

COLUMBUS, OHIO LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Community Violence Intervention Programs and Initiatives

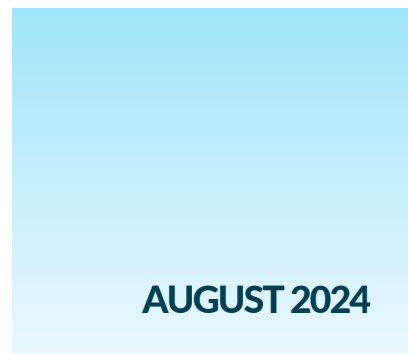
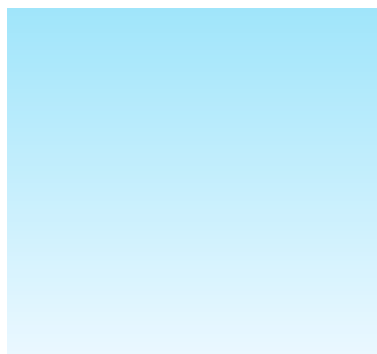
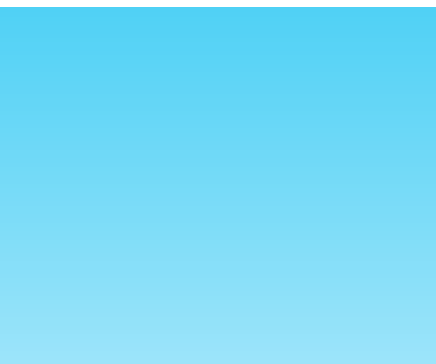
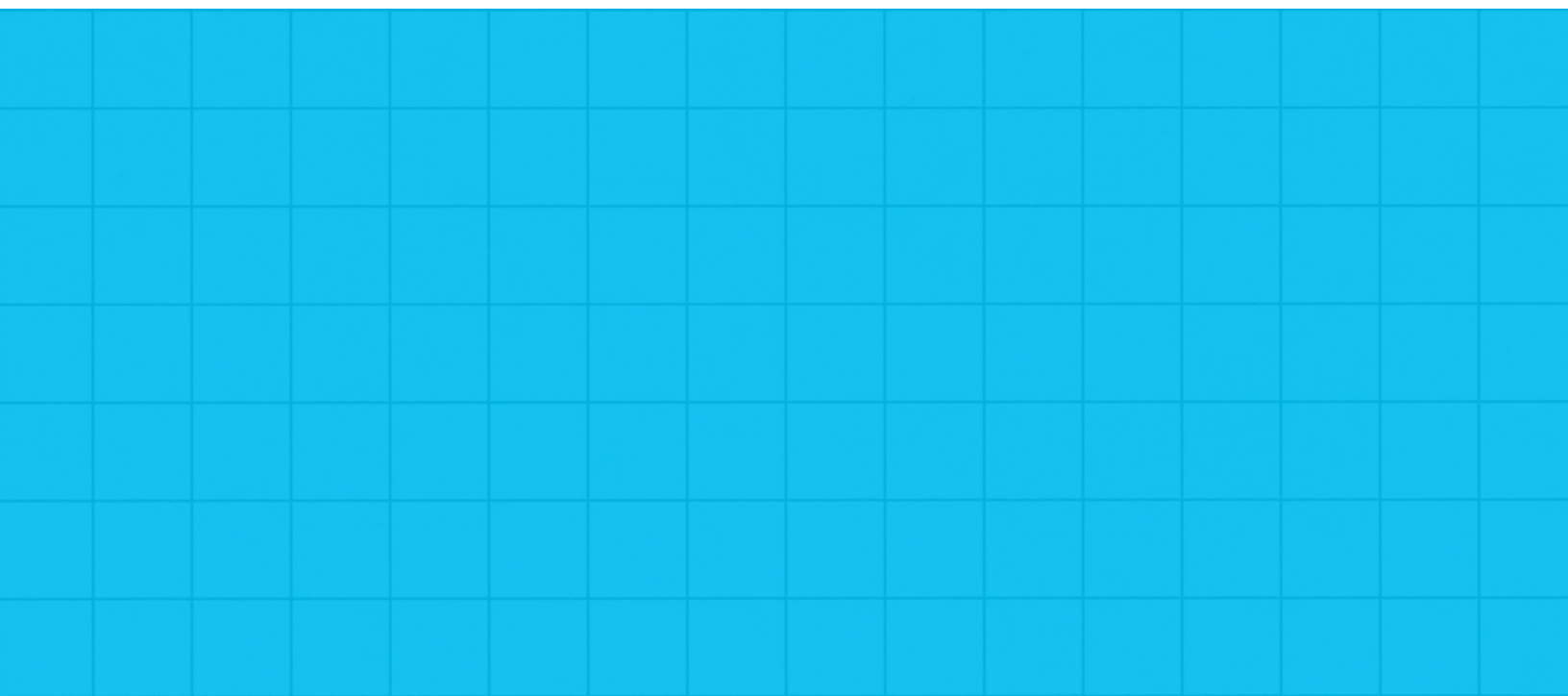


