

# KING COUNTY LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

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VIOLENCE REDUCTION PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The King County Regional Office of Gun Violence Prevention (ROGVP) commissioned the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) to conduct an analysis of the county's existing community violence intervention (CVI) landscape, with a focus on community-based organizations (CBOs) leading gun violence reduction work. This included an analysis of programs within King County's current CVI ecosystem, assessment of system strengths and gaps, and the identification of additional organizations that are important resources as the ROGVP and its partners work to fully build out the continuum of services.

NICJR research shows that King County is dedicated to mitigating gun violence, understanding its local impact, and seeking guidance and resources to enhance support for those in need. The County has recently taken important steps toward addressing violence, particularly in securing funding to establish a Regional Office of Gun Violence Prevention and supporting County and community-based violence reduction initiatives. There are an array of programs and services in King County that focus on violence prevention, violence intervention, and community transformation. Many of these are effective grassroots efforts that are deeply anchored in some of the county's most under-resourced communities. While the report covers the entire county, NICJR specifically addresses the City of Seattle in certain instances, as it is the largest city and accounts for more shootings than any other city in the county.

At the same time, our research sheds light on local challenges related to gun violence reduction. Notably, there are a limited number of organizations and programs in King County whose primary focus is immediate violence intervention and who provide services to those at the highest risk for gun violence. There is also a need for strengthened collaboration and coordination among organizations, as well as between these organizations and County agencies. This creates gaps in services and resources, and it adds challenges to accessing services and resources, limiting the effectiveness of violence reduction strategies. Without unity among various stakeholders and agencies, opportunities for comprehensive intervention and sustained community engagement may be missed, delaying long-term progress in reducing violence. This absence of concrete coordination is especially noteworthy given the high rates of violence that continue to impact King County residents.

While the existing Regional Office of Gun Violence Prevention is evidence of King County's commitment to creating a safe and healthy environment for its residents, realizing significant reductions in gun violence will require more data-driven decision making, coordinated efforts with consistent and committed action, and services that are directed toward those at the highest risk of violence regardless of race or ethnicity. Creating a comprehensive gun violence reduction strategic plan and establishing a countywide violence intervention ecosystem are essential next steps, as a centralized approach will allow County departments, City agencies, and community-based organizations to effectively work toward a common vision of safety and community well-being.

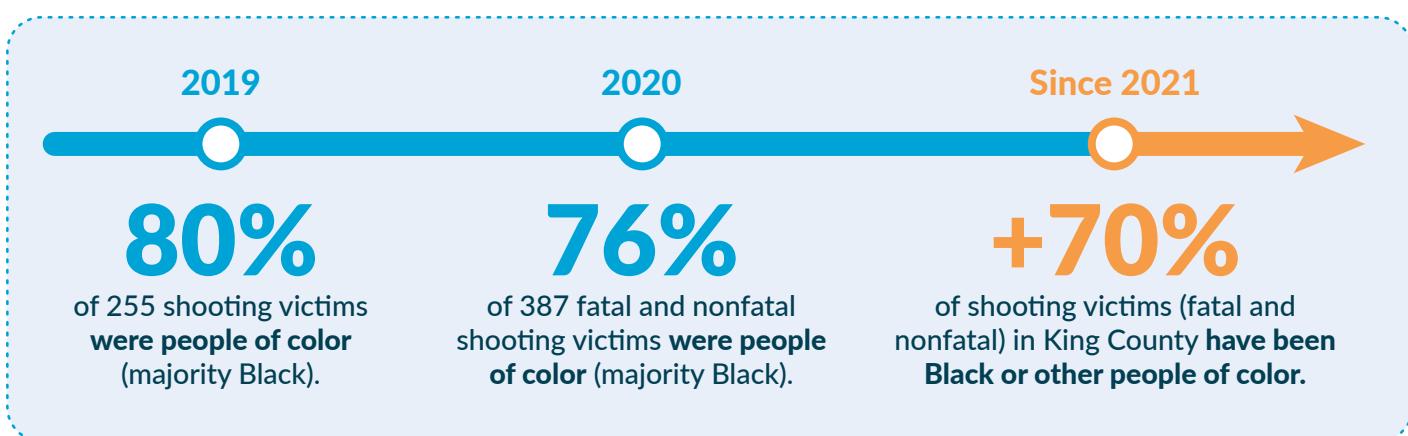


# INTRODUCTION

King County, Washington, is home to 2,271,380 residents, of whom 62.7% are White, 22.2% are Asian, 11.1% are Latino, and 7.4% are Black.<sup>1</sup> The City of Seattle, which is the largest city in the county, is home to 755,078 residents and has similar racial dynamics (63.6% of residents are White, 16.8% are Asian, 7.5% are Latino, and 6.4% are Black).<sup>2</sup>

Like many other communities across the nation, King County experienced a spike in gun violence as the COVID-19 pandemic intensified. In 2019, King County had 49 fatal shooting victims, 206 nonfatal shooting victims, and 858 total shots fired incidents.<sup>3</sup> In 2020, there were a total of 69 fatal shooting victims, 268 nonfatal shooting victims, and 1,025 total shots fired incidents.<sup>4</sup> Since 2021, King County has averaged 110 fatal shooting victims, 366 nonfatal shooting victims, and 1,586 total shots fired incidents annually.<sup>5</sup>

The racial breakdown of gun violence within King County is striking, as a large portion of gun violence victims are Black and other people of color, yet the county's population is largely composed of White individuals. Of the 255 total shooting victims in 2019, 80% were people of color—the majority of whom were Black. In 2020, 76% of the 387 fatal and nonfatal shooting victims were people of color (also majority Black). Since 2021, more than 70% of fatal and nonfatal shooting victims in King County have been Black or other people of color.<sup>6</sup>



Although many organizations in King County focus on serving youth and families, most of the county's gun violence victims and suspects are young adults. Based on data from the Gun Violence Archive, the majority of King County gun violence victims from January 2022 through July 2024 were over the age of 18.<sup>7</sup> In 2023, the average age of an individual involved in gun violence was 33 years, with the average suspect aged 31 and the average victim aged 34. In 2022, the average victim and suspect age was both 32 years old. Thus far in 2024, the average age of those involved in gun violence across the county is 30; in Seattle, the average age of a fatal shooting victim is 35, while the average age of a fatal shooting suspect is 34. For nonfatal shootings, the

