

2025 | **IN REVIEW:**
BUILDING A SAFER,
MORE JUST NATION

NICJR ★
National Institute for
Criminal Justice Reform

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Letter From the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

As we look back over 2025, I am in awe of the many ways our field has shown up in the midst of immense challenges. By some measures, our nation is the safest it has ever been. Yet the very strategies that got us here are under threat as community violence intervention has lost critical funding and regressive, ineffective approaches to public safety and criminal justice are being embraced.

This year, the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) continued our work in many cities that are achieving significant reductions in gun violence, including Baltimore, Oakland, Indianapolis, Knoxville, and many others. NICJR also continued to support implementation of the [National CVI Action Plan](#).

We also grew the National Offices of Violence Prevention Network to more than 80 members (check out the [NOVPN Annual Report](#)); launched the inaugural cohort of the [Violence Reduction Management Institute](#); and provided research, training, and/or technical assistance to more than 25 local, county, and state jurisdictions throughout the US.

In May of 2025, NICJR published our landmark [Just & Safe](#) report, detailing the workload of 20 police departments and 10 correctional agencies across the country, showing how we can achieve justice and safety through reform and transformation in this country.

I was personally honored to have my own journey chronicled in a [New York Times Magazine article](#) highlighting the massive reduction in youth incarceration in America.

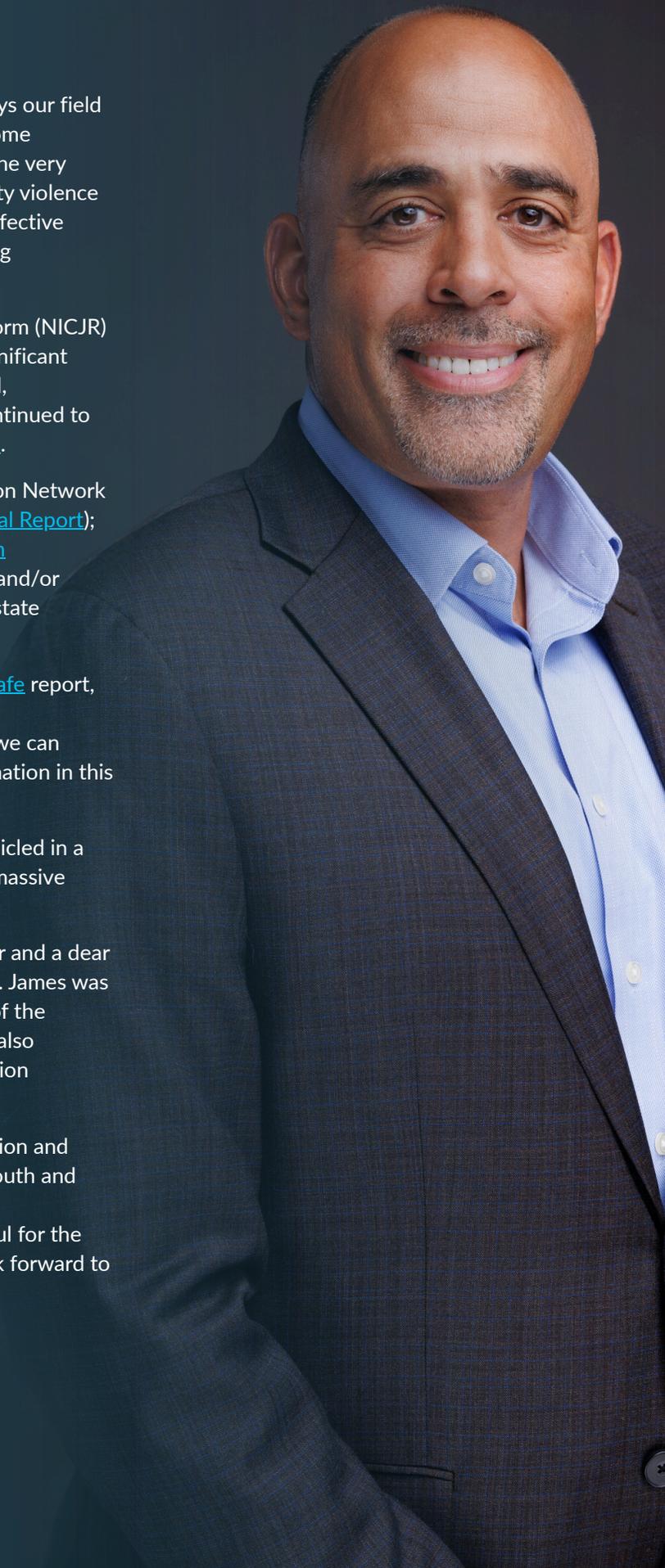
This year was also marked by loss. NICJR Board Member and a dear mentor of mine, James Bell, passed away in spring 2025. James was a fierce leader of youth justice reform and the founder of the Haywood Burns Institute. As we mourn his loss, we are also preparing to launch the James Bell Youth Justice Champion Fellowship.