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Columbus Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) commissioned the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) to conduct an analysis of the city's existing community violence intervention (CVI) ecosystem, with a focus on community-based organizations (CBOs) leading gun violence reduction work. This included an analysis of programs offered through City agencies (Columbus Recreation and Parks Department and Columbus Public Health), analysis of four organizations that constitute the core of Columbus's current CVI ecosystem, and identification of four additional organizations that are important resources as the OVP and its partners work to fully build out the continuum of services.

The city's core organizations collectively address key components of a complete CVI ecosystem, including: crisis management, community outreach, hospital-based violence intervention, mediation and violence intervention, preventative youth development, school-based violence intervention, reentry services, victim services, and wraparound services. At this time, life coaching and neighborhood stabilization are not addressed by these organizations.

The City has recently taken important steps toward addressing violence, particularly in securing funding to establish an Office of Violence Prevention and supporting City and community-based violence reduction initiatives. Creating a comprehensive gun violence reduction strategy (GVRS) and establishing an all-encompassing, citywide violence intervention ecosystem are essential next steps, as a centralized approach will allow various City departments, agencies, and organizations to effectively work toward a common vision of safety and community well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Columbus, Ohio is home to 907,901 residents, of which 54.9% are White, 29.1% are Black, 6.7% are Latino, and 5.8% are Asian.¹ There are few government programs and initiatives specifically focusing on gun violence throughout the city, and there are a number of community-led organizations that serve youth and families with the goal of curbing the rise in violent crime. A number of longstanding organizations within the city have reimaged their missions and values to place gun violence reduction at the forefront of their work.

Like many other cities across the nation, Columbus experienced a spike in gun violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, the city saw 93 fatal shootings and 158 nonfatal shooting incidents.² In 2020, Columbus experienced a nearly 56% increase in fatal shootings, with 145 fatal shootings, and a 132% increase in nonfatal shootings, with 366 nonfatal shooting incidents.³ Since 2021, the city has averaged 152 fatal shooting incidents and 435 nonfatal shooting incidents annually.^{4,5,6} With the City of Columbus experiencing violence at such high rates, a comprehensive gun violence reduction strategy and development of the community violence intervention ecosystem is imperative.

This report begins with visualizations of gun violence incidents in 2022 and 2023 relative to the location of City departments and CBOs focused on violence reduction. Next, the report provides descriptions of city-level initiatives, key programs, and community-based organizations. This is followed by an overview of the components of a CVI ecosystem in order to set forth a framework for planning responses to community violence. Analysis of Columbus's current CVI ecosystem follows, along with a brief discussion of strengths, challenges, and goals of the ecosystem. Finally, the report provides an overview of additional CBOs that could support the system and offers recommendations for next steps.

