

GVRS

THE SUCCESSFUL GUN VIOLENCE REDUCTION STRATEGY



The Successful Gun Violence Reduction Strategy

The Gun Violence Reduction Strategy (GVRS) is a comprehensive method of identifying the individuals in a jurisdiction who are at the very highest risk of being involved in gun violence and employing effective interventions to intervene with those individuals and their conflicts to significantly reduce gun violence.

The National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) works with jurisdictions to implement GVRS through data analysis, policy development, training, coaching, management support and technical assistance. NICJR helps identify people and groups at highest risk of being involved in gun violence in a specific city; trains community leaders and law enforcement to effectively communicate that risk to those individuals in a supportive manner; helps stand up, manage, and train staff for intensive community violence intervention (CVI) efforts to work with those individuals; and works with law enforcement to focus their efforts in a way that reduces their overall footprint in the community and increases their focus on the small number of people driving gun violence. When operated to scale, well managed, and coordinated, GVRS can significantly and consistently reduce gun violence citywide.

GVRS is a distinct strategy that has evolved from similar models known as Ceasefire and Gun Violence Intervention.¹

GVRS rests on two main principles: **specificity** and **intensity**: Specifically serving those at the very highest risk of being involved in gun violence soon, and intensively and frequently engaging those at the very highest risk.

Gun Violence Reduction Strategy (GVRS)



The primary components of GVRS include:

- 1. Data-Driven Identification:** Using accurate and timely data to identify individuals and groups at the highest risk of being victims or perpetrators of gun violence.
- 2. Direct and Respectful Communication:** Engaging with high-risk individuals to clearly communicate the risks they face and the support available to them.
- 3. Intensive Services, Supports, and Opportunities:** Connecting very high-risk individuals with trained staff who are credible and relatable to develop positive and trusting relationships, then connect participants with resources they need to address underlying issues and create positive life changes.
- 4. Focused Enforcement:** As a last resort, implementing targeted law enforcement strategies for those who continue to engage in gun violence.
- 5. Data-Driven Performance Management:** A deliberate, structured approach to using data and information to assess progress and needed improvements among city and strategy leadership.

Theory of Change

The GVRS community violence intervention theory of change explains how very high-risk individuals transition away from engaging in gun violence to making better decisions and achieving improved outcomes. The Theory of Change includes:

- **Relationships:** CVI workers, namely Life Coaches, develop positive and trusting relationships with individuals and use their relationships to gain influence and use that influence to help the participants make better decisions.
- **Mentality Shifts:** Through their relationships and mentoring, using strategies like motivational interviewing, Life Coaches help participants shift their mindsets and make better decisions. GVRS also employs cognitive behavioral interventions (CBI) to change mentalities, helping participants see themselves differently and make better decisions.
- **Services, Supports, and Opportunities:** After establishing trust and initiating mentality shifts, Life Coaches collaborate with participants and their families to develop comprehensive Life Plans that address individual needs; set specific goals in key domains of development, including education, employment, and housing; and identify pathways to overcome other barriers to success.

Through this three-part approach, GVRS creates a pathway for high-risk individuals to transform their lives and disengage from gun violence, contributing to overall community safety and well-being.

¹The title “Ceasefire” has occasionally been used with programs that employ ineffective, punitive, and regressive tactics. GVRS represents NICJR’s approach to violence reduction. GVRS has evolved through implementations in cities including Oakland, Stockton, Indianapolis, and Baltimore to incorporate more in-depth and intensive services and support.



Core Component 1: Data-Driven Identification

Data-driven identification is the systematic process of using data and intelligence to identify individuals and groups most likely to be involved in gun violence in the near term. Effective data-driven identification in GVRS typically consists of the following:

1. **Gun Violence Problem Analysis (GVPA):** A comprehensive assessment of a particular jurisdiction’s gun violence problem to understand the underlying drivers of shootings in a specific community. A GVPA seeks to answer four primary questions regarding gun violence: Where is gun violence happening? Who is involved in homicides and nonfatal shootings? What are the specific proximate circumstances that lead to homicides and nonfatal shootings? What are the primary characteristics or risk factors of those involved in the majority of gun violence?
2. **Shooting Reviews:** Regular analysis of recent shooting incidents to identify patterns, potential retaliations, and immediate intervention opportunities.
3. **Conflict Mapping:** A structured, detailed assessment by CVI workers of the most violent conflicts, incidents associated with those conflicts, and individuals connected to the incidents.

