

VIOLENCE REDUCTION RESEARCH AND PRACTICE NETWORK

**2025 CONVENING
WHITE PAPER**

CONTENTS

Background	02
Inception of the VRRP Network	03
October 2025 VRRP Network Convening	04
Overview of Presentations and Discussions	05
Presentation #1: Identifying Risk Factors for Repeat Injury	05
Presentation #2: Identifying Very High-Risk Groups and Individuals Through Shooting Reviews	06
Presentation #3: Identifying and Effectively Engaging Very High-Risk Individuals / Drivers of Gun Violence	08
Themes Across Presentations and Discussions	09
Emerging Research Questions	11
Next Steps for the VRRP Network	11
Appendix A	12
Appendix B	13
Appendix C	14

Thank You To Our Funder

**Public Welfare
Foundation**

BACKGROUND

The violence reduction field stands at a decisive moment. Following significant spikes in violent crime in 2020 and 2021, recent data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and local jurisdictions reveal substantial and rapid declines in crime across the United States, spanning both urban and rural communities. In 2025, gun violence was likely at its lowest point in a century. According to the Council on Criminal Justice, when complete FBI nationwide data are reported later this year, the 2025 homicide rate could fall to approximately 4.0 per 100,000 residents—potentially the lowest rate ever recorded in law enforcement or public health data dating back to 1900.¹ These encouraging trends coincide with significant investments in community violence intervention (CVI) strategies and have been accompanied by a growing body of research demonstrating their effectiveness and offering evidence-based pathways to sustain continued reductions in violence.



“In 2025, gun violence was likely at its lowest point in a century.”

However, this progress now faces serious threats from a rapidly shifting policy landscape. The current federal administration has eliminated critical funding streams that have supported violence reduction efforts nationwide. Most notably, in April 2025, the Department of Justice canceled \$811 million in grant funding, abruptly halting and scaling back CVI efforts across the country.² This termination of resources comes precisely when evidence suggests these interventions are working, creating a stark disconnect between evidence and investment. These cuts come in conjunction with the regularly scheduled sunset of the American Rescue Plan Act, which also majorly supported CVI efforts across the country.

In this constrained environment, it has become imperative to rigorously document what works in violence reduction. Building a robust evidence base for effective CVI strategies and certain policing initiatives is essential to maintaining momentum, informing future policy decisions, and ultimately saving lives. The Violence Reduction Research and Practice (VRRP) Network was established to support this critical work, bringing together researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to strengthen the field during this defining moment in the history of community violence intervention.

INCEPTION OF THE VRRP NETWORK

The VRRP Network was launched in November 2024 by David Muhammad, Executive Director of the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR), and Patrick Sharkey, William S. Tod Professor of Sociology and Public Affairs at Princeton University. The VRRP Network's mission is to gather practitioners and researchers in the violence reduction field to identify high-impact research priorities, rigorously examine emerging challenges, and generate actionable guidance that strengthens policy, practice, and long-term efforts.

The inaugural 2024 VRRP Network Convening gathered a small group of violence reduction experts from nonprofit organizations, community-based organizations, law enforcement, government agencies, and academic institutions for intellectual and deliberative dialogue on research-based and experience-driven solutions to gun violence. The convening intentionally brought together experts with diverse perspectives in community violence reduction research, policy, and practice to engage in candid, cross-sector dialogue and develop shared priorities for advancing the field.

The day-long session, which was preceded by a dinner the night before, was organized into four thematic areas. Each followed a consistent format that included an expert-led presentation followed by considerable time for questions and discussion among all participants. Across all four areas, several common themes emerged, including the need to improve data sources, collection, and sharing in the violence reduction field; aligning research priorities and needs in the field; and increasing the evidence base to advocate for stable, long-term funding for CVI efforts.³

In addition, identifying and engaging individuals at the highest risk of engaging in violence emerged as a critical issue for successful violence reduction efforts. Research demonstrates that violence within a specific jurisdiction is not random but concentrated among a very small number of people.^{4,5} To achieve measurable, near-term reductions in violence, CVI strategies must serve those at highest risk with specificity and intensity, engaging them frequently and relentlessly to prevent imminent violence. Addressing this requires pairing proper identification methods with holistic support that connects individuals to the specific resources and services needed to interrupt cycles of violence. This insight became the foundation for the Network's second convening.