1. [US Census Bureau QuickFacts: Columbus city, Ohio](#)

2. [Gun Violence Archive](#)

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

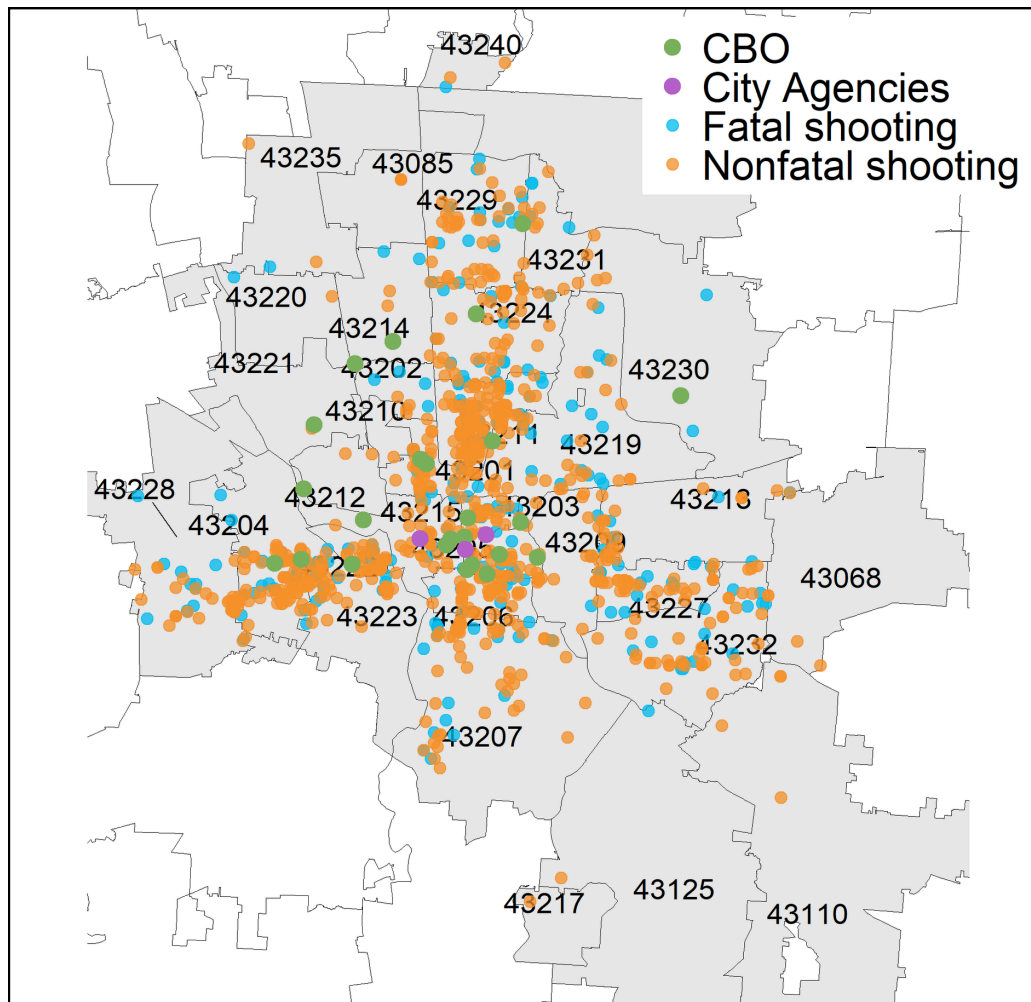
5. [Crime Data Explorer](#)

6. While all fatal shootings are homicides, not all homicides are fatal shootings. These terms are not used interchangeably in this report. The term "homicide" encompasses all circumstances of one person killing another and does not always involve a firearm. "Fatal shooting" specifically denotes a situation where a person is killed by a firearm.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS' LOCATIONS AND COLUMBUS GUN VIOLENCE, JANUARY 2022–DECEMBER 2023