Core Component 2: Direct and Respectful Communication

Direct and respectful communication serves as a critical bridge between identifying very high-risk individuals and connecting them with supportive services. This engagement is carried out through direct, face-to-face communication that follows specific principles to maximize effectiveness. As a public health approach, direct and respectful communication is similar to communications carried out during the onset of the COVID pandemic; we had to inform people who were over the age of 65 or who had an underlying health condition that if they contracted the virus, their likelihood of severe illness was exponentially greater than others. The same principle is true here: We must inform people of their risk of being involved in gun violence so they can make informed, better decisions. The effectiveness of this approach rests on these principles:

- **Communicating with the Right People:** Focusing on the small number of people who are most likely to be involved in gun violence, including active shooters, recent victims likely to retaliate, and those who influence shooters.
- **Communicating in the Right Way:** Being brief and respectful, and avoiding lecturing or making false promises.
- **Following Through:** Keeping promises about both consequences and support.

Custom Notifications are face-to-face meetings where a small team—typically a high-ranking police officer and a respected community leader—makes direct contact with a very high-risk individual at their home or in their community. The goal is to deliver a personalized message about the individual's risk level, offer support, and initiate a connection to services in a way that respects their dignity and humanity.

While Custom Notifications provide one-on-one intervention for immediate situations, Community Safety Meetings offer a complementary group approach. In these structured gatherings, which are typically held every other month, 8–15 (usually no more than 20) very high-risk individuals are invited to hear a carefully crafted message from multiple community stakeholders. These meetings communicate both the consequences of continued violence and the community's commitment to supporting positive change.

Core Component 3: Community Violence Intervention – Intensive Services, Supports, and Opportunities

Effective intervention requires a comprehensive, relationship-based approach delivered by credible messengers who can connect with participants authentically. Credible messengers are people who have credibility and can relate to the people they are serving, often those with similar backgrounds and experiences as the people they are serving. The intensive services component consists of several elements that work together to create pathways away from violence, including but limited to:

- 1. Street Outreach:** The first point of contact, where Outreach Workers and Violence Interrupters locate and engage very high-risk individuals (who are often hard to reach and resist initial attempts to engage) through relentless pursuit. Individuals who have been identified as being at very high risk of being involved in gun violence are identified through Shooting Reviews and/or CVI Conflict Mapping and information about those individuals are shared with Outreach Worker supervisors in regular Coordination Meetings. Supervisors then assign each of these referrals to Outreach Workers on their team for relentless pursuit and engagement.
- 2. Intensive Life Coaching:** The backbone of long-term support, where trained Life Coaches, who serve as mentors and case managers, develop deep, trusting relationships with participants to guide their journey toward stability and positive change.
- 3. Connection to Services, Supports, and Opportunities:** In addition to the positive and trusting relationship developed with participants, Life Coaches also connect them to practical resources that address concrete needs, including transportation, obtaining vital documentation, education, employment, housing, mental health services, and financial incentives.



Outreach Workers

To provide these services, GVRS employs three primary community violence intervention roles, each with specific responsibilities in engaging and supporting very high-risk individuals.²

- 1.** Violence Interrupters focus primarily on responding to shooting scenes, immediate crisis response, and conflict mediation.
- 2.** Outreach Workers locate, engage, and connect very high-risk individuals to Life Coaches. They serve as the initial point of contact focused on initial relationship-building.
- 3.** Life Coaches provide intensive, sustained support and mentorship to program participants over an extended period (18+ months).

²If a jurisdiction has limited resources, it is possible, though not ideal, to merge the outreach worker and violence interrupter positions.

Relentless Pursuit

To effectively reduce gun violence in the short term, it is critical to provide intensive services and interventions to the people who are at the very highest risk of being involved in gun violence. These individuals are often young adults with significant criminal justice involvement, associated with a neighborhood group or clique, and have been connected to a recent shooting. These are also people who have often been turned down or let down by traditional community service programs, therefore may be resistant to services. A very high-risk individual will likely and should be expected to reject the initial offer of services. This is why an effective Gun Violence Reduction Strategy must include Relentless Pursuit of individuals who have been identified as being at very high risk of being involved in gun violence. Relentless Pursuit includes any and everything an Outreach Worker needs to do to locate, engage, and get onto the caseload of a Life Coach, a very high-risk individual. Outreach Workers must engage in persistent and consistent pursuit of their referrals, not being deterred by initial rejection: Make calls, send text messages, “pull up” at the house and/or neighborhood, reach out to known family members and friends – do all you can to engage the person.