¹ [Crime Trends in US Cities](#)

² [Justice Department cuts to public safety grants leave police and nonprofits scrambling](#)

³ [To read the complete conclusions, access the VRRP Network November 2024 Convening Summary.](#)

⁴ [Network Exposure and Homicide Victimization in an African American Community](#)

⁵ [Social Networks and the Risk of Gunshot Injury](#)

OCTOBER 2025 VRRP NETWORK CONVENING

In October 2025, the VRRP Network gathered leading researchers and practitioners (see Appendix A for the full list of attendees) for a one-day convening focused on a critical challenge: identifying and engaging the very small number of individuals at highest risk for involvement in gun violence. The convening brought together academic experts, community violence intervention leaders, law enforcement officials, and policy analysts to examine the root causes of gun violence and assess evidence-based solutions. The convening was structured around four core objectives:

1. Identifying big ideas on how to better address the issue of gun violence
2. Identifying proposals for original research to address gaps in evidence
3. Proposing strategies to identify, translate, and disseminate existing evidence and applied knowledge
4. Developing plans for next steps in both research and practice

Following brief presentations by leading experts, participants engaged in deep, deliberative discussions on three key themes:

1. *Identifying Risk Factors for Repeat Injury*, presented by Dr. Joseph Richardson
2. *Identifying Very High-Risk Groups and Individuals through Shooting Reviews*, presented by Caitlin Scott
3. *Identifying and Effectively Engaging Very High-Risk Individuals / Drivers of Gun Violence*, presented by DeVone Boggan

This intensive exchange of knowledge and experience laid the groundwork for strengthened collaboration between researchers and practitioners, delving deeper into how evidence-based strategies reach high-risk populations.



OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Presentation #1: Identifying Risk Factors for Repeat Injury

Dr. Joseph Richardson of the University of Maryland's Prevent Gun Violence: Research, Empowerment, Strategies, and Solutions (PROGRESS) Initiative drew on hospital-based violence intervention program (HVIP) data and violent injury reviews in Washington, D.C., discussing key risk factors for violent reinjury and ways to strengthen identification and intervention for high-risk individuals. The strongest risk factors for violent reinjury include prior incarceration, recent involvement in fights or weapon usage, untreated trauma, housing instability, and peer networks in which multiple close associates have already been shot. While significant progress has been made in identifying risk factors for reinjury, a risk assessment tool has yet to be developed and validated for use, making identification difficult. It is also unclear what factors may contribute to individuals denying or leaving services. Additionally, criminal justice system supervision conditions interact with risk, shaping employment opportunities, housing access, and drug consumption. Other circumstances can also shape risk, such as the use of social media platforms and music to escalate conflict. This raised a central research question regarding which methods and data sources can reliably identify those at the highest immediate risk of being shot or shooting others, and what supports are necessary to intervene effectively.

The discussion following the presentation centered around two main themes: 1) the need for risk assessments for gun violence involvement, and 2) safety as an immediate need following victimization and the barriers to establishing it for program participants. One area of consideration was the data and methods used to identify very high-risk individuals. Information captured by the criminal justice system is too narrow to be used in isolation. Data from multiple systems, including law enforcement, hospitals, social services, and social media should be better integrated for this purpose. Risk assessments should also provide information related to an individual's willingness to engage in services. Community nominations (i.e., when knowledgeable individuals such as credible messengers suggest a high-risk individual for intervention) and social media signals (i.e., when conflicts posted on social media are monitored by practitioners for risk assessment and intervention) were suggested as additional possible mechanisms. Social media was also highlighted more generally as a potential resource. Given the immense influence of social media on conflicts in recent years, this space should be explored for risk assessment and intervention, with young people acting as domain experts to better understand dynamics.

Ensuring safety in the immediate aftermath of a shooting incident emerged as the most pressing need, but also as one that is difficult to address. Significant safety concerns exist when individuals are discharged from hospitals back into the communities where they were just injured. This can increase the risk of retaliatory violence, and it can impede progress for individuals since they are still in the same environment that originally led to their injury. Relocation and/or emergency temporary housing in another area can be powerful tools for reducing risk of reinjury or involvement in gun violence. The infrastructure for these programs, however, is scarce, and few high-risk individuals have access to relocation as an option.