<sup>1</sup> [Census Quick Facts: King County, WA](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Census Quick Facts: Seattle, WA](#)

<sup>3</sup> [2019 King County Firearm Violence: Year End Report](#)

<sup>4</sup> [2020 King County Firearm Violence: Year End Report](#)

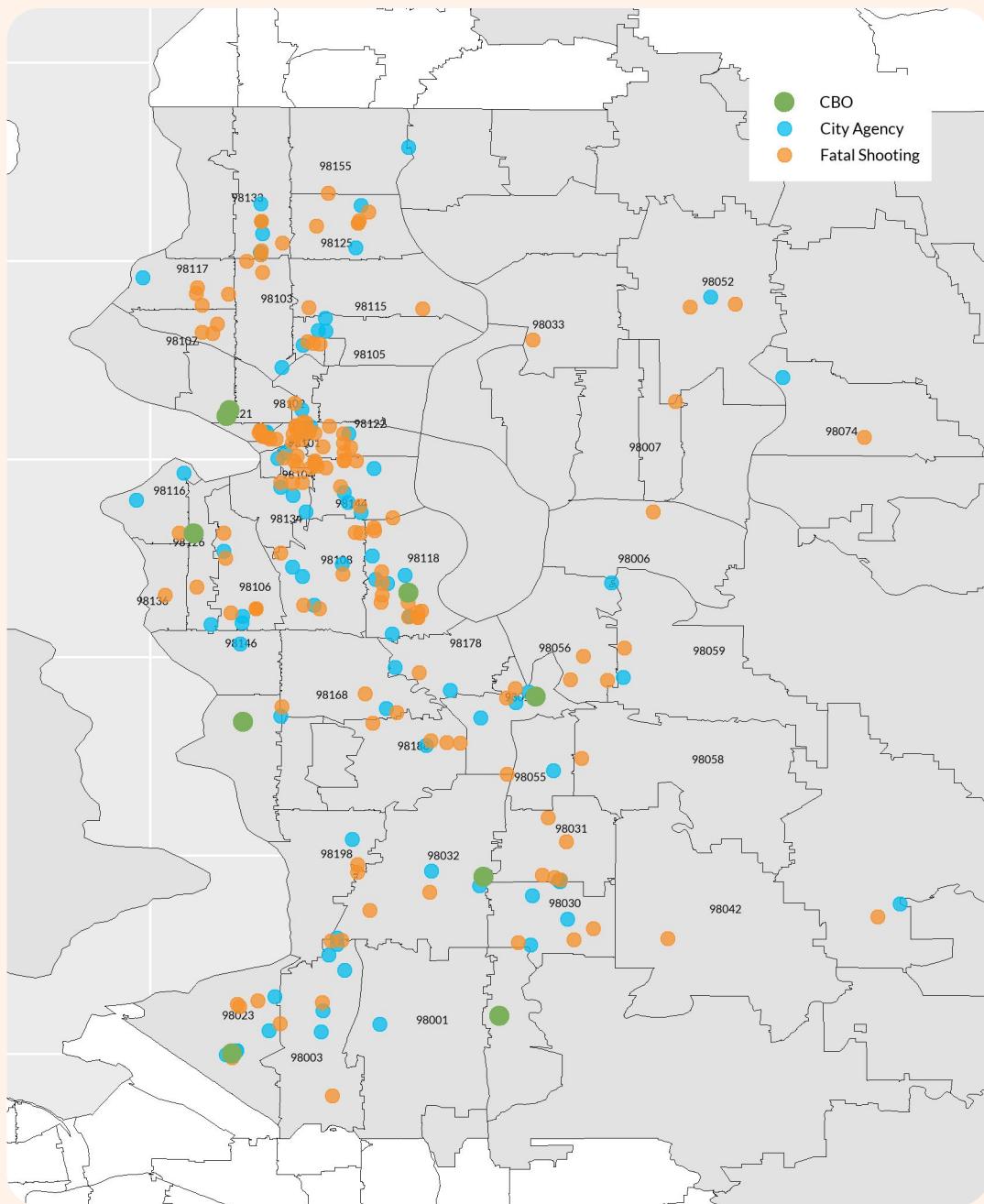
<sup>5</sup> [2024 Q1 King County Firearm Violence Report](#)

<sup>6</sup> [2021 Year End King County Firearm Violence Report Total Shootings and Shots Fired Incidents Geographic Distribution\\*](#) 2021 report specifies racial breakdown as primarily Black or African American.

<sup>7</sup> [Gun Violence Archive](#), data provided via direct correspondence with GVA

average age of victims remains 35, whereas the average age of suspects drops to 31. Also looking specifically at Seattle shows a 14% increase in non-fatal shootings thus far in 2024.<sup>8</sup> However, while the vast majority of individuals involved in violence in King County are adults, it is important to note the recent increase in youth gun violence involvement; between 2020 and 2023, King County saw a 39% increase in shootings of kids and teens and a 150% increase in deadly shootings among that age group.<sup>9</sup>

## Relationship Between CBO Locations and Gun Violence Incidents, January 1, 2023, through December 31, 2023<sup>10</sup>



8 Crime Dashboard - Police | seattle.gov

9 King County sees more kids and teens killed by gun violence compared to all of 2023

10 King County Washington Gun Violence and CBOs

# METHODOLOGY

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The National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform has conducted this assessment to inform King County's development of additional gun violence reduction strategies and to provide a springboard for larger conversations around gun violence within King County. To that end, this report aims to answer the following questions:

1

Who are the community-based organizations leading gun violence prevention and intervention services in King County, and what services are they providing?

2

What are the gaps in services provided by the existing CBOs?

3

What support and resources do organizations need to improve and expand services provided to those involved in gun violence?

On July 24, 2024, NICJR hosted an invitation-only convening of community-based organizations in conjunction with the King County Regional Office of Gun Violence Prevention. Eight organizations were invited to this event: Center for Children and Youth Justice (CCYJ), Community Passageways, CHOOSE 180, Freedom Project, Progress Pushers, Pro Se Potential, Urban Family, and YMCA Alive & Free.<sup>11</sup>

Over the course of four hours, NICJR introduced these organizations to the landscape analysis framework, facilitated breakout sessions to explore current gun violence reduction work within the county, and reconvened the full group to debrief and discuss next steps. To supplement data collected at this convening, NICJR contacted staff from participating organizations separately as needed for further conversations regarding their work and dynamics of the ecosystem. NICJR also interviewed the ROGVP Director and a representative from CCYJ, the intermediary that manages program coordination, training, technical assistance, and finances and contracting for this project.