Intensive Life Coaching

Intensive Life Coaches are primarily responsible for helping to reduce gun violence in their city. They work with those who have been identified as being at the very highest risk of gun violence on a long-term basis, and they are expected to establish positive and trusting relationships with the participants on their caseload. Life Coaches spend significant time with their participants, eventually using their positive relationships to connect participants to needed services, supports, and opportunities. Life Coaches employ specificity and intensity. They are specifically focused on the small number of individuals who are at very high risk and engage them intensively. Intensive Life Coaches should have small caseloads, ideally of no more than eight participants. Life Coaches are responsible for communicating with each participant every single day and having in-person engagement with each participant three to four times per week.



Cognitive Behavioral Interventions (CBI)

Another critical service provided through GVRS is helping participants change, improve, and expand their mentality through cognitive behavioral interventions. This can happen through the individual relationships that Life Coaches have with their participants, using tactics like motivational interviewing or individual CBI (i.e., ROCA's Re-Wire). It should also happen in group cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) sessions. NICJR has developed the [Healthy, Wealthy, and Wise](#) (HWW) program and curriculum over several years to be an effective, trauma-informed, cognitive behavioral therapy and transformative mentoring program that serves very high-risk youth and young adults.

Core Component 4: Focused Enforcement and Supervision

Focused enforcement represents a fundamental shift in how law enforcement resources are deployed. One of the overt goals of GVRS is to reduce the overall footprint of police by focusing enforcement on serious and violent crime—activities that officers typically spend a very small portion of their time addressing. This approach encourages police departments to forgo ineffective and harmful practices such as saturation or "scorched earth" tactics that produce further distrust between communities and police.

Focused enforcement is a targeted approach concentrating on a very small number of individuals who are driving gun violence in the jurisdiction.


GVRS is not a carrot or stick approach. Participants are not penalized for simply choosing not to participate in services. Enforcement comes as a last resort only after someone has committed an act of violence, not for declining to engage with community-based interventions.

In GVRS, law enforcement does not work directly with CVI, but enforcement is a parallel effort. Firewalls between frontline CVI workers and law enforcement are critically important to maintain credibility.

For those individuals and groups who do not respond to the GVRS message and continue to engage in violence, there is follow-up supervision and focused enforcement by police, probation, parole, and prosecutors. The key principle here is precision—applying enforcement resources strategically to those who persist in violent behavior while simultaneously reducing the overall law enforcement footprint in the community.

In implementing focused enforcement, some agencies have created police units focused solely on gun violence. Despite the attention the issue of gun violence garners, very few police departments have units dedicated solely to proactively reducing shootings.

"In GVRS, law enforcement does not work directly with CVI, but enforcement is a parallel effort. Firewalls between frontline CVI workers and law enforcement are critically important to maintain credibility."



Core Component 5: Data-Driven Performance Management

It is critical to the success of any significant initiative to continuously monitor, evaluate, and improve performance. Data-driven performance management is a deliberate, structured approach to using data and information to assess progress and needed improvements among city and strategy leadership. This systematic process enables jurisdictions to track progress toward specific goals, identify what is and is not working, and make informed adjustments to maximize effectiveness.

Creating an effective performance management system requires thoughtful planning and engagement from all stakeholders involved in GVRs. The following elements are essential for building a system that drives meaningful improvements in gun violence reduction efforts:

1. Setting **strategic and achievable goals** related to gun violence reduction
2. **Defining metrics** for each strategic goal to track progress
3. Establishing **consistent and reliable data collection systems** that capture all relevant metrics in a standardized format and protect confidentiality while enabling information sharing
4. Facilitating **regular accountability meetings** that bring together key stakeholders to review metrics, discuss challenges, and develop plans for improvement
5. Building a **data-driven culture** that values data and **continuous improvement** is key for successful performance management

GVRs Profiles

The following two profiles illustrate the effective implementation of GVRs in Oakland, CA, and Indianapolis, IN. Each city profile examines how every key component was adapted to each jurisdiction, along with notable accomplishments and challenges.



