare young people for academic success, workforce pathways, and lifelong learning.

Social and Emotional Learning - The process through which children, youth, and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

Sports and Recreational Activities - Structured or unstructured physical, social, and leisure activities that promote physical health, social connection, skill-building, teamwork, and positive youth engagement. These activities provide safe, supervised environments that support healthy development, reduce risky behaviors, and strengthen protective factors associated with reduced violence involvement.

Therapy and Behavioral Health Services - Structured, evidence-based clinical interventions delivered by licensed or credentialed professionals to address mental health conditions, trauma, emotional distress, substance use disorders, and behavioral challenges. These services include assessment, diagnosis, counseling, psychotherapy, crisis intervention, substance use treatment, and coordinated care designed to improve psychological well-being, functioning, coping skills, and safety.

Workforce Development - A coordinated set of policies, programs, and services designed to prepare individuals for employment, support them in acquiring the skills needed in the labor market, and help employers meet their talent needs. It includes job training, education, career counseling, credentialing, and wraparound supports that improve individuals' ability to obtain, retain, and advance in employment.

Youth Development - An intentional, prosocial process that supports young people in developing the cognitive, social, emotional, moral, and physical skills they need to thrive. It focuses on building strengths; fostering positive relationships; creating safe and supportive environments; and expanding opportunities for youth to develop competencies, confidence, character, connection, and contribution.

Youth Diversion - A structured process that moves young people away from formal justice system involvement—such as arrest, prosecution, adjudication, or detention—and toward supportive, community-based services that address underlying needs, promote accountability, and reduce the likelihood of future offending. Diversion programs prioritize early intervention; restorative responses; individualized supports; and keeping youth connected to school, family, and pro-social environments.

Community Transformation

Accessible Medical Care - A healthcare environment in which all people can obtain timely, affordable, culturally appropriate, and high-quality medical services without financial hardship, discrimination, geographic barriers, or system-level obstacles. The end goal is a community where every resident—regardless of income, race, insurance status, disability, or neighborhood—can reliably access preventive care, primary care, behavioral health services, emergency treatment, and other ongoing care needed to achieve optimal health.

Community Development - The state in which neighborhoods have strong social, physical, and economic conditions that allow residents to thrive. This includes safe and stable housing; vibrant public spaces; accessible services; local economic opportunity; and strong social networks that support community well-being, safety, and resilience. The end goal is a healthy, inclusive, and sustainable community where all residents can participate fully in civic, social, and economic life.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design - A built environment in which the physical design of buildings, streets, and public spaces naturally promotes safety, visibility, positive social interaction, and community cohesion. The end goal is a neighborhood where opportunities for crime are minimized; residents feel safe; and the environment supports well-being, stewardship, and collective guardianship.

Economic Development - The condition in which a community has a diverse, resilient economy that generates stable jobs, rising incomes, and equitable access to opportunity, allowing all residents to build wealth, improve their quality of life, and participate fully in the economic and social fabric of the community.

Educational Investments and Reform - A state in which every learner has equitable access to high-quality education, safe and well-resourced schools, excellent teaching, modern instructional materials, and supportive learning environments that prepare them for academic success, career opportunity, civic participation, and lifelong well-being. The end goal is an education system that eliminates disparities, strengthens student achievement, and ensures that all students—regardless of race, income, neighborhood, or background—can thrive.

Healthy Food Systems - Coordinated policies, community processes, and infrastructure that increase access to nutritious food by improving food production, distribution, affordability, and cultural relevance. This work includes expanding grocery access, supporting local agriculture, strengthening food supply chains, improving school and institutional meal quality, investing in food-retail development, and addressing inequities in neighborhoods where healthy food options are limited.

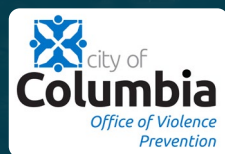
Housing Infrastructure and Affordability - A community condition in which all people have access to safe, stable, high-quality housing that is affordable relative to household income; supports health and well-being; and is integrated into neighborhoods with the services, transportation, and opportunities needed to thrive. The end goal is a housing environment where cost burden, instability, displacement, and unsafe living conditions no longer prevent individuals or communities from reaching their full potential.

Public Transit Investments and Reform - The condition in which communities have safe, reliable, affordable, and accessible transit systems that enable all residents to reach jobs, schools, healthcare, and essential services without geographic, economic, or physical barriers. The end goal is an equitable transportation environment that supports mobility, reduces disparities, enhances economic opportunity, and strengthens overall community well-being.

COLUMBIA, MO

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

VIOLENCE REDUCTION PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES



September 2026