In addition, NICJR reviewed publicly available documentation such as organization impact reports, news articles, County planning reports, and more to describe the organizations and efforts that compose the local community violence intervention ecosystem. Through the convening, interviews, and document review, NICJR not only engaged with established leaders in the local landscape but also identified emerging entities whose contributions could enhance the CVI ecosystem. NICJR also identified both the strengths that can be leveraged and the challenges that need to be tackled as King County moves forward in reducing violence.

## Violence Reduction Framework

The NICJR violence reduction framework around which this report is organized includes three primary programmatic categories: violence prevention, violence intervention, and community transformation. Reentry stands as another key programmatic category within any violence reduction ecosystem and is thus highlighted in this report as well. Each of the violence reduction organizations identified in King County fit within one or more of these categories.

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<sup>11</sup> While invited to the convening, CCYJ did not participate in focus groups. Information from CCYJ was obtained separately.

## 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.

Programs and services in this category are often targeted 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.

## 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 are specifically focused on the people who are at the greatest immediate risk of violence—typically young adults.

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.

## 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 15-20 years to achieve, if successfully implemented, it can also be most effective at permanently reducing violence.

### Prevention



**5 - 10 years**

Long-term violence reduction strategies like mentoring high-risk middle and high school students or cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) workshops.

### Intervention



**1 - 3 years**

Violence reduction in the near term, like harm reduction strategies and gun violence reduction strategies such as intensive case management.

### Community Transformation



**15 - 20 years**

Transforming communities so that they do not induce violence:

- Education reform and investment
- Economic development
- Neighborhood revitalization

# OVERVIEW OF KING COUNTY'S VIOLENCE REDUCTION ECOSYSTEM

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## Policies and Initiatives

This section highlights the policies and initiatives that shape King County's CVI efforts, focusing on strategies to prevent and reduce violence throughout the county. This section also provides an overview of key partnership and actions driving impactful change.

### King County's 100 Days of Action and 100 Days of Peace

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Due to the rise in gun violence incidents involving young people since the beginning of the year and the historical increase in firearm violence during the summer months, King County Executive launched 100 Days of Action to concentrate attention and mobilize resources to collectively address gun violence in King County.

Similarly, community-based organizations banded together to create a community-led 100 Days of Peace initiative, to begin a coordinated response in communities most impacted by gun violence. The 100 Days of Peace focused on intensive engagement with young adults most directly impacted by gun violence and added new resources to support hospital-based services. Throughout the 100 days, King County has engaged underserved communities, launching a large-scale awareness campaign, and updating resources and partnerships to strengthen public safety initiatives, among other activities to support community members.

### Regional Office of Gun Violence Prevention

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The ROGVP first launched in 2021 as the Regional Gun Violence Program. Under the direction of Eleuthera Lisch, the program joined the National Offices of Violence Prevention Network (NOVPN) in 2022 and formally became the Regional Office of Gun Violence Prevention in 2023. While Public Health – Seattle & King County began funding community-led safety efforts in 2021, the department established the Regional Office of Gun Violence Prevention in October 2023 to advance and manage CVI efforts. The Office employs a public health approach to violence prevention, intervention, and community restoration, and collaborates with cities across the county on various city-specific initiatives. Acting as an intermediary between CBOs and government agencies, it helps structure initiatives and provides essential training to CBOs to ensure their successful implementation. ROGVP and CCYJ have partnered to provide comprehensive program coordination, training, technical assistance, capacity building, and contractual and financial oversight, to ensure the effective support and success of community-based organizations.

Key functions of the ROGVP include funding and providing technical assistance for CVI service providers and Hospital-based violence prevention services, convening community elders, survivors, and youth to inform policy; partnering with service providers to enhance their capacity; and providing CBOs with access to technical assistance opportunities. The ROGVP's current initiatives include the Regional Peacekeepers Collective and a hospital-based violence intervention program (HVIP). The ROGVP also aims to establish a Community Violence Intervention Training Academy, which is currently in the concept development phase.

## Regional Peacekeepers Collective

The Regional Peacekeepers Collective (RPKC) is an ROGVP initiative that aims to address gun violence through a holistic and community-centered approach. RPKC emphasizes positive engagement and behavioral interventions between young people and trusted adults who can also provide support for safety and stability in order to reduce the risk of firearm injury and death. RPKC also prioritizes long-term engagement in violence interruption efforts, with a focus on sustainability supported by local, state, and federal government funding, as well as philanthropic contributions. Additionally, RPKC is committed to community outreach, raising public awareness, and cultivating restorative practices to build a safer, more resilient community.



This initiative backs culturally responsive, BIPOC-led community organizations that deliver intervention, prevention, and restoration services. Current contracted service providers include Community Passageways, Freedom Project, Progress Pushers, Urban Family, and YMCA Alive & Free. As of 2024, RPKC serves the Skyway, Burien, and Kent areas, with hopes to expand service areas in the future. CCYJ provides programmatic coordination as well as oversight and support as relates to organizational capacity building, data collection, and fiscal and contractual management.

Through a network anchored by a community-based trauma center, the Collective links individuals most impacted by gun violence to life-affirming care, provides them with access to vital resources, and supports them in forging meaningful connections within their communities. This support extends to family members, offering them connection and resources.

## Harborview Medical Center Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Program

Harborview Medical Center, in partnership with the ROGVP, implements a Hospital-Based and Community-Linked Violence Intervention Program designed to provide comprehensive care to individuals affected by gunshot injuries and their families. This initiative, which is funded by Public Health – Seattle & King County, King County, the City of Seattle, Seattle's Public Health Department, and the State of Washington, ensures that hospital staff, including staff who are survivors of gun violence, connect patients and their families with critical community-based resources.

The program refers survivors of firearm injuries to CCYJ for organization and service coordination. Additionally, community-based violence interrupters are deployed to the hospital as needed to enhance safety, assist in de-escalation efforts, and prevent retaliatory violence. In instances of fatality, community organizations provide support for vigils, funerals, and memorials. All staff involved in the program receive specialized training to effectively support gun violence survivors. Through these efforts, the program seeks to reduce gun violence, prevent future incidents, and promote the overall well-being of the King County community.