Oakland, CA



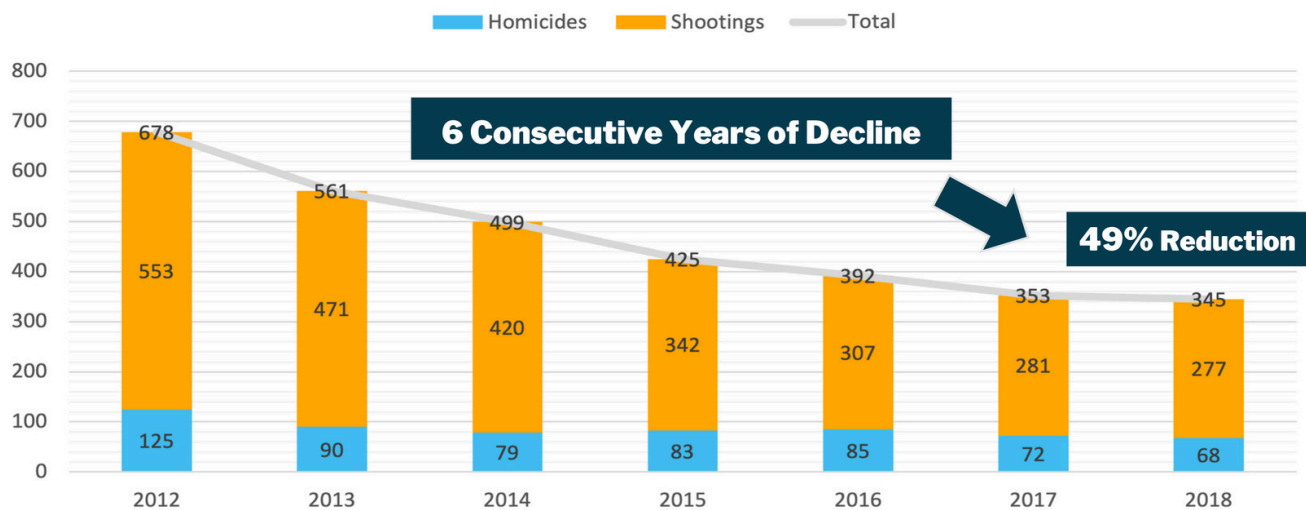
Indianapolis, IN

Oakland, CA

For decades, Oakland faced numerous challenges in addressing violent crime, with efforts often marked by intermittent and incomplete implementations. This included major public and private investments in various violence prevention services and strategies since the 1990s, which did not produce sustained reductions in violence. In late 2012, after advocacy from community and faith-based organizations – especially from Faith In Action East Bay – the City officially launched Oakland Ceasefire, a violence reduction strategy modeled after the effective Boston Ceasefire initiative.

From 2012–2018, the city experienced a 46% reduction in homicides and a 49% reduction in injury shootings. An external evaluation by Northwestern and Northeastern Universities confirmed that the majority of this decline was attributable to the Ceasefire strategy.