NICJR remains wholly committed to reducing incarceration and violence, improving the outcomes of system-involved youth and adults, and increasing the capacity and expertise of the organizations that serve these individuals. We're thankful for the many partners who are in this work with us, and we look forward to the progress we'll achieve together in 2026.

In partnership,



Executive Director, NICJR



Training and Development

Violence Reduction Management Institute: Investing in the Next Generation of Violence Reduction Leaders

Through our work in dozens of communities throughout the US, we've consistently seen that one of the greatest challenges to successfully implementing effective violence reduction initiatives is dedicated, competent, and active management. We've also found that offices of violence prevention and other similar agencies often face a very limited recruitment pool when seeking to hire a director.

NICJR's new [Violence Reduction Management Institute \(VRMI\)](#) is a 10-month training program designed to address these challenges. Launched in late 2024 with support from the Langeloth Foundation, the VRMI is designed to improve the management skills of current and aspiring leaders in the violence reduction field.

Over the course of 10 months, VRMI participants spend more than 100 hours in the classroom receiving instruction from experts and field leaders. The curriculum is rooted in research and best practices and designed to develop practical skills. The program also includes site visits guided by NICJR local partners, a mentorship component, and a placement pipeline to match graduates with open violence reduction leadership positions throughout the US. At the end of their time with the VRMI, participants develop a capstone project utilizing what they've learned to improve violence reduction efforts at home in their jurisdictions.

The application window for the inaugural Violence Reduction Management Institute cohort closed on January 31, 2025, with a total of 39 applications submitted by individuals in 19 states and Washington, DC. The 16 professionals selected for the inaugural VRMI cohort bring together extensive expertise from across public agencies, private organizations, and the nonprofit sector—all united by their work and leadership in the violence reduction field.

The 2025 VRMI cohort has now completed three of four week-long, in-person learning sessions:

Session 1

- **Location:** Oakland, CA
- **Training Topics:** Introduction to Violence Reduction Management, Managing People, Key Capacities to Reduce Community Violence

Session 2

- **Location:** Oakland, CA
- **Training Topics:** Data-Driven Decision Making, Identifying Highest-Risk Populations, Grounded Leadership
- **Site Visit:** Richmond Office of Neighborhood Safety

Session 3

- **Location:** Washington, DC
- **Training Topics:** Empowered Leadership – Coaching and Motivating Teams for Impact, Leadership Lessons from the Public Welfare Foundation CEO, Communicating to Advance the Mission
- **Site Visit:** DC Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement



The inaugural VRMI participants will graduate on January 30, 2026, after their last full week of learning sessions.

Strengthening Coordination and Collaboration in Oakland, California

NICJR is proud to be an Oakland-based organization with deep roots in the City's violence reduction and juvenile justice reform efforts. We've been heavily involved in this work since our organization's inception, and many NICJR staff have been a part of these efforts for decades. Over the last year, our work in Oakland has focused on supporting the City as it recommits to the Oakland Ceasefire gun violence reduction strategy and strengthening coordination and collaboration across the city's government and community providers.

Although Oakland Ceasefire was mostly dismantled after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City recommitted to the strategy in early 2024, after an [audit](#) of the strategy was conducted by NICJR and the California Partnership for Safe Communities. Through the Coalition to Advance Public Safety, NICJR has provided intensive TA to the Mayor's office, Department of Violence Prevention (DVP), and Police Department. We've also provided training and TA to six community-based organizations (CBOs) contracted by the City for community violence intervention (CVI) work. A key component of this has been the launch of monthly CVI ecosystem coordination meetings that gather key CBOs to review shooting data, discuss service gaps/challenges and potential solutions, and coordinate interventions with specific youth and families.