Below is a map that displays two sets of data: 1) locations where fatal and nonfatal shootings took place in Columbus, Ohio during 2022 and 2023 and 2) locations where community-based organizations and City agencies supporting those affected by gun violence are situated. CBOs are represented by green dots, programs under City agencies by purple dots, fatal shootings by blue dots, and nonfatal shootings by orange dots. Though a number of organizations acknowledge providing services throughout the City of Columbus, many are headquartered in just a handful of zip codes. Notably, there is a lack of CBOs located within the 43213, 43227, 43232, and 43207 zip codes.⁷

Figure 1: [Map of Gun Violence and CBOs in Columbus, OH, January 2022–December 2023](#)



7. While the agencies and organizations are not located within the specific zip codes, their services are available throughout the city.

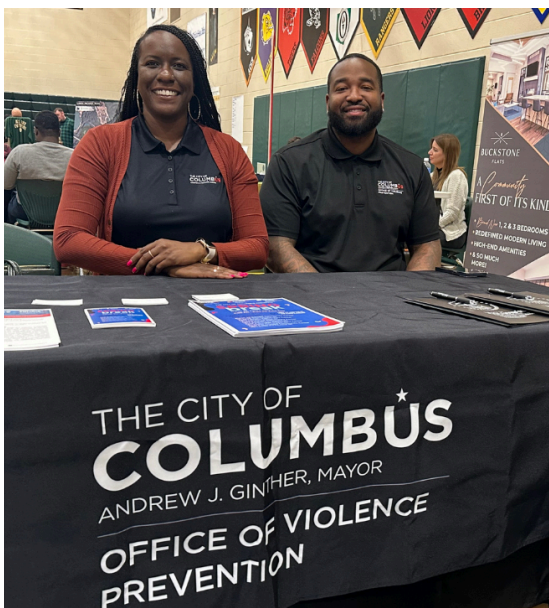
METHODOLOGY

In February 2024, NICJR participated in an Office of Violence Prevention Convening hosted by the City of Columbus. The event engaged four community-based organizations and six City programs that were recognized by the OVP as pivotal players in mitigating gun violence. The event also highlighted six additional organizations that are actively engaged in gun violence reduction initiatives within the city.⁸

Nine of the ten entities that participated in the Convening were subsequently interviewed by NICJR to delve deeper into their approaches. The NICJR team also interviewed key staff from the Columbus Office of Violence Prevention. All interviews took place between March 21, 2024 and April 24, 2024. They were conducted virtually via Zoom and each lasted 30–60 minutes. Interviews were structured to allow for open-ended questions, to ensure sincere responses and productive discussion. NICJR also reviewed publicly available documentation such as organization impact reports, news articles, City planning reports, and more to describe the organizations and efforts that compose the local CVI ecosystem. Through the convening, interviews, and document review, NICJR not only engaged with established leaders in the field 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 Columbus moves forward in reducing violence.

COLUMBUS GUN VIOLENCE REDUCTION INITIATIVES

Development of an Office of Violence Prevention



In 2022, the Mayor of Columbus officially declared gun violence a public health crisis and charged Columbus Public Health with devising strategies for reducing gun violence. Recognizing the fragmented nature of the city's existing violence reduction landscape, Columbus Public Health formally recommended the development of an Office of Violence Prevention that would be integrated within a citywide comprehensive violence intervention ecosystem and would coordinate efforts across various initiatives and organizations. As a result, the City of Columbus Office of Violence Prevention was established in 2023.

8. These organizations were not directly engaged during the preparation of this report. However, subsequent sections will provide information about these organizations based on publicly available data.



Grounded in evidence-based strategies and collaborative partnerships, the OVP is currently developing comprehensive initiatives aimed at preventing violence before it occurs. The Columbus OVP actively collaborates with a range of organizations to enhance community safety and support. The OVP works closely with the Columbus Department of

Neighborhoods, particularly through initiatives like My Brother's Keeper and the Commission on Black Girls, as well as engaging with neighborhood liaisons to address local needs effectively. By partnering with Franklin County Juvenile Court, OVP stays informed about innovative practices in juvenile probation, preventative services, and detention center management. Most recently, the OVP supported the Juvenile Court at the Annie E. Casey conference to discuss the Court's transformative services and resources provided to youth and their families.