Oakland Shootings and Homicides 2012-2018

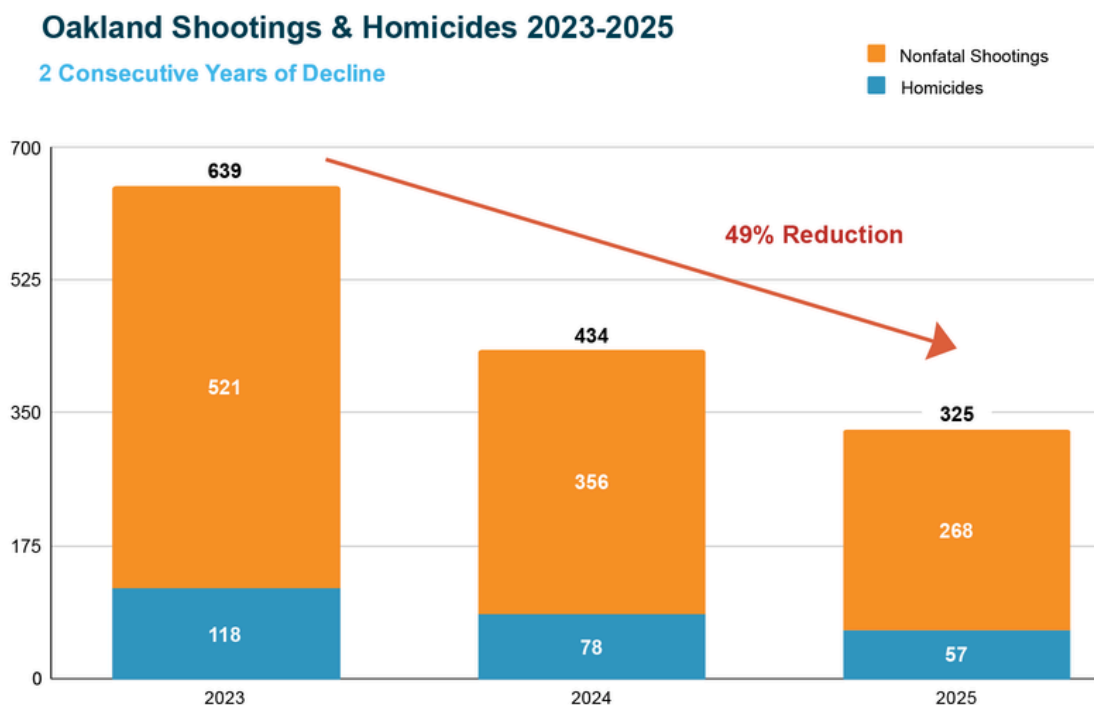


NICJR, headquartered in Oakland, has been deeply involved in the City's Ceasefire strategy since its inception. NICJR and the California Partnership for Safe Communities (CPSC) provided technical assistance for implementation, contributed to the initial Problem Analysis, and trained Outreach Workers and Life Coaches.



In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, Oakland witnessed a sharp increase in gun violence, exacerbated by a shift away from the core elements of the Ceasefire strategy. The strategy, once highly effective, had become diluted with in-person engagement suspended for nearly a year, resources were diverted and focus was lost. In response, CPSC and NICJR conducted a [comprehensive audit of the Oakland Ceasefire strategy](#) in December 2023. This audit revealed that since 2020, the City had gradually moved away from focusing on individuals at the highest risk of gun violence, leading to an ineffective implementation of the strategy. In addition to diagnosis, the audit provided a detailed roadmap for restoring the strategy's effectiveness, emphasizing the need for a return to data-driven identification, direct communication, and focused enforcement.

The City re-dedicated to the strategy in 2024 and experienced two consecutive years of gun violence decline.



How Oakland Implements Ceasefire

Data-Driven Identification

Oakland's strategy is informed by comprehensive Gun Violence Problem Analysis studies (conducted in 2012, 2016–2017, and 2020–2021) that examine homicides and shootings to determine who is at highest risk for violence involvement. These analyses consistently show that gun violence in Oakland is concentrated among a small population (approximately 300–350 people) with specific risk factors: primarily men aged 18–35 with extensive criminal histories, gang/group connections, prior shooting victimization, and a connection to a recent shooting in the last six or so months.

Additionally, the Oakland Police Department (OPD) conducts weekly Shooting Reviews to analyze each shooting from the previous week, identify patterns, assess retaliation risk, and determine which individuals are in greatest need of immediate interventions.

Direct and Respectful Communication

Oakland utilizes two forms of direct communication with high-risk individuals:

1. **Call-Ins:** Quarterly group meetings where 15–20 high-risk individuals hear from law enforcement, community members, survivors of violence, faith leaders, and service providers about the consequences of violence and available support.
2. **Custom Notifications:** One-on-one meetings with individuals at imminent risk, as identified in the Shooting Reviews and Coordination Meetings, conducted by teams that include community members and probation officers, and sometimes by police officers. A team of community members and probation officers conduct Custom Notifications regularly twice per week.

Both approaches communicate that violence must stop while offering genuine pathways to support and services.

Life Coaching and Community Services

The Oakland Department of Violence Prevention (DVP) provides life coaching services for individuals identified as being at the very highest risk of being involved in gun violence. Life Coaches build positive and trusting relationships with participants, develop individualized Life Plans, and connect them to needed services, including:

- Employment training and job placement
- Housing support services
- Incentivized stipends (up to \$375 per month for achieving certain milestones)
- Cognitive behavioral therapy through Healthy, Wealthy, and Wise
- Mental health and substance abuse treatment
- Emergency relocation for individuals at imminent risk



Following the NICJR/CPSC audit of Ceasefire, DVP significantly expanded its direct services unit to provide violence interruption and life coaching. DVP now employs more than 20 direct service staff – Life Coaches, Violence Interrupters, and supervisors – and even though it is a government agency, many of these staff are formerly incarcerated. DVP also funds more than 20 local community-based organizations who also provide wraparound services and direct engagement with higher-risk youth.

Oakland is also an example in how it [funds its violence intervention services](#). In 2004, Oakland voters passed Measure Y, followed by Measure Z in 2014, and Measure NN in 2024, which provides dedicated funding for violence prevention and intervention services. Beginning in 2013, the City earmarked a portion of these dollars to fund CVI services under Ceasefire, more than \$12 million annually to focus interventions with those at the very highest risk of violence.