Presentation #2: Identifying Very High-Risk Groups and Individuals Through Shooting Reviews

Caitlin Scott, former Supervisor of Intelligence Analysis at the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department, presented on Indianapolis's revamped Shooting Review process and how the city operationalizes its understanding of risk in real time. A Shooting Review is a regular, often weekly, citywide review of homicides, nonfatal shootings, and shots fired incidents, for the purpose of generating strategies to disrupt ongoing conflicts and prevent further shootings. Within these reviews, the city uses several criteria to classify individuals as very high risk: being under age 35, group-affiliated, previously involved in a shooting, connected to associates recently shot, or identified as high risk for retaliation. Analysts also integrate information from investigators, subject matter experts, National Integrated Ballistic Information (NIBIN) data, social media, and network connections to build real-time assessments of who is most immediately in danger. The city uses a range of interventions led by law enforcement or community-based partners, which are tied to strict accountability/oversight mechanisms. Importantly, the effectiveness of Shooting Reviews depends heavily on who is in the room and the degree of trust and shared purpose between law enforcement and community-based partners.

The discussion following the presentation focused on defining very high-risk individuals for gun violence and on the considerations for developing and deploying an assessment of individuals' risk level to guide targeted interventions such as Gun Violence Reduction Strategy and CVI. As in the first discussion, there was a significant focus on the assessment of risk. In a Shooting Review, which individuals should be considered high risk? Should assessment be based on the number of endorsed risk factors, on the role within a group, or on the proximity to recent violence? The incorporation of social network data can play an important role in such risk assessments by shedding light on an individual's affiliation with a group and where within the network they sit. Since many shootings and retaliations are concentrated in a handful of networks, this information is helpful for assessing an individual's risk of future involvement in a shooting.

However, data about networks are often less available than data about individuals, making it difficult to standardize the use of network analysis in risk assessments. Further, given that reviewing the risk level of individuals close to those who have recently been involved in gun violence can open those individuals up to unfair scrutiny, practitioners should be cautious when assessing risk so as to not over-scrutinize individuals based only on their social ties.

Discussion also considered communication between and knowledge of individuals involved in reviews (law enforcement, practitioners, etc.), and infrastructure needed for CVI and gun violence reduction strategies. Law enforcement, service providers, and other stakeholders who may be a part of Shooting Reviews typically have different information about individuals and groups. Shooting Reviews allow for communication between agencies and organizations to collaboratively identify the individuals at the highest risk for violence. However, crucially, information between law enforcement and CVI organizations should always be one way, meaning CVI organizations do not provide information to law enforcement and do not engage in enforcement. Strict, well-defined boundaries between law enforcement and service providers are essential to maintaining safety and efficacy.

Infrastructure for CVI and Shooting Reviews may vary between cities, with different cities engaging different stakeholders, meeting with differing frequency, and organizing meeting agendas and resulting assignments differently. An important part of Shooting Reviews is consistently evaluating what is and is not working and adjusting an area's approach to be more effective. Evaluation of Shooting Reviews can be difficult, however, and developing better ways to evaluate their efficacy should be a priority. Shooting Reviews rely heavily on trust and accountability. Law enforcement, CVI practitioners, and other stakeholders must work together to build relationships and establish accountability standards for all involved. Finally, Shooting Reviews, and CVI generally, require sustainable capacity building to support the people and processes involved.



Presentation #3: Identifying and Effectively Engaging Very High-Risk Individuals / Drivers of Gun Violence

DeVone Boggan, Founder of Advance Peace, presented on strategies for engaging highest-risk individuals and the intensive intervention model that underpins the Peacemaker Fellowship. The fellowship is a relationship-based program that pairs very high-risk individuals with credible messengers who provide daily contact and mentorship, offering financial and emotional assistance to stabilize participants and reduce their exposure to violence. The program focuses on individuals who are deeply embedded within active conflicts and who may move fluidly between victim and offender roles, making consistent engagement an essential tool in shifting decision making and interrupting retaliatory cycles. Influence and proximity are the core tools of the model, and the credibility and continuity of frontline staff are central to building trust with people whose lives are shaped by trauma and volatility. Boggan's framing pushed the group to consider what this level of engagement demands in practice and what infrastructure is needed to support practitioners who do this work long term. Importantly, this means supporting Violence Interrupters/Neighborhood Change Agents with appropriate training and financial compensation, as well as fostering an unwavering commitment to the program's philosophy and approach to the work.