## Leadership, Intervention, & Change (LINC) Program

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The Leadership, Intervention, & Change (LINC) program, connects youth and young adults aged 12–24 who are involved in or at risk of gang activity and crime with comprehensive wraparound services. The LINC program has operated within the region since 2011. The LINC program is a regional adaptation of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Comprehensive Gang Model, which is designed to enhance collaboration and community-driven solutions to prevent and reduce gang violence. Through LINC, a steering committee composed of representatives from law enforcement, schools, local governments, faith communities, and community-based organizations works alongside Multidisciplinary Intervention Teams (MDITs) to provide coordinated street outreach, collaborative case management, and other essential direct services to young people. This collaborative approach ensures that youth receive the support they need to divert from criminal paths and achieve positive outcomes. As the lead entity, CCYJ oversees the implementation of this model, playing a central role in coordinating MDIT services, managing data collection, and staffing the Steering Committee.

## Seattle Community Safety Initiative

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The Seattle Community Safety Initiative (SCSI) is a violence prevention program funded by the City of Seattle that aims to provide safety through a hub-based framework in Central, Southeast, and West Seattle. SCSI service providers include YMCA, Urban Family, and Community Passageways. SCSI delivers an array of services such as school safe passage, street outreach, and service navigation assistance.

SCSI facilitates a thorough response to critical incidents and offers follow-up care for those most profoundly impacted by gun violence. The initiative not only focuses on immediate safety concerns but also seeks to foster long-term community resilience and well-being. By leveraging local resources and engaging with a variety of community stakeholders, SCSI aims to create sustainable safety networks for those directly impacted by gun violence and promote a sense of collective responsibility within the community.

# Community-Based Organization Programs and Services Profiles

This section provides overviews of organizations that participated in the CBO convening and are crucial stakeholders in the existing community violence intervention ecosystem within King County. As described above, NICJR uses a three-part framework to assess local ecosystems' ability to respond to gun violence. This framework categorizes programs and services based on whether they are oriented toward medium-term efforts to prevent gun violence, short-term efforts to intervene in immediate risk of gun violence, or longer-term community transformation efforts to reduce the structural conditions that give rise to gun violence. Based on the convening and our subsequent interviews with these CBOs, we have categorized each organization within the NICJR violence reduction framework of violence prevention, violence intervention, and community transformation. However, it is important to note that there is always some overlap, and the distinctions are not absolute. This categorization is intended to serve as an analytic tool for understanding the violence reduction landscape rather than an absolute description of the work of each organization.

While many of the CBO staff self-identified their organizational focus and programming as intervention work, only three organizations provide services for those at the highest risk of involvement of gun violence: adults.

Violence intervention entails targeted identification of highest-risk individuals and the relentless engagement of those individuals to address the immediate causes of violence and provide support to those with the greatest needs. This includes life-saving services such as violence mediation and interruption, conflict resolution, and intensive life coaching and case management. By intervening before violence occurs or escalates, these programs disrupt violence and contribute to near-term violence reduction and long-term community safety and well-being.

Given that the vast majority of individuals involved in violence in King County are over the age of 18, expansion of services and programming for adults is necessary for near-term reduction of gun violence in King County.

Violence Prevention	Violence Intervention	Community Transformation
Choose 180	Community Passageways	Choose 180
Community Passageways	Freedom Project	Community Passageways
Pro Se Potential	Urban Family	Freedom Project
Progress Pushers		Urban Family
Urban Family		
YMCA		

# Violence Prevention

## CHOOSE 180

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Is an organization that partners with the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office (PAO) to provide services for justice-involved young people. CHOOSE 180's offerings include community-based youth programming, art therapy, school-based prevention programming, professional development and training, and diversion.<sup>12</sup>

CHOOSE Freedom is a 14-week program that serves 12–24 year olds impacted by gun violence or incarceration. The program's weekly meetings focus on trauma, preventing retaliation, and goal setting. Meetings are available in juvenile facilities and virtually for youth in the community. Youth involved in CHOOSE Freedom and any other CHOOSE 180 program are also eligible for the organization's Aftercare program, which provides ongoing support after program completion. They also have the opportunity to participate in art therapy as a supplement to other programming. Additionally, youth at risk of suspension or expulsion from school can receive school-based diversion and prevention programming focused on breaking the school-to-prison pipeline. Finally, through the Teaching and Advancement program, CHOOSE 180 provides professional development for direct service workers across the country who seek to launch similar community-centered prevention and intervention efforts.

Restorative Community Pathways is CHOOSE 180's diversion program for youth accused of a first-time felony and referred by the PAO. This program refers youth to other community-based organizations to receive services, with the goal of keeping them out of the juvenile justice system. The organization also offers adult court diversion for young adults referred by the Prosecuting Attorney's Office. This program follows the Compass journal curriculum and results in the young person's charges being dropped or dismissed.

## Community Passageways

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Was established in 2017 as a youth felony diversion program in Seattle. Since then, the organization has expanded to utilize a four-pronged approach to reducing community violence and criminal justice involvement: prevention, diversion, support, and reintegration.<sup>13</sup> Community Passageways provides youth and young adult case management and wraparound services, substance abuse treatment, school and youth violence prevention programming, prison reentry, community empowerment programming, and community violence intervention.

Community Passageways' youth and young adult services are provided through two programs: Family Integrated Transition (CP-FIT), which serves young people ages 12–24, and Deep Dive, which serves males ages 15–27. Both programs are strengths-based and teach skills such as conflict resolution, mindfulness, and financial literacy. They also provide services such as legal system support and employment support. Additionally, Community Passageways provides school violence prevention programs in Lakota Middle School and South Lake High School, as well as a variety of mentoring and apprenticeship opportunities to build youth leadership.



<sup>12</sup> CHOOSE 180: Program Overview

<sup>13</sup> Community Passageways: Our Programs

Community Passageways' substance use services are provided through the Recovery Navigator Program, which serves youth and young adults in the Central District of Seattle, the City of Burien, and the unincorporated North Highline neighborhood. The organization also has a Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion program that provides case management and prebooking diversion for youth and young adults facing low-level drug and prostitution charges.

Community Passageways is also part of the Seattle Community Safety Initiative and the Regional Peacekeepers Collective.