Focused Enforcement

OPD created the Ceasefire Unit, a proactive unit consisting of approximately 50 officers at its peak and representing 7% of the total police force. The OPD Ceasefire Unit focuses on intelligence gathering and enforcement specifically on individuals and groups who are driving and committing gun violence. The approach aims to minimize arrests while preventing shootings. Officers in the Ceasefire Unit receive specialized training in procedural justice, Constitutional policing, and intelligence-based policing to ensure that enforcement actions are focused, fair, and effective. Over the course of the first seven years of the Unit's creation, officers in Ceasefire had very few serious uses of force or complaints.

Performance Management

One of the most important aspects of the successful management of Oakland's strategy is a full-time Ceasefire Director. Over the course of 13 years, even though there have been five Mayors, there have only been two Ceasefire Directors. Both of them were involved with the strategy since its inception, providing much-needed continuity.

The strategy is also managed through a series of coordinated meetings, including:

1. Weekly Shooting Reviews to analyze incidents and guide enforcement
2. Weekly Coordination Meetings between OPD and DVP
3. Regular Case Conferences for Life Coaches
4. Monthly Ceasefire Partnership Committee meetings
5. Weekly Mayoral Accountability Sessions (previously, these sessions were scheduled on a monthly basis)

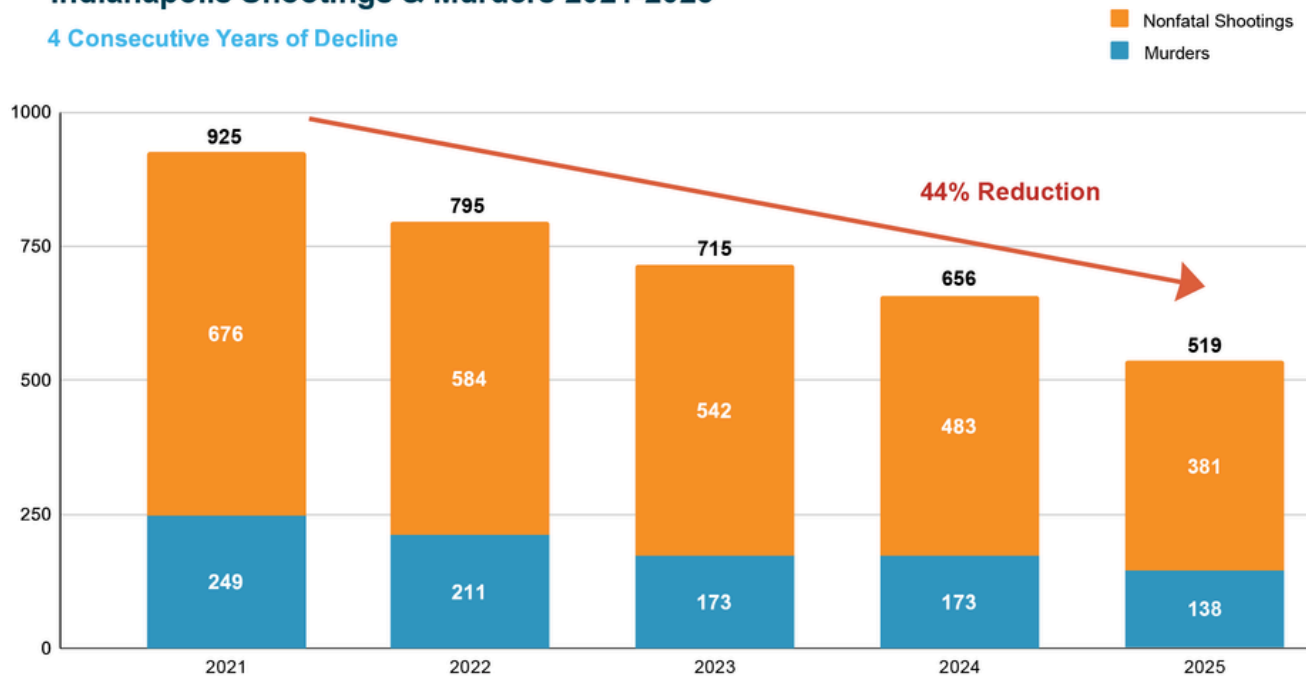
These meetings ensure mutual accountability for results between City agencies, the Mayor's Office, and community partners.