Additionally, OVP collaborates with the Franklin County Board of Commissioners' Justice Policy and Programs, focusing on re-entry services and their connection to the court system. This partnership aims to support individuals transitioning back into the community. The OVP is also set to partner with Franklin County Municipal Court on a new in-house batterer's intervention program and ongoing work with their probation department. Similarly, the OVP works closely with Franklin County Common Pleas Court, emphasizing probation services to ensure comprehensive support and oversight. Through community outreach, education programs, policy advocacy, partnerships, and targeted intervention efforts, the OVP is working to develop safer environments and promote peace and well-being for all Columbus residents.

Development of Central Ohio Crime Gun Intelligence Center

In 2023, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine and Columbus Mayor Andrew J. Ginther introduced a collaborative effort to curb gun violence with the creation of the Central Ohio Crime Gun Intelligence Center (CGIC). Housed within the Ohio Department of Public Safety in Columbus, the CGIC will lead investigative efforts to address firearm-related crimes in the region.⁹

9. [Gov. DeWine, Ginther announce new investigative unit aimed at preventing gun violence in central Ohio](#)

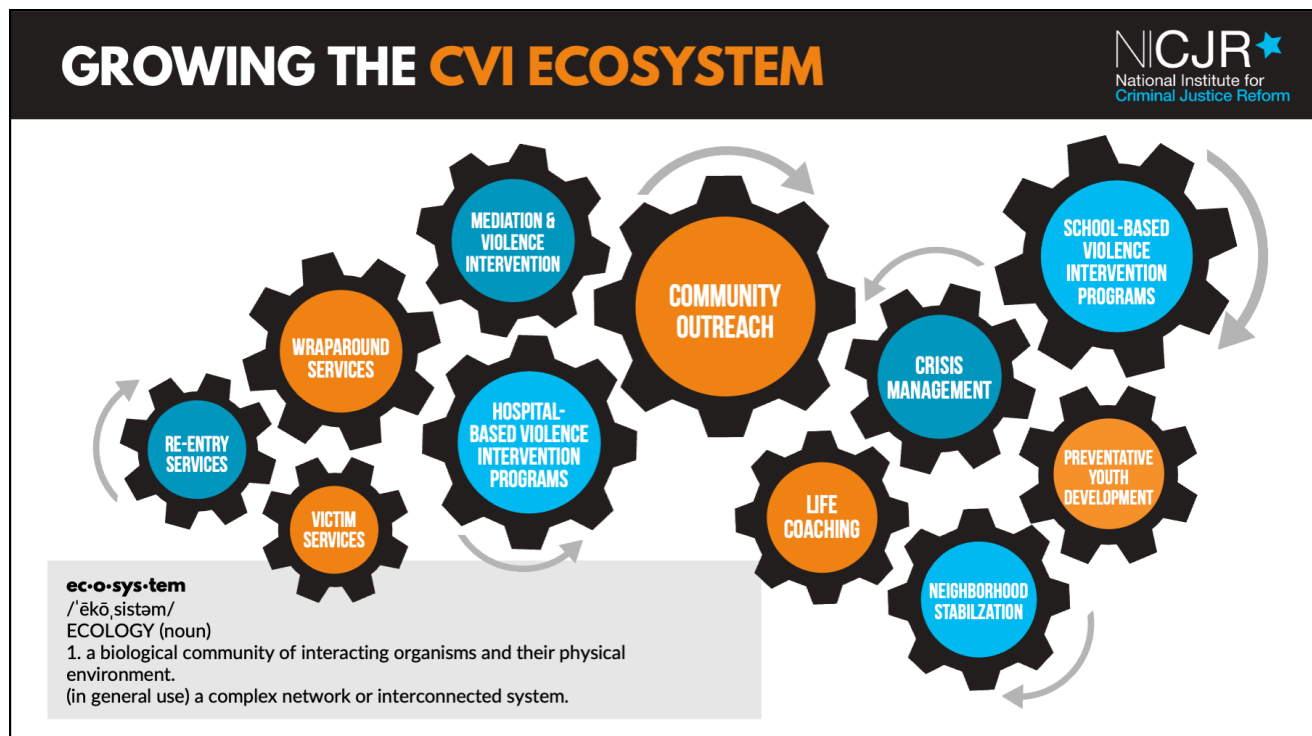
BUILDING A CVI ECOSYSTEM

A community violence intervention ecosystem is a comprehensive network with coordinated strategies, programs, and stakeholders working together to reduce violence within a community.¹⁰ A CVI ecosystem is designed to address the root causes of violence, intervene in imminent acts of violence, and provide comprehensive support to those affected.¹¹

A complete CVI ecosystem includes a variety of partners such as hospitals, public schools, victim services providers, life coaches, and case managers—all working together across a city, and each playing a uniquely important role in the overall strategy to reduce violence. An OVP is integral to the system, as it shapes the overall strategy that guides the ecosystem and coordinates various system components, ensuring partners work together seamlessly.

Key components of a CVI ecosystem are depicted below.

Figure 2. A Comprehensive CVI Ecosystem Requires a Complex Infrastructure of Services and Systems



10. [CVI Ecosystem](#)

11. Ibid.



COLUMBUS CVI DEFINITIONS

During the February 2024 Columbus OVP Convening, local CVI leaders worked together to develop shared definitions of these CVI components, with each organization providing their unique perspective for synthesis into a unified definition. This collaborative effort ensured that all voices were heard and that the final definitions reflected a comprehensive view of the ecosystem's foundation.