## Pro Se Potential

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Offers mentorship, academic support, and diversion services for young people of color ages 11–24 in the South King County area. Pro Se Potential provides therapy-based mentorship to youth involved in, or at risk of involvement in, the criminal justice system through the Mental Investment Program,<sup>14</sup> while the Pro Se Scholars Program provides incentives and support for academic achievement. The organization's diversion program, Alternative Path, provides mentorship, therapy, and resources for youth diverted from the juvenile justice system. For youth who participate, this diversion program is stipulated in sentencing as part of youth probation.

## Progress Pushers

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Is a youth-focused organization established in 2017 that provides strengths-based youth mentorship as well as professional development training for credible messengers.<sup>15</sup> The organization's Empowerment Initiative, which serves youth ages 12–14, provides advocacy and service coordination, while its Youth Mentorship and System Navigation program connects justice-involved youth to resources and helps them navigate the juvenile justice system. Progress Pushers also provides group mentorship to youth and young adults who have been impacted by the legal/injustice system through Credible Messenger Groups. These groups are provided in the community, schools, and institutions and facilitated by credible messengers. The groups' 24-week, four-phase curriculum is based upon the seven pillars of the Covenant of Peace. Finally, Progress Pushers provides Credible Messenger Training, including 40 hours of training in cognitive behavioral therapy, motivational interviewing, facilitation, and more as well as Work and Learn sessions for professionals.



<sup>14</sup> Pro Se Potential: Programs

<sup>15</sup> Progress Pushers

## Urban Family

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Formally started in 2007 as an organization dedicated to serving youth. In 2010, the organization shifted its focus to serve those at risk for exposure to and involvement in gun violence. Urban Family serves individuals between the ages of five and 30, offering school-based mentorship programs that include group mentoring and life coaching. These programs create a supportive network for youth, empowering them to realize their full potential and contribute positively to their community.<sup>16</sup>

Urban Family also offers the Game 360 Sports program, which provides a comprehensive athletic development experience by integrating elite sports training, team competition and participation in camps, group mentorship, academic development, and life coaching for student athletes. Additionally, the organization runs the LEADERSHIP 360 program, a leadership and advocacy initiative that supports students in civic engagement and social advocacy. This program empowers youth to become leaders, mentors, and role models by enabling them to design, plan, and implement social justice projects addressing issues that directly impact their peers. Further, Urban Family offers an onsite afterschool program to help youth develop through a variety of educational and recreational activities.

Urban Family is also a service provider for the Seattle Community Safety Initiative and the Regional Peacekeepers Collective.

## YMCA

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YMCA Alive & Free is part of the YMCA of Greater Seattle Social Impact Center. The program serves youth impacted by the justice system or community violence through street outreach and case management focused on wraparound services, employment and education training, and suicide prevention.<sup>17</sup> The YMCA Building Resilience and Violence Education program works with Burien youth in schools to prevent involvement in violence and the justice system. Finally, as part of the Seattle Community Safety Initiative in West Seattle, YMCA's Street Outreach Workers interrupt youth violence by de-escalating conflicts and engaging youth in services.



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<sup>16</sup> [Urban Families](#)

<sup>17</sup> [YMCA of Greater Seattle: Violence Prevention](#)

## Violence Intervention

### Community Passageways

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Engages in violence intervention through its Community Support Team. The Community Support Team connects with individuals on shooting scenes, in hospitals, and in the community to intervene in and deescalate gun violence. Community Passageways conducts initial risk assessments and develops emergency safety plans at 24-, 48-, and 72-hour intervals following each incident. The organization ensures that safety protocols are tailored in real time to each unique situation and communicated effectively for safe passage during vigils, funerals, and memorials. The team also connects participants to resources for needs related to mental health and trauma, medical services, housing, employment, and mentoring. Additionally, Community Passageways participates in weekly “hot spot” remediation, pop-up events, and safe passage initiatives to enhance community safety and support.

### Freedom Project

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Provides violence intervention support through their frontline staff to respond to incidents of fatal and non fatal shootings throughout King County. When incidents of gun violence occur, the organization sends a team of violence interrupters and mediators. These frontline staff members provide immediate support to victims and affected community members, working to de-escalate tensions and prevent further violence using compassionate communication. The Freedom Project also proactively identifies situations where retaliation is likely to occur and intervenes to mediate conflicts.

### Urban Family

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Provides violence intervention support to the South Seattle area through the Seattle Community Safety Initiative. Serving ages 12-24, Urban Family engages with the victims of nonfatal shootings. Once the organization is contacted regarding a gun violence incident, the team supports the nonfatal shooting victim at the hospital with referrals to services, and they provide crisis support to the neighborhood where the incident occurred. Urban Family also identifies potential suspects to de-escalate violence and resolve any issues stemming from shootings, and they provide community event support and safety support for funerals of gun violence victims to reduce the potential of retaliation.



While Urban Family has been doing this work in South Seattle for the past two years, the organization is currently preparing to expand this work to support the Skyway area under the Regional Peacekeepers Collective.

## Community Transformation and Reentry

### CHOOSE 180's

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Community-based reentry program, CHOOSE Freedom, recognizes the traumas of incarceration and violence and takes a restorative approach to promote healing and prevent future harm among individuals transitioning from incarceration. Rather than continuing the cycle of violence and punishment, CHOOSE Freedom aims to foster a stronger, more resilient community through continued dialogue and community building. The program is led by a team of individuals with lived experience of the criminal justice system. Its sessions provide a space for youth and young adults to build relationships and learn from one another. Participants of the program engage in discussions on topics such as accountability, trauma recovery, goal setting, identifying personal strengths, and exploring alternatives to retaliation, all with the goal of encouraging personal growth and community well-being. (See Violence Prevention for additional details.)

## Community Passageways

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Offers reentry services through its Not Forgotten program, which supports individuals returning from incarceration. Utilizing staff with firsthand experience of incarceration, Not Forgotten provides holistic support in navigating the emotional impacts of incarceration and accessing employment, education, stable housing, financial literacy, family reunification, and cultural connection. This program is part of a broader initiative that includes substance use disorder services provided by the Recovery Navigator Program (See Violence Prevention for details). Through these efforts, Community Passageways focuses on helping formerly incarcerated individuals reintegrate into society, providing them with the necessary resources and support to rebuild their lives and avoid recidivism.