Relatedly, this year NICJR created Oakland Youth Violence Reduction Coordination (YVRC) to break down silos among agencies that serve many of the same high-risk youth and fund or contract with many of the same youth-serving CBOs. Through our work operating the [Oakland Neighborhood Opportunity and Accountability Board](#), we've seen that many of Oakland's hardest-to-reach and highest-risk youth in the city fall through the cracks within traditional youth services systems. The YVRC is a space to collaboratively address the complex needs of those high-risk youth and their families.

Our work in Oakland and surrounding communities has also shown us the extent to which Bay Area violence increasingly crosses city and county lines. We've responded by launching the Bay Area Violence Reduction Coordination Initiative, which has begun to regularly convene offices of violence prevention and other similar local agencies to coordinate violence reduction efforts. In late 2025, we also supported Oakland Mayor Barbara Lee in convening a Bay Area Mayors' Meeting intended to foster executive-level collaboration.

Since the City of Oakland's re-implementation of the Ceasefire initiative

33%

decrease in nonfatal shootings

32%

decrease in homicides

21%

further decrease in homicides (mid 2025)

The City of Oakland's re-implementation of the Ceasefire initiative [has been successful](#). In 2024, Oakland experienced a 32% decrease in homicides, in addition to a 33% decrease in nonfatal shootings. In its [2025 mid-year report](#), the City indicated a further 21% decrease in homicides.



Safer Together in Columbus, Ohio

Like many other US cities, Columbus experienced a spike in gun violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, the city saw a nearly 56% increase in fatal shootings and a 132% increase in nonfatal shootings. The City responded with decisive action. In 2022, Columbus Mayor Andrew J. Ginther officially declared gun violence a public health crisis, and in 2023, the Columbus Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) was established within the Mayor's Office.

Since 2024, NICJR has provided a variety of support to the City in establishing this new OVP and building a comprehensive, coordinated approach to violence reduction that is anchored in data and best practices. Our Research and Data team developed a [Landscape Analysis](#) that maps out the city's CVI ecosystem and offers recommendations for growth as well as a [Cost of Gun Violence](#) Report that breaks down the taxpayer cost of each fatal and nonfatal shooting in Columbus. Both reports informed our support of the OVP in developing a comprehensive violence reduction strategic plan, [Safer Together 614](#), that is now guiding the public safety work of the OVP and other City agencies.

Alongside this research and planning, NICJR's [National Offices of Violence Prevention Network](#) team provided ongoing TA to the OVP Director and every member of her staff. This included support in areas such as team management, delineating staff roles and responsibilities, and navigating community and intergovernmental partnerships. Additionally, OVP Director Rena Shak has received more intensive coaching and training as a member of the inaugural Violence Reduction Management Institute cohort.

Like Oakland, Columbus has made significant progress in reducing homicides and nonfatal shootings, with [sizeable decreases in both 2024 and 2025](#).

Multi-Team Support in Memphis and Shelby County, Tennessee

Throughout 2025, NICJR's Gun Violence Reduction Strategies (GVRS) team and National Offices of Violence Prevention Network (NOVPN) team have both supported multiple facets of the City of Memphis's violence reduction work.

The GVRS team began by assessing the city's current landscape of focused deterrence, street outreach, and cognitive behavioral therapy services. Based on this assessment, we offered recommendations for improvement and worked closely with the City to develop a GVRS Manual. Equally important, we provided ongoing coaching to ensure the City is equipped to adapt and refine its GVRS model over time. The GVRS team also facilitated a Violence Reduction Initiative Implementation Team Design Sprint where we gathered the Mayor, Police Chief, staff from the Joint Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (JONSE), CVI CBO leaders, philanthropic partners, and others to present the GVRS model, answer questions, and talk through how the framework can be implemented in Memphis. We also organized two site visits where Memphis Mayor Paul Young; the Memphis Police Chief; and other key staff from the Police Department, JONSE, and CBOs spent time in Indianapolis to see GVRS in action, where NICJR has helped to successfully implement the strategy for four years.

Building upon work initiated in 2024, this year our NOVPN team provided ongoing TA to JONSE, which serves both Memphis and Shelby County. Given the newness and unique structure of the JONSE, our TA included helping the team to think through the agency's structure, create an organizational chart, and develop job descriptions. We also supported the Joint Office in thinking through how it fits into existing City and County crisis management plans, and we helped it begin to develop its own plan to activate the local CVI ecosystem during crises related to gun violence.