Indianapolis, IN

Following advocacy from local faith and community leaders for an effective violence reduction strategy, Indianapolis partnered with the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform in 2019, initially to conduct a series of analyses. Informed by these analyses, the City's Gun Violence Reduction Strategy was fully implemented in January 2022. The city has since recorded four consecutive years of reductions in gun violence, resulting in a 44% decrease in murders and nonfatal shootings combined between January 2022 through December 2025.

Indianapolis Shootings & Murders 2021-2025

4 Consecutive Years of Decline



NICJR conducted an initial landscape assessment of local violence prevention programs and provided a series of recommendations to the City. NICJR then developed the Gun Violence Problem Analysis in 2021, which formed the foundation for the City's approach. Following these initial steps, in 2022, Mayor Joe Hogsett allocated more than \$100 million of American Rescue Plan Act funds to reduce gun violence. The City funded the hiring of 60 new CVI workers—Life Coaches, Violence Interrupters, and Outreach Workers—forming the Indy Peace initiative. A total of \$75 million dollars were directed to the Elevation Grant Program, funding more than 30 local community-based organizations. These organizations provide additional support services that complement the Indy Peace Fellowship's direct intervention work.

How Indianapolis Implements GVRs



Data-Driven Identification

The Indianapolis GVRs focuses interventions on the small number of people who are at the very highest risk of being involved in gun violence. The identification process occurs in phases, all filtered by the risk factors determined by the Gun Violence Problem Analysis:

- 1. Shooting Reviews:** In this weekly meeting, attendees review all shootings in the previous seven days to identify incidents with a high likelihood of retaliation and individuals likely to be involved in those incidents. Those individuals, who will not be the subject of imminent enforcement action, are referred to Indy Peace.
- 2. Community Safety Meetings:** Every 60 days, the three correctional supervision agencies in Indianapolis—probation, parole, and community corrections, with the support of the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (IMPD)—identify a small number of people under their supervision who are at the highest risk of being involved in gun violence. Those individuals are invited to a Community Safety Meeting (CSM), where they are offered enrollment into the Indy Peace Fellowship.
- 3. Conflict Mapping:** The CVI workers of Indy Peace meet regularly to have internal discussions about the most violent conflicts in the city, the incidents connected to those conflicts, and the people connected to those incidents. Those individuals are then prioritized for relentless pursuit and enrollment into the Indy Peace Fellowship.

Of these three primary sources of referrals, approximately 300 very high-risk individuals are identified each year, with a goal of enrolling at least 65% of them into the Indy Peace Fellowship.

Direct and Respectful Communication

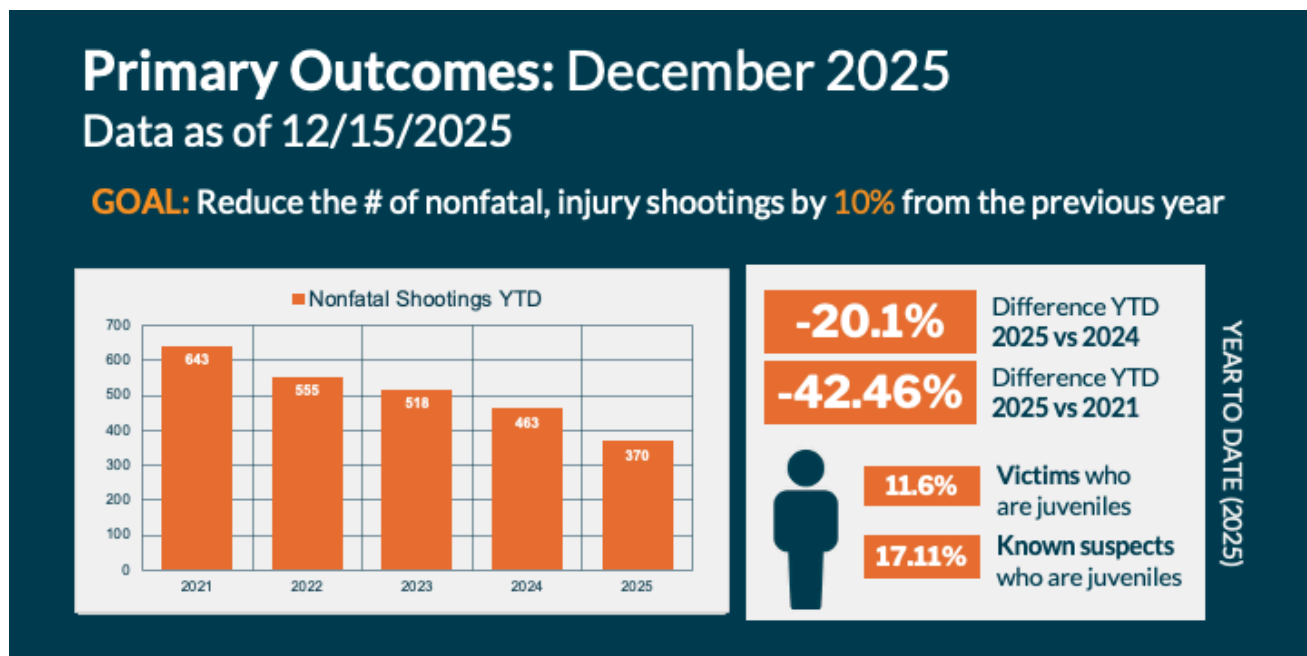
Indianapolis GVRs uses Custom Notifications delivered to very high-risk individuals by small teams including IMPD and community members. These are supplemented by bi-monthly Community Safety Meetings where 15–20 high-risk individuals are invited to be informed of their risk, warned of the consequences of continued violence, and offered services and supports. During the CSM, food is served and Life Coaches are present to engage directly with attendees.