## Freedom Project

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Is a reentry organization established in 2001 that provides services to individuals who are currently or recently incarcerated. Programming is provided at three points in the reentry process: inside, return, and outside. Inside programming consists of six to 12 months of classes, including a Nonviolent Communication course designed to promote communication that centers empathy and connection. Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Freedom Project volunteers provided services in nine state prison facilities. Today, inside programming takes place in two facilities in Monroe, Washington, with plans to return to all nine facilities in the future.<sup>18</sup>

Return programming includes 72 hours of immediate support upon release from prison. During this time, individuals receive peer support and practical assistance with transportation and other basic needs. Outside support lasts 90 days and includes peer support and workshops to continue practicing nonviolent communication as well as connection to resources such as education, medical care, and housing. All programming is provided by volunteers and incarcerated individuals who are trained to facilitate workshops.

## Urban Family

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Is dedicated to supporting youth and families through its Family 360 program, a family-centered and strengths-based initiative. This program offers comprehensive support by providing basic needs, systems navigation support, advocacy, and empowerment coaching to help families achieve and maintain positive changes. The program also features a strong community support component, connecting families with a wide range of services through Urban Family's extensive network of community partners.

Urban Family also provides programs and services to address the unique challenges of youth and young adults who are homeless, runaways, or experiencing housing insecurity. Recognizing that these youth often face traumatic situations and engage in unsafe activities, Urban Family tailors its programs to provide them with the necessary resources and support to improve their life circumstances.

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<sup>18</sup> Freedom Project: About Us

# System Coordination

## Center for Children & Youth Justice

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While CCYJ does not provide direct services, it is important to highlight the unique position of the organization that serves as intermediary and provides program coordination, training, technical assistance, capacity building, and financial oversight for other community-based organizations. CCYJ is an organization working to improve the lives of youth impacted by foster care and the criminal justice system and youth within the LGBTQAI community. CCYJ focuses on creating systemic changes that benefit these vulnerable populations.<sup>19</sup>

CCYJ serves as the lead entity for the Leadership, Intervention, & Change (LINC) program, which connects youth and young adults aged 12-24 who are involved in or at risk of gang activity and crime with comprehensive wraparound services. The LINC program is a regional adaptation of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Comprehensive Gang Model, which is designed to enhance collaboration and community-driven solutions to prevent and reduce gang violence. Through LINC, a steering committee composed of representatives from law enforcement, schools, local governments, faith communities, and community-based organizations works alongside Multidisciplinary Intervention Teams (MDITs) to provide coordinated street outreach, collaborative case management, and other essential direct services to young people. This collaborative approach ensures that youth receive the support they need to divert from criminal paths and achieve positive outcomes. As the lead entity, CCYJ oversees the implementation of this model, playing a central role in coordinating MDIT services, managing data collection, and staffing the Steering Committee.

Additionally, CCYJ emphasizes professional development through initiatives like the annual LINC conference, which offers training in trauma-informed care, motivational interviewing, and youth advocacy, along with training that focuses on critical areas such as housing and trauma-informed care.

CCYJ also serves as a programmatic and fiscal intermediary for King County Regional Peacekeeper Collective. This role includes providing technical assistance to intervention-focused community-based organizations and monitoring the implementation of programs. Through these efforts, CCYJ continues to be a bridge that unites diverse systems in support of at-risk and high risk youth.

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<sup>19</sup> CCYJ: Reducing Gang Violence

# STRENGTHS OF GUN VIOLENCE REDUCTION SERVICES IN KING COUNTY

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## Established ROGVP

At the forefront of King County's landscape lies a remarkable asset: the Regional Office of Gun Violence Prevention. The development of the ROGVP exemplifies the County's dedication to and investment in reducing gun violence and allowing citizens of King County to live safe, healthy, and productive lives. The ROGVP plays a crucial role in coordinating the CVI landscape by acting as a bridge between community and government efforts and partnering with both in the development and implementation of a community-informed strategic approach focused on gun violence reduction. The Office itself is firmly committed to listening to community voices and participating in development and training to continually improve its efforts, and the ROGVP leadership is deeply invested in the work. These dynamics embody the boldness of King County and its commitment to gun violence reduction.

## Community Connections

The deep community roots of CBO leaders in King County also represent a significant strength of the county's violence reduction landscape. The vast majority of the organizations' employees are natives of Seattle or King County, and a number of staff noted how their earlier life experiences fuel their dedication to reducing gun violence within the neighborhoods they come from. Many organizations have been serving the community for over 10 years and have evolved as the needs of the community have changed. This unwavering commitment is commendable and a reflection of their investment in true community transformation. Related to this, many organizations noted the various ways they have supported each other's leaders, events, and even participants at some points. This mutual support and flexibility speaks to the community's commitment to making King County safer.

## Staffing

In addition to possessing deep community connections, many of the organizations highlighted in this report are staffed by people who have been directly impacted by the justice system and/or gun violence. The presence of such staff is crucial, because their firsthand understanding of the challenges and complexities of life in high-risk environments enables them to connect authentically with those affected by gun violence. This relatability and credibility allows them to build trust with participants, making interventions more effective. Employing system- and violence-impacted individuals not only enhances the cultural competency of these organizations, it also ensures that strategies and programs are grounded in lived realities, ultimately leading to more successful and sustainable outcomes in violence prevention and intervention.

## Service Delivery Model

Many organizations highlighted in this report have evolved their service delivery models, shifting from a primary focus on youth development in their early years to now addressing the needs of higher-risk individuals. While organizations may still face challenges in reaching those at the highest risk for gun violence, their current efforts reflect a significant move toward supporting more vulnerable populations.

Relatedly, organizations overwhelmingly noted that they expanded their gun violence reduction efforts in response to civil rights and social justice movements during and following the nationwide response to the death of George Floyd in 2020. Community-based organizations received heightened attention and support as justice movements gained momentum. This increased visibility allowed these organizations to expand their reach and impact, capitalizing on the growing demand for social justice and systemic change that was particularly strong in King County. While this exposure came as a result of tragedy, it has allowed organizations to grow and evolve. It is important that the county's CVI ecosystem continues to focus on increasing change, action, and impact, even if their exposure wanes.