Direct Services

Intensive Life Coaching through Knoxville Peace

In summer 2025, NICJR launched Knoxville Peace (KP) in partnership with the Mayor's Office and the Knoxville Office of Community Safety and Empowerment. This community violence intervention initiative provides intensive support to individuals at the highest risk of being involved in gun violence.



Knoxville Peace employs a team of credible messenger Outreach Workers and Life Coaches who have similar lived experiences as the young people they serve. KP Life Coaches develop positive and trusting relationships with their participants utilizing NICJR's [Intensive Life Coaching Model](#). Through these relationships, they are able to guide participants away from violence and toward a future with hope.

The Knoxville Peace program currently serves more than 20 young men that have been identified as being at very high risk of being involved in gun violence. Learn more about Knoxville Peace in this [news segment](#) and on our [website](#).

Healthy, Wealthy, & Wise: Addressing the Root Causes of Violence in Oakland

Many young people who are at very high risk for violence involvement are hesitant to engage in services. Often, they've been connected to providers off and on for years, but with no deep, sustained relationships or real change. Recognizing this, NICJR developed [Healthy, Wealthy, & Wise](#) (HWW). This culturally relevant, trauma-informed cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) program is specifically designed to reach very high-risk young people. HWW focuses on gaining each participant's trust through meaningful, frequent contact with staff who are from the same community and/or who have similar life experiences as the participant.

Through weekly sessions over a 14- to 16-week period, HWW participants explore decision making, purpose and identity, overcoming trauma, and life skills in a peer cohort. Beyond engaging with program staff, attendees have the opportunity to learn from and support one another. Participants must attend at least 12 sessions and complete a CBT journal to graduate, and we host a big graduation celebration at the end of each HWW cycle. Participants continue to receive life coaching and case management for up to 18 months.



HWW is a key pillar of Oakland Ceasefire, the City's primary gun violence reduction strategy. In 2025, NICJR facilitated four Oakland HWW cohorts that engaged 108 individuals, in partnership with Oakland's Department of Violence Prevention. NICJR and DVP recently celebrated 11 graduates of the Healthy, Wealthy, & Wise program. Oakland Mayor Barbara Lee joined families, Life Coaches, staff from the Oakland Police Department, and a village of community members for this special graduation ceremony at a local Black-owned restaurant, Everett and Jones. Graduates and their Life Coaches shared testimonies highlighting the transformational power of both intensive life coaching and HWW, and Mayor Lee committed to continued involvement with the program.

Data and Research

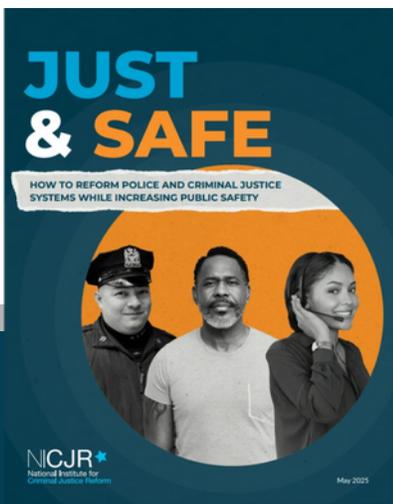
Just & Safe

In May 2025, NICJR released [Just & Safe: How to Reform Police and Criminal Justice Systems While Increasing Public Safety](#). This report features detailed analyses across 18 US cities, comparing police calls for service data and correctional populations with department budgets and staffing information. It also highlights the many services, programs, and strategies that can be used to effectively improve criminal justice system performance and policing.

NICJR found that in some jurisdictions, up to 75% of police calls for service are noncriminal or low level, and that patrol divisions responding to those calls make up the largest portion of police departments' staffing and budgets, leaving very few resources for the kind of focused enforcement and intelligence gathering necessary to significantly reduce gun violence. Researchers also found that a high proportion of people on probation and parole are assessed as low risk, diluting the resources available to supervise and serve individuals who pose the greatest danger to public safety.

Overall, Just & Safe highlights both the need for vast improvements of the criminal justice system and the immense opportunities that jurisdictions have to reform police, probation, and parole while increasing public safety.

In July 2025, NICJR hosted a [Just & Safe webinar](#) where NICJR Executive Director David Muhammad and Senior Policy Analyst Jesslyn Mitchell-Laguna outlined key findings and discussed our recommendations. In the coming year, we will continue to share what we learned and engage jurisdictions in dialogue about how they can become Just & Safe communities.