This presentation prompted discussion focused on the implementation, infrastructure, and sustainability of CVI and the models underlying the work. The Advance Peace model relies heavily on relationship building and credibility of the workers delivering services. This can be difficult to evaluate, standardize, and replicate because much of the efficacy of the work relies upon the people providing services. It is also difficult to define and evaluate qualifications for these jobs. Participants grappled with the tension between standardization and personalization, recognizing that effective replication requires clear program models and instructions while compelling frontline work depends heavily on relational credibility and contextual adaptation. How can standardization and personalization be balanced to create effective, replicable work?

Another area of focus was the scaling of CVI work. One concern was related to resource availability. CVI programs are often underfunded and under-supported. When this is the case, should programs strive to provide lower intensity services to the right number of people in a community, or prioritize providing the right level of intensity to a smaller service population? In scaling, it is also important to adapt programming to the cultural context of the area, including population size, political climate, and community cohesiveness, which may shape implementation. To maintain sustainability and allow for scaling, it is important that managers within organizations are able to provide accountability and leadership, work with city officials, and support model fidelity. Finally, scaling requires long-term investment in a program to allow the work to become established in the area, ideally with an upfront, 10-year commitment.

Themes Across Presentations and Discussions

Across the three presentations and discussions, conversation repeatedly returned to a shared set of structural challenges facing CVI implementation and evaluation. Foremost among them was the centrality of risk to effective models of CVI. While the three interventions discussed throughout the day vary in their processes for identifying individuals to engage, all three are hyper-focused on individuals who are actively involved in gun violence and credit their success in reducing shootings to their ability to identify and intervene with these very high-risk individuals. The emphasis on the primacy of identifying and engaging very high-risk individuals for the effective implementation of CVI generated a number of associated points of focus, including the proliferation of programs that call themselves CVI but do not work with people who are actively involved in gun violence, the lack of standardized tools for assessing risk, and a number of related issues regarding definition and measurement of CVI work.



“...hyper-focused on individuals who are actively involved in gun violence and credit their success in reducing shootings to their ability to identify and intervene with these very high-risk individuals.”

As CVI has gained recognition as an effective approach for reducing violence, there has been corresponding growth in the number of jurisdictions and organizations that are interested in implementing it. However, not all organizations operating under the banner of CVI adhere to the core principles and practices that underpin its effectiveness, in large part because they do not accurately understand the target population of very high-risk individuals, substituting those who are at risk of potential future involvement in crime for those who are at very high risk for immediate involvement in a shooting. Programs that fail to properly make this distinction are not as well-positioned to generate sharp reductions in gun violence, and their lack of effectiveness may undermine the reputation and success of the field at large.

Amid the growing number of people and organizations attempting to implement CVI, the issue of assessing risk has taken on greater immediacy. Several participants expressed skepticism about the feasibility of developing a singular validated risk assessment similar to those used in other areas of criminal justice, such as pretrial detention. However, given the extent to which relevant data are dispersed and difficult to access, there was a strong interest in a more forceful articulation of who should and should not be served by CVI programs and in greater use of data to reinforce this.

Relatedly, many participants underscored the need to more clearly and explicitly define what CVI is and is not, to promote these definitions more emphatically, and to improve both measurement and evaluation of CVI. In particular, cities need to be better prepared to quantify what work is being done, with whom it is being done, and what the direct and indirect outcomes are. Discussions about identifying very high-risk individuals and measuring efficacy also surfaced a critical question about the level of CVI saturation required to achieve meaningful outcomes. In particular, the field has not established what proportion of very high-risk individuals must be reached for a city to expect tangible reductions in violence, nor has it homed in on the necessary combination and duration of different types of interventions. Without improvements in the measurement of CVI implementation, the field will be limited in its ability to answer these questions.



Emerging Research Questions

First, several participants pointed to a tension in CVI's explicit focus on communities, as evidenced even in the language of community violence intervention, and the focus on individuals, as evidenced in the focus on identifying and serving high-risk individuals. These participants emphasized a need to better disentangle the relationship between individuals involved in violence and the communities of which they are a part and, relatedly, to better conceptualize how to support both individuals and communities.

Second, several participants highlighted a need for the field to embrace and improve relocation models that remove very high-risk individuals from the communities where they are engaged in violence, giving them an opportunity to change their lives without being in an environment that poses an acute risk to their personal safety. While several participants spoke of their own experiences relocating people to remove them from imminent danger, they also noted that this approach had not garnered as much attention or acceptance in the field. Moreover, they noted a need to figure out when and for whom relocation is a viable approach and what systems, supports, and coordination are needed to ensure success.