## Data Collection

King County CBO staff noted that their organizations collect a wide variety of data, with many engaging in continuous data collection. Several organizations mentioned the distribution of surveys and an influx of internal spreadsheets. Some organizations even mentioned previous collegiate research partners. CBO staff and ROGVP staff noted the existence of a Public Health Seattle and King County public data dashboard that provides detailed insights on firearm-related injuries and deaths within King County. This resource is accessible to the ROGVP and community partners, offering population-level data to inform prevention efforts. These data collection practices are commendable, as they represent an important step toward the evolution of gun violence reduction strategies.

Whether it is information on participant demographics, program participation, or referrals to other services, data collection is essential for any community-based organization. Data collection is especially crucial for CBOs in the gun violence prevention and intervention space, as it allows for the identification of patterns and trends, enabling more targeted and effective responses to violence. By systematically gathering data, these organizations can potentially evaluate the impact of their programs, make informed decisions to strengthen programming, and allocate resources more efficiently. Additionally, robust data collection can support organizations in securing funding and influencing policy changes, as it provides concrete evidence of the effectiveness of their work.

## Citywide and Countywide Initiatives

Another strength is the number of citywide and countywide initiatives that strive to reduce gun violence and create safety within the community. For example, Public Health – Seattle & King County implements the Regional Peacekeepers Collective Initiative, and the City of Seattle implements the Seattle Community Safety Initiative. Multiple community-led organizations—including Community Passageways, Urban Family, and YMCA Alive—are part of both initiatives. This overlap underscores the commitment of these CBOs at both city and regional levels as well as their resilience and capacity to operate effectively across different scopes.

There is a real opportunity to leverage these organizations' strengths and expertise at both the city and county level for a cohesive and unified approach to addressing gun violence, enhancing the overall impact of violence reduction efforts in King County. The importance of such collaboration cannot be overstated, as it indicates the beginnings of a comprehensive strategy to address gun violence from multiple angles and establish a more resilient support system for communities in need.

# CHALLENGES

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## Coordination of Citywide and Countywide Services

Although numerous gun violence reduction efforts exist, King County needs a cohesive strategic plan to coordinate and clearly differentiate initiatives. Many of the same programs operate in both City and County initiatives. This consistency can have benefits, but without a centralized vision, it can also lead to overlap in services, organization burnout, and overall inefficiency. Ultimately, this disjointed approach challenges the county's ability to implement a comprehensive and sustained gun violence reduction strategy, with specific deadlines and measurable outcomes.

## Service Delivery

Though many of the nine organizations featured in this report describe their programming as intervention work, only a handful have robust services specifically dedicated to people who are directly involved in violence or at the greatest immediate risk of violence. Most of the organizations are youth and family serving, with the exception of three that offer direct intervention services such as violence interruption and mediation, and many are only dedicated to supporting youth and young adults (up to age 24). However, when analyzing the age of those who are directly involved in gun violence in King County, we find that a large portion of violence involves those who are in their 30s.<sup>20</sup>

The key to an effective gun violence reduction strategy is having the right organizations offering the right services to the right people in the right way. To align with best practices in the field and reduce gun violence in the near term, a violence intervention program should use data to drive decision making and identify highest-risk individuals who are in need of programming. This program should have a distinct structure and staffing that includes street outreach workers, violence interrupters/mediators, critical incident responders, and life coaches. Outreach workers, mediators/interrupters, and other violence interventionists are essential to reducing retaliatory violence and engaging with high-risk individuals to prevent conflicts before they escalate. Life coaches provide long-term, intensive case management and life coaching. This includes personalized guidance and support to clients through small case loads that ensure focused attention and tailored care. Equally important, violence intervention efforts should utilize a comprehensive and partnership-based approach to addressing the needs of high-risk individuals, with each partner playing a significant role in the overall strategy.



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<sup>20</sup> 2024 Q1 King County Firearm Violence Report; Gun Violence Archive data correspondence

Ensuring significant resources, capacity, and programming are dedicated specifically to those at the highest risk for violence is crucial for meaningful and sustained reductions in gun violence. Without these, broader initiatives may fall short in their impact. To reduce violence in the near term, King County must provide services to and work directly with individuals who are currently involved in gun violence or at the highest risk for such involvement. Youth and family serving programs are important; however, their contributions to near-term gun violence reduction are limited.

## Funding

A number of organizations noted that, in terms of funding, success can bring challenges. Achieving positive outcomes might lead to reduced funding as the problem their work addresses seems resolved. Conversely, if a program is unsuccessful, funding might be withdrawn due to perceived ineffectiveness. Given this complex dynamic, a few organizations noted how multi-year funding for particular programs has been especially helpful, but they are still in need of additional funding streams. Because they lack sufficient funding, some organizations struggle to develop and expand services needed by highest-risk individuals who are impacted by gun violence.

Organizations also mentioned that bureaucracies make it difficult to secure and administer funding. Time-consuming and complex reimbursement request processes can delay the receipt of essential funds, hindering organizations' ability to implement timely and effective interventions for community needs. Further, CBOs noted particularly disheartening experiences of not being able to receive reimbursement for costs associated with providing essential support to their clients, such as hot meals or transportation, that may not be allowable costs under federal government grants.

## Community Connections

Another challenge is the limited connections of both CBOs and government agencies to the East African community, and the associated difficulty with engaging Somali youth and adults who are involved in gun violence. Organizations noted the dire need for services among that population, as well as their desire to serve the Somali community. However, their ability to engage this population is limited by language and cultural barriers in community outreach and engagement and, more broadly, distrust between the Somali community and providers. Although NICJR did not have access to data quantifying the number of people of Somali descent who have been victims or perpetrators of gun violence in King County, the frequency with which this community was mentioned and the absence of any CVI CBOs situated therein make clear that this is a pressing issue.

## Data Collection

The community-based organizations highlighted in this report vary widely as it relates to collecting and utilizing data; many organizations mentioned collecting their own data, while others noted their work with external research and evaluation partners, and others described not fully knowing how to use the data they collect. While it is commendable that organizations in King County are actively collecting data, they are not yet analyzing these data. This results in missed opportunities to understand the root causes of issues. Without analysis, CBOs are also unable to measure the impact of their work, which can lead to inefficient use of resources and hinder their ability to make data-driven decisions that could enhance community safety efforts. It also limits CBOs' ability to advocate for increased funding and other support for their work. As King County CBOs and ROGVP both navigate barriers when collecting data, the ROGVP is committed to advocating on the behalf of CBOs for data access and transparency, as well as additional technical assistance as it relates to best practices for data collection, data analysis, and data reporting.