Violence Reduction Research and Practice Network

Within the violence reduction field, researchers, practitioners, and policy makers often operate in silos that limit the effectiveness of each group. All too often, research is not clearly aligned to policy agendas or to the pressing questions of practitioners in the field, practitioners have limited insight into the evidence base that can strengthen their work, and policy makers craft legislation that is disconnected from realities on the ground and evidence from research.

[The Violence Reduction Research and Practice \(VRRP\) Network](#) is a partnership between NICJR, Princeton University, and the Public Welfare Foundation that seeks to address this challenge by bringing together leading practitioners and researchers to advance the violence reduction field. Co-founded by NICJR Executive Director David Muhammad and Patrick Sharkey, William S. Todd Professor of Sociology and Public Affairs at Princeton University, the Network's mission is to identify pressing field needs, evaluate the effectiveness of current and emerging strategies, and develop forward-looking research agendas that inform both policy and practice in violence reduction efforts. The Network consists of a core group of members as well as a rotating group of members who come together for specific convenings focused on particular challenges or questions.



The inaugural VRRP Network convening in November 2024 intentionally included diverse perspectives and cross-sector collaboration, featuring community leaders with firsthand violence intervention experience, researchers studying long-term trends, and ground-level practitioners to ensure rich dialogue bridging theory, policy, and practice. The day-long session was structured around four thematic areas that progressed from understanding root causes of gun violence to exploring solutions, with each session combining expert presentations and extended participant discussions. The resulting [White Paper](#) documents key discussions, main themes, and conclusions from the inaugural convening, along with next steps for the VRRP Network.

In October 2025, the VRRP Network convened again with a focus on identifying and engaging very high-risk individuals. This convening featured fewer presentations to allow additional time for discussion and collaborative problem solving. Through it, members identified research gaps and defined next steps in both research and practice.

We look forward to the continued growth and evolution of the VRRP Network as we tackle some of the biggest challenges in the violence reduction field today.

NICJR Giving Initiative

Thanks to generous support from the Ballmer Group, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies, and federal Bureau of Justice Assistance, NICJR distributed nearly **\$3.5 Million** in [NICJR Giving Initiative Funding](#) to **26** organizations across the US between **July 2024** and **December 2025**.



OAKLAND
\$1,035,000 | 6 grantees

BALTIMORE
\$340,000 | 3 grantees

MILWAUKEE
\$500,000 | 5 grantees

WASHINGTON D.C.
\$400,000 | 2 grantees

COLUMBUS
\$250,000 | 1 grantee

JACKSON
\$250,000 | 1 grantee

PORTLAND
\$250,000 | 1 grantee

INDIANAPOLIS
\$170,000 | 2 grantees

BIRMINGHAM
\$100,000 | 1 grantee

KNOXVILLE
\$100,000 | 2 grantees

MEMPHIS
\$50,000 | 1 grantee

SOUTHERN PIKE COUNTY
\$10,000 | 1 grantee

Organizational Updates

In 2025, NICJR continued to strengthen our staff, suite of services, national presence, and organizational infrastructure. This work has occurred in the midst of a year marked both by losses and growth.

In April 2025, NICJR was notified by the US Department of Justice that all of our federal grant awards, totaling more than \$4 million, had been terminated. This year, we have also seen some longtime corporate partners shift away from supporting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and the lifesaving work of violence reduction.

Despite these challenges, NICJR continues to grow and thrive. In 2025, this has included hiring 12 new team members, promoting staff and supporting their growth through dedicated professional development budgets, and recruiting new members for the NICJR Board of Directors. We also initiated an internal strategic planning process, established a new direct service team in Knoxville, pursued new funder relationships, and developed and piloted artificial intelligence tools to strengthen our work. On top of all this, we published a total of 37 reports, strategic plans, and other written deliverables to support specific jurisdictions and the broader fields of violence reduction and justice reform.



\$10.3M awarded and released



Published 37 reports, strategic plans, and other written deliverables



Hired 12 new team members

Financials

Amounts that were awarded or released from restriction during FY25

Funding amount by revenue type:

\$6.64M

Grants

\$3.58M

Subcontracts

\$65K

Contracts

\$19K

Donations

Funding by revenue source:

\$6.79M

Foundations and corporations

\$2.97M

Government

\$254K

Nonprofits

\$289K

Individual and Corporate Donors



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