Community Healing - There is no single definition for community healing, and any methodologies employed must be able to evolve to remain culturally and geographically competent. The goal of community healing is to create or restore a sense of balance and wellness within communities that have been traumatized by system and/or community violence. Community healing includes a supportive, trauma-informed environment that empowers community members to overcome conflict, adversity, and trauma. Community healing requires collaborative efforts. *While community healing is not a specific component of the CVI ecosystem, the ultimate goal is for the entire ecosystem to be anchored in promoting healing and well-being.*

Community Outreach - Consistent, intentional, and direct communication with community members about programs and services offered. Put simply, community outreach works to “grab the people and pull them in.”

Crisis Management - In the context of CVI, coordination to rapidly deploy mediation, violence intervention, and community outreach services to those in need due to a traumatic community-based event. Crisis management and neighborhood stabilization often occur simultaneously if the crisis is related to gun violence.

Hospital-Based Intervention Programs (HBIPs) / Hospital Violence Intervention Programs (HVIPs) - Programs with a multidisciplinary approach to provide care coordination and connect patients with hospital- and/or community-based resources that target the underlying risk factors for violence. HVIPs and HBIPs should be Health Alliance for Violence Intervention certified.¹²

Life Coaching - Within the realm of CVI, intensively working with those at the highest risk of perpetrating gun violence and/or becoming a victim of gun violence. A life coach should have no more than eight people on their caseload due to the amount of contact they must have with participants. Best practice stipulates that life coaches contact participants at least three times per day and that they physically spend time with participants at least three times per week.

Mediation and Violence Intervention - An urgent response that involves working with people at risk of committing or being the target of violence to prevent imminent acts of violence. Violence interrupters who are credible messengers work in the community to find alternatives to violence by employing de-escalation and mediation. This may occur before or during a violent incident as well as after a violent incident (to prevent retaliation).

Neighborhood Stabilization - A coordinated, trauma-informed, and placed-based approach to violence prevention that mobilizes local agencies and community-based partners to embed critical, readily accessible resources for a sustained period in communities that experience acts of violence or other traumatic events. These responses should be informed by data from City agencies and emergency services for the given community to ensure that each activation is specifically tailored to the response area.