## Connections Between CBOs and Government Agencies

While there are some strong relationships between violence reduction community-based organizations in King County, significant gaps exist in their connections with public agencies, which often lack understanding of the organizations' roles and contributions. CBOs emphasized that their relationships with government entities such as courts, juvenile services, and schools tend to be person-based rather than institutionalized. As a result, frequent staff turnover can mean the recurring loss of buy-in and partnership from key government partners.

Additionally, the shift to remote operations after the pandemic has made it much more difficult to engage with County officials and other key government stakeholders. CBO staff noted that they used to be able to drop by and see their government contacts in person. Now, they must rely on phone calls and emails that may go unreturned, complicating efforts to build and maintain effective collaborations. Because the work of gun violence reduction is heavily dependent on human interaction and experience, these challenges hinder the overall impact of community-based initiatives.

# GOALS OF COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

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During the convening, the organizations reached a consensus on several key goals. They agreed on the importance of building a common language to ensure clear communication of their work, their roles within the work, and overall gun violence reduction strategies. Another significant objective is translating their work into information that can be easily understood by a broader audience, thereby increasing transparency and engagement. Additionally, the CBOs and the ROGVP agreed that they all aim to quantify their efforts, providing measurable data to track progress and outcomes. While each organization is in a different space with their use of data, they overwhelmingly desire to expand their use of data. Lastly, they emphasized the need to continue building strong relationships across organizations and government partners to promote collaboration and mutual support.



# GAPS WITHIN THE EXISTING KING COUNTY LANDSCAPE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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This section examines critical opportunities for development in current CVI services and resources within King County. By focusing on practical, community-driven solutions, this section provides a roadmap for developing an effective CVI ecosystem.

Through our research, the following needs have been identified within King County's CVI landscape:

## **1. Development of a countywide gun violence reduction strategic plan.**

Through our analysis of the CBO convening and supplemental interviews, as well as our review of publicly available information, NICJR has identified the absence of a King County comprehensive gun violence reduction strategic plan as the most significant gap in the local violence reduction landscape.

- a. A strategic plan is crucial for an office of gun violence prevention, as it provides a clear, actionable roadmap to address the complex issue of gun violence. By outlining specific goals, objectives, and strategies, a comprehensive plan would ensure that all stakeholders are aligned and working toward common goals to ensure King County is safer. Equally important, a strategic plan would ensure the ROGVP prioritizes resources effectively and that efforts are focused on the most impactful areas.
- b. Despite the presence of numerous gun violence prevention efforts, the King County violence reduction ecosystem is not currently organized around a cohesive gun violence reduction strategic plan. Without a unified plan, resources and efforts may be duplicated or misaligned, reducing their effectiveness. A strategic plan ensures that all initiatives are coordinated, maximizing their potential to reduce gun violence and enhance public safety. This plan should be co-developed with community and government stakeholders, and it is essential that the plan be inclusive of all agencies, community-based organizations, and entities that make up the King County CVI ecosystem. The plan should include specific, actionable items with date-specific commitments over the course of three to five years. This plan should also include the identification of those at the highest risk of involvement in gun violence. It is imperative that the plan's strategic initiatives focus solely on this population, as this increases the likelihood of near-term violence reduction.

## **2. Development of performance measures and ongoing evaluation of King County's CVI ecosystem.**

- a. While King County has a number of organizations involved in violence reduction work, there is a real need to streamline this work and ensure all groups have access to services. There should be further evaluation to determine where each organization within the King County ecosystem is effectively meeting the needs of its clients and where improvements are needed. This evaluation should be based on clearly defined criteria, and specialized training should be provided to ensure organizations develop the necessary skills to meet those criteria.
- b. King County needs to use data to better understand the services that should be offered, expanded, or reduced. To ensure funding is used in the most impactful way possible, data should be used to identify what

is working and address what is not working. There are already numerous services and programs designed to support those impacted by violence, but there is currently no mechanism to measure whether these initiatives are reaching the intended individuals or making a meaningful impact.

### **3. Identify and engage with those who are at the highest risk of involvement in gun violence throughout King County.**

- a. King County is in need of comprehensive data sharing that allows for the data-driven identification of the groups and individuals at the very highest risk of being involved in gun violence. Further research and analysis must be completed to know which demographics, neighborhoods, groups/gangs, etc. should be the focus of community violence intervention work.
- b. King County needs to engage with individuals who are at the highest risk of involvement in gun violence. There is a critical need to develop services and initiatives that are inclusive of and specifically tailored to those most in need regardless of race, gender, or ethnicity. To identify these individuals, King County should review data related to fatal and nonfatal shootings from the past 12–24 months to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of gun violence within the county. King County's current ecosystem primarily serves those between the ages of 12–24. Although a portion of violence is committed by those within the age range, the ecosystem lacks services for adults at the highest risk of involvement of violence: adults. King county should expand and develop programs and services for adults between the ages of 25–39.

### **4. Provide additional opportunities for CBO certifications and training.**

- a. While CBO leaders mentioned their involvement in training and certifications, NICJR recommends specific additional training. Organizations working with those directly involved in and impacted by violence should absolutely participate in conflict resolution workshops, training on de-escalation techniques and community engagement strategies, trauma-informed care seminars, and cultural sensitivity training. Additional specific recommended training and certifications include: regular life coach training and certification, violence interrupter training, and data collection and management training.

### **5. Clarify service types.**

- a. Service providers should prioritize clear communication about the programs they offer, their geographic service areas, and their target populations. This transparency is essential not only to help those in need easily find services but also to encourage collaboration among community-based organizations and local government agencies. Initially, organizations should ensure that this information is readily accessible through public-facing materials, such as their websites, social media, and brochures. In the long term, developing a comprehensive provider directory would significantly support the city's violence reduction efforts. NICJR recommends including key data fields in such a directory, such as service type (e.g., street/community outreach, crisis management, life coaching), target populations (e.g., children, youth, reentry populations), and target geographic areas.

By filling or closing all service gaps, King County—with the commitment of elected and other government officials, the Regional Office of Gun Violence Prevention, and service providers—can greatly enhance current efforts to reduce gun violence, build a safer community, and promote a culture of peace and collaboration.

A photograph of the Seattle skyline, featuring the Space Needle, with a green and blue gradient overlay at the top.

# KING COUNTY LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

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VIOLENCE REDUCTION PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES