# NOVPN Youth Takeovers Resources

## The Role of Offices of Violence Prevention

As jurisdictions respond to youth gatherings and related community safety concerns, Offices of Violence Prevention (OVP) and Community Safety agencies play an important role, but not the only role.

OVPs are not designed to function as:

- Primary law enforcement agencies
- Crowd control units
- Intelligence or surveillance operations
- Emergency management agencies
- Sole owners of youth engagement or public safety strategy

At the same time, OVPs have a critical responsibility to help jurisdictions approach these moments through a prevention, coordination, and community-centered lens. OVPs operate in the bridge space between community and public administration. OVPs are uniquely positioned to:

- Convene cross-sector partners
- Coordinate prevention-oriented responses
- Bring community voices and trusted messengers into planning
- Support de-escalation and conflict mediation strategies
- Help shape balanced public narratives and communications
- Elevate youth voice and youth-centered solutions
- Connect outreach, violence interruption, and support services
- Facilitate relationship-building between systems and communities

## Jurisdiction Strategies in Practice

Across the country, jurisdictions are navigating an increase in large youth gatherings often referred to publicly as “takeovers.” These gatherings are taking place in downtown corridors, commercial districts, beaches, parks, and other highly visible public spaces and are frequently organized or amplified through social media.

During NOVPN’s recent OVP Director peer exchange, jurisdictions shared strategies currently being implemented across the country to balance public safety, youth engagement, and community trust. This document is intended to capture emerging practices, considerations, and lessons being shared across the Network.

## Youth Engagement

Some jurisdictions experiencing these events are working directly with the youth who are organizing them, partnering to understand the purpose behind the gatherings and the unmet needs driving young people to host takeover events. By engaging youth as partners, jurisdictions are co-designing safer alternative events that are structured, intentional, and designed to prevent escalation into violence. Jurisdictions shared examples of:

- Youth advisory groups and youth ambassadors
- Youth-led planning processes
- Youth engagement staff embedded within violence prevention offices
- Co-designing alternative events and safe summer programming
- Partnering directly with young people to understand motivations and unmet needs

One jurisdiction shared that its Director of Youth Engagement, who is 18 years old, is helping lead planning for community kickbacks and youth-centered events while presenting alongside leadership to elected officials.

## Partner Coordination

Other jurisdictions are coordinating with local law enforcement and partner agencies to maintain a presence at non-sanctioned gatherings, helping ensure safety and reduce the likelihood of violence. Together, these approaches reflect a balanced strategy that centers youth engagement while reinforcing community safety.

As jurisdictions continue navigating these gatherings, participants identified several emerging considerations:

- Coordination between CVI teams and law enforcement
- Development of SOPs and MOUs to clarify operational roles
- Community-based outreach teams embedded in response efforts
- Coordinate across violence prevention, parks and recreation, schools, law enforcement, outreach teams, and community organizations
- Establish operational clarity through SOPs and MOUs
- Engage trusted messengers and credible community voices
- Develop relationships with youth

## Considerations

OVPs should carefully assess the implications and potential risks associated with any OVP-sponsored or sanctioned events. When an event carries OVP branding, it often signals a level of responsibility and oversight from the public administration, which can introduce additional considerations. As you explore youth gatherings as a positive engagement strategy, take time to walk through the potential liability that may fall on the OVP and ensure safeguards are in place to support safe event design and risk mitigation planning. Thoughtful preparation

helps protect the office, strengthens community trust, and ensures youth-centered events remain both meaningful and safe.

## Narrative & Media Guidance

### "Takeover" Reframing

Offices want to ensure that young people are not broadly labeled as "violent," particularly when most youth participating in these gatherings are seeking connection, visibility, entertainment, and community rather than harm, as well as belonging and ownership within public spaces. While incidents of violence may occur and, in some cases, involve smaller groups or individuals who may intentionally incite violence, retaliation, or other harmful behavior, the term "takeover" has contributed to public perceptions that these gatherings are inherently dangerous and criminal in nature.

Directors also noted that many of these gatherings occur in highly visible public spaces, reflecting young people's desire not only for social connection, but also for visibility, participation, and a sense of ownership within community life.

From a public health perspective, these events can also be understood as a reflection of unmet needs and highly coordinated youth organizing. Young people are utilizing social media to communicate, mobilize, and create shared experiences in public spaces at a scale and speed that many traditional youth engagement strategies have not matched. Several jurisdictions noted that the same coordination, communication, and mobilization skills being used to organize these gatherings also represent leadership capacity and social connectivity that can be redirected toward positive youth development opportunities when appropriately supported.

To help shift the narrative toward one that acknowledges both safety concerns and the underlying social dynamics at play, some jurisdictions are intentionally reframing these events as:

- Youth gatherings
- Youth kickbacks
- Community kickbacks
- Safe summer events
- Youth social events
- Youth-centered public gatherings

We also encourage jurisdictions to work directly with young people to co-create language, activities, and event identities that reflect youth voice, foster shared responsibility, and help shape safer and more supportive community spaces.

### Media Engagement

Several jurisdictions discussed how media narratives often focus disproportionately on isolated incidents rather than the broader context or the proactive work underway to maintain safety. We encourage partnering with local media and trusted community outlets, which can help reshape public understanding of these gatherings and highlight the proactive work underway to ensure they remain safe, meaningful, and well-supported across your community.

## Conclusion

OVP Directors emphasized that there is no single response model for youth gatherings emerging across jurisdictions. However, many noted that long-term success will require systems that are as coordinated, visible, accessible, and relationship-centered as the young people they seek to support. Across the country, jurisdictions continue exploring how to create safer, youth-informed spaces that balance community safety with belonging, engagement, and opportunity.

## Resources Shared by the Network

Here you will find the resources shared by the Network:

### Links

- https://www.youtube.com/live/v-DzHozUm_M?si=QbAxffbrxVd_Dnbz
- https://www.wisn.com/article/violence-prevention-groups-work-to-thwart-downtown-milwaukee-teen-takeover/70901119

### Digital Assets

- https://bmorethissummer.wpcomstaging.com/
- Youth Takeovers Digital Resources

*If there are additional resources you would like to share with the Network, please email them to novpn@nicjr.org.*