In addition to these common themes, a series of research questions emerged as areas of interest among convening participants and can be found in Appendix B.⁶

Next Steps for the VRRP Network

In the aftermath of the VRRP Network's second convening, we are prepared to move forward along two dimensions. First, the VRRP Network will consider how additional convenings can deepen the exploration of the emerging research questions identified by attendees during the October 2025 convening, while also focusing attention on other high-priority areas that were raised in the initial convening. Second, the Network is now in a position to consider proposals for projects, policy shifts, and research to test the ideas raised in the convenings and generate evidence to respond to core research questions.

By creating structured opportunities for the co-development of research proposals and implementations strategies, the VRRP Network aims to build a robust evidence base to sustain violence reduction efforts among the complex landscape of the field. Through these convenings and partnerships, the Network will serve as a bridge connecting rigorous research with practice, ensuring that evidence-based strategies reach the communities most affected by gun violence.

⁶ In the weeks following the VRRP Network 2025 Convening, attendees completed a post-convening survey to identify priority research questions for future Network convenings. The full list of research questions can be found in Appendix B; the survey results are in Appendix C.

Appendix A: List of Participants at the 2025 VRRP Network Convening

1. Jeremy Biddle; Director, Violence Reduction Policy and Programs; Crime and Justice Policy Lab at the University of Pennsylvania
2. DeVone Boggan, Founder and CEO, Advance Peace
3. Shani Buggs; Associate Professor; University of California, Davis Health
4. Paul Figueroa, Retired Assistant Chief, Oakland Police Department
5. Jocelyn Fontaine, Executive Director, Black & Brown Collective for Community Solutions to Gun Violence
6. Candice C. Jones, President and CEO, Public Welfare Foundation
7. Holly Joshi, Chief of Violence Prevention, City of Oakland
8. David Muhammad, Executive Director, National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform
9. Andrew Papachristos; Director and John G. Searle Professor; Institute for Policy Research, Center for Neighborhood Engaged Research and Science at Northwestern University
10. Randal Pinkett; Founder, Chairman, Chief Executive Officer, and Managing Partner; BCT Partners
11. Mikaela Rabinowitz, Director of Data and Research, National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform
12. Joseph Richardson; MPower Professor of African-American Studies, Medical Anthropology and Epidemiology; University of Maryland
13. Caitlin Scott, Intelligence Analyst Supervisor, Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department
14. Patrick Sharkey, William S Tod Professor of Sociology and Public Affairs at Princeton University
15. Deion Sumpter, Deputy Director of Violence Prevention Initiatives, City of Philadelphia
16. Niloufer Taber, Director of Research and Policy, DC Criminal Justice Coordinating Council
17. Daniel Webster, Bloomberg Professor of American Health, Johns Hopkins University

Appendix B: Post-Convening Survey Research Questions

To better understand how convening participants assessed the relative importance of these questions, we designed and fielded a post-convening survey. The survey was sent to all convening participants on October 27, 2025, and asked respondents to rank-order what they considered the three most important or promising questions for the field to pursue. The survey was designed to move beyond broad thematic agreement and identify areas of clear consensus that could anchor the Network's future research agenda.

1. Is it possible to develop a risk assessment instrument that effectively and accurately identifies individuals who are at very high risk of being involved in gun violence in the next six months?
2. Can we consistently, effectively, and accurately identify individuals who are at very high risk of being involved in gun violence without law enforcement?
3. Risk Level and Dosage: How do we determine the rise and fall of the levels of risk among those individuals who are at very high risk of being involved in gun violence (dimmer switch), and how do we determine the appropriate dosage of intervention considering the fluctuation?
4. Social Media: Can we develop effective social media interventions designed to interrupt social media posts and videos driving violence?
5. Relocation: Can we develop a national relocation initiative where people at imminent risk of being involved in gun violence can relocate to a sister city and receive the appropriate resources and support to remain and be successful?
6. Are there / What are the specific CVI interventions that are most effective (e.g., relationship with CVI workers, financial incentives, cognitive behavioral therapy / cognitive behavioral intervention, connection to social services, etc.)?
7. Saturation: What is the CVI saturation threshold level in a jurisdiction? How many very high-risk people and/or neighborhoods need to be effectively served to have significant citywide impact? What is the tipping point?
8. People vs Place: How do we balance investing in individual interventions versus neighborhood-level change? What if we help a very high-risk individual not engage in gun violence, but we do not change the community they come from?
9. Hospital-Based Intervention Programs: How do we move from victim services to violence intervention?
10. How can CVI learn from other fields that have been established after being nascent programs (e.g., reentry, crisis response, social work, etc.)?
11. Researching the 1 to 4: Does one shooting really lead to four more?