Preventative Youth Development - Strategies, programs, and interventions designed to address and mitigate the factors that contribute to youth involvement in gun violence before such involvement occurs. This proactive approach focuses on creating supportive environments, promoting positive behaviors, and equipping young people with the skills and resources they need to make safe and healthy choices.

Reentry Services - Services provided to individuals with histories of criminal justice system involvement, often focusing on those who are preparing to reenter society from jail, prison, halfway housing, or treatment centers. Reentry services ensure individuals are able to sustain healthy and productive lives and include a range of support mechanisms tailored to address the unique needs and challenges identified during incarceration (in the leadup to reentry) and throughout reentry.

12. [The HAVI: Violence Prevention Professional Training](#)

School-Based Violence Intervention Programs - Programs that provide support to students who are identified as being at high risk of participating in violence. These programs partner with school faculty to shift the cultural norms of violence and provide restorative practices to combat violent behavior through four intervention strategies: essential life skills training, conflict mediation training, academic remediation, and emotional wellness.

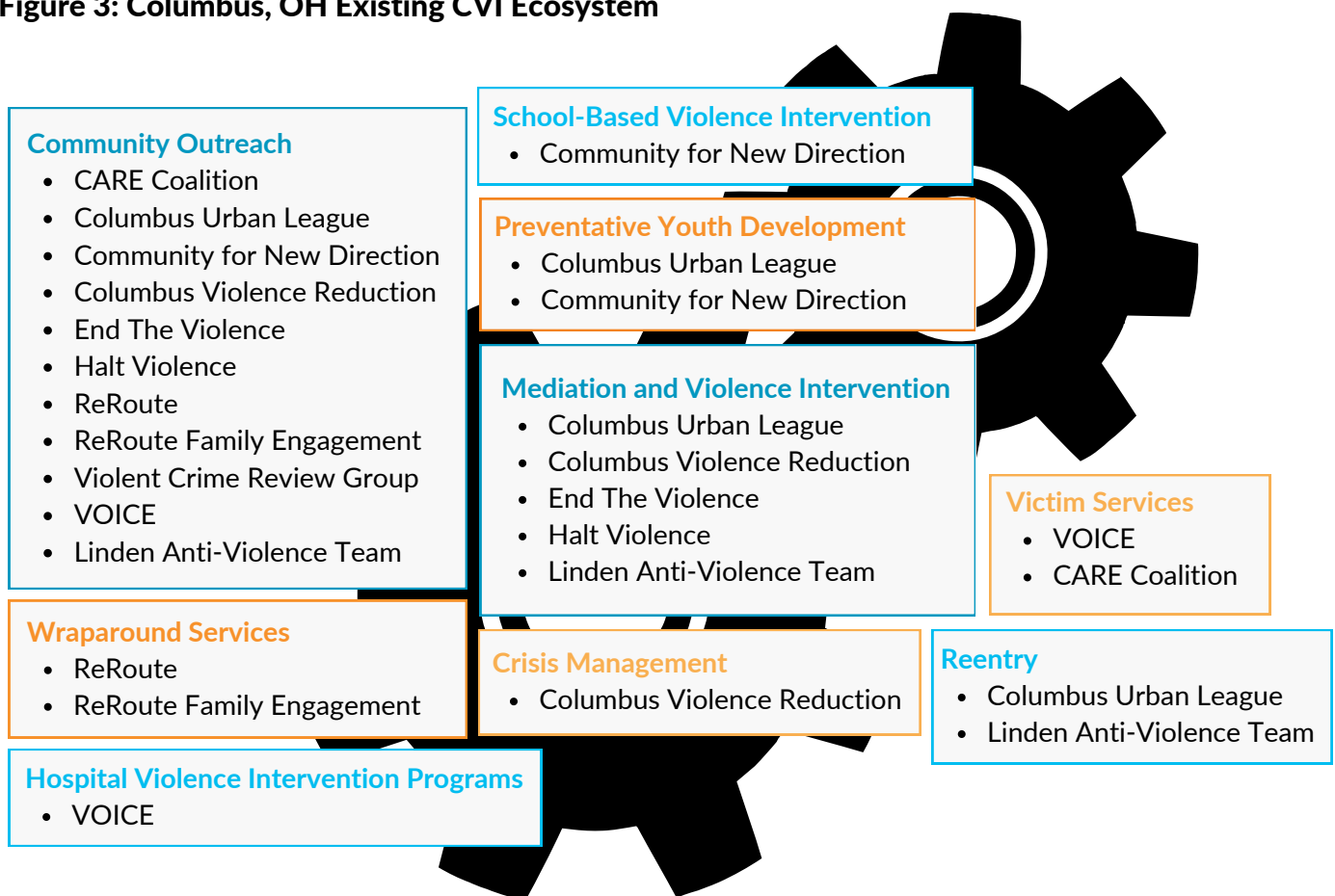
Victim Services - Services and resources that are provided to victims of crime.