Indy Peace Fellowship

Central to Indianapolis's strategy is the Indy Peace Fellowship, which is operated jointly by the Office of Public Health and Safety (OPHS) and Indy Public Safety Foundation (IPSF). Indy Peace consists of:

- 1. Identification and Engagement:** Violence Interrupters and Outreach Workers identify and engage high-risk individuals through conflict mapping and information provided in Coordination Meetings.
- 2. Relationship Building:** Outreach Workers transition individuals onto the caseloads of Life Coaches, who establish trust with participants through supportive, non-judgmental relationships focused on safety and personal connection.
- 3. Mentality Shift:** Indy Peace Fellows attend weekly CBI groups, which has included Elders Circle, a life skills and decision making course developed by Indy Peace staff, and Healing Hearts, a music engineering and CBI group.
- 4. Service Connection:** Once a strong relationship is established and a mentality shift has begun, Life Coaches collaborate with participants to develop individualized Life Plans addressing education, employment, housing, and other needs. They maintain daily engagement with participants on a long-term basis to hold them accountable and help them achieve the goals outlined in the Life Plan. Fellows are also eligible to receive monthly incentive stipends for achieving certain milestones. Fellows can earn up to \$350 per month in incentives.
- 5. Mediation:** Violence Interrupters (VIs) mediate ongoing and instant conflicts in the community. VIs also “hot spot squat,” spending time on corners with high rates of violence, intervening in conflicts and engaging those hanging out.
- 6. Neighborhood Stabilization:** Neighborhood stabilization is a coordinated, structured approach to street outreach and violence intervention efforts in set neighborhoods or housing complexes. Neighborhood stabilization is deployed regularly by Indy Peace to have focused, intensive intervention in neighborhoods with protracted high rates of gun violence. Neighborhood stabilization efforts pinpoint specific neighborhoods, housing projects, apartment complexes, or parks that have the highest number of shootings in the previous three months. Over the course of 4–12 weeks, consistent and intensive violence intervention efforts are employed, including Outreach Workers saturating the area through canvassing, engaging residents and those hanging out, and offering support and connection to services; food distribution; and neighborhood events like barbecues, jumpers for children, basketball tournaments, etc.

The Indy Peace Fellowship expanded in 2024 by partnering with Indiana University Health Methodist Hospital to launch a hospital violence intervention program, creating additional access points to reach very high-risk individuals.



Focused Enforcement

IMPD has three proactive units with more than 80 officers dedicated to reducing gun violence: the Indiana Crime Gun Task Force, Violence Reduction Teams, and Violent Crime Task Forces. These resources are concentrated on individuals and groups who are driving incidents of gun violence. This targeted approach aims to balance accountability with minimizing the overall law enforcement footprint in communities. Each year, no less than four major enforcement operations are focused on the groups and individuals who have been the primary drivers of gun violence in the city.



David Muhammad, NICJR Executive Director, and Joe Hogsett, Indianapolis Mayor

Conclusion

Oakland and Indianapolis both demonstrate the powerful outcomes that can be achieved when a jurisdiction commits to comprehensive, sustained, and well-resourced implementation of the Gun Violence Reduction Strategy. By specifically focusing on those who are at the very highest risk of being involved in gun violence, and intensively engaging those individuals, both cities have significantly reduced gun violence and saved countless lives.



NICJR★
National Institute for
Criminal Justice Reform

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