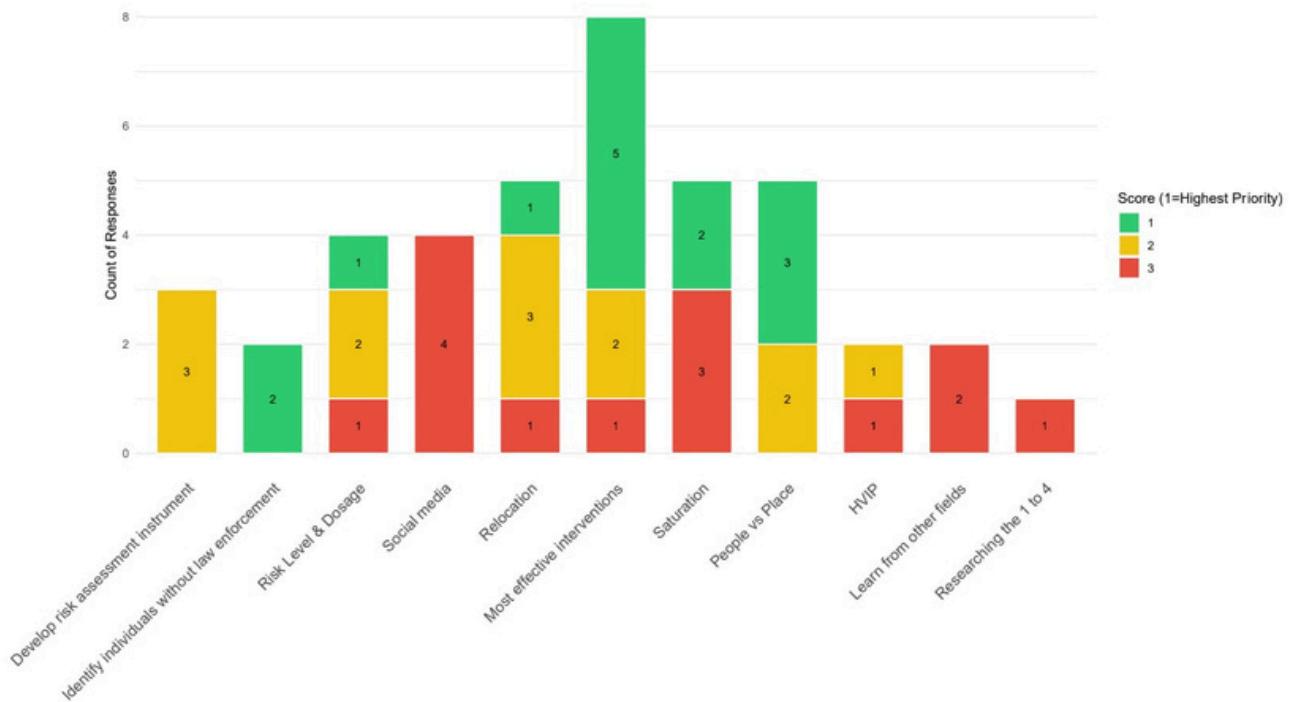
Appendix C: Post-Convening Survey Results

Respondents indicated the most important question for the field is to clarify the specific CVI interventions that are most effective (e.g., relationship with CVI workers, financial incentives, cognitive behavioral therapy/intervention, connection to social services, etc.). While this question is arguably the most fundamental—and possibly hardest to answer conclusively—it points to the need for a stronger evidence base in the field and sound research for policymaking.

Other research questions with broad support focused on the importance of place for violence reduction efforts, including disentangling the relationship between people and place and exploring the promise of relocation efforts.

Distribution of Priority Scores (1, 2, 3) Across Research Questions

Total Respondents: 13



Appendix C: Post-Convening Survey Results (continued)