Wraparound Services - Centralized, holistic services that meet the unique needs of individuals and families. Services are designed to support, empower, and encourage participants to live safe, healthy, and productive lives.

CURRENT COLUMBUS CVI ECOSYSTEM

The Columbus CVI ecosystem, as identified by the Office of Violence Prevention, currently comprises four community-based organizations and six City programs that collectively play lead roles in nine of the 11 CVI ecosystem components depicted above.

Figure 3: Columbus, OH Existing CVI Ecosystem



Crisis Management

Columbus Violence Reduction (CVR) is a strategic initiative dedicated to keeping people within the Columbus community alive, safe, and free.¹³ CVR emphasizes the need for both prevention and intervention strategies and draws upon the National Network for Safe Communities Group Violence Intervention model. Through partnerships with organizations like the Columbus Urban League and Community for New Direction, CVR brings together community members, law enforcement, and social service providers to prevent violence. Additionally, they offer support services to affected individuals and communities, facilitating access to counseling and resources to aid in recovery.

Community Outreach

The **Columbus Community, Action, Resilience, Empowerment (CARE) Coalition** is a collaborative initiative established in 2015 with the aim of addressing community trauma and promoting resilience throughout the City of Columbus.¹⁴ With over 300 community partners and five active working groups, the Coalition exemplifies a comprehensive and united effort to heal and uplift the community. The CARE Coalition plays a pivotal role in fostering recovery and strength through post-trauma community and family support, educational programs, and community-based groups. For example, the Coalition provides trauma training, racial trauma healing circles, and care connections within coalition teams. The Coalition also hosts an annual remembrance dinner and vigil to honor the lives of those lost to violence as well as a trauma-informed awareness week, and they maintain a community trauma response team. Additionally, the CARE Coalition works more intensively within communities identified by the Violent Crime Review Group as having the highest need for support, and they assign social workers to each side of town to provide individualized care and support.

The **Violent Crime Review Group (VCRG)**, established in 2018 by Mayor Andrew Ginther, aims to create a coordinated response to homicides within the City of Columbus.¹⁵ VCRG member agencies include Columbus Public Health, Columbus Division of Police, Public Safety, Department of Neighborhoods, Code Enforcement, City Attorney's Office, Recreation and Parks Department, and Columbus CARE Coalition. The VCRG leverages critical data from these agencies to develop effective crime reduction strategies focused on identified high-violence areas such as Linden, Hilltop, Southside, and parts of the Eastside. The group strives to create a community where residents, civic organizations, and local governments collaborate to reduce violent crimes and create safety.

13. [Columbus Violence Reduction](#)

14. [City of Columbus: CARE Coalition](#)

15. [City of Columbus: The Violent Crime Review Group](#)

To this end, the VCRG conducts weekly conference calls to review homicides within the core focus areas and prepare coordinated responses. The group also meets on the third Thursday of each month to share relevant crime trends and data, fostering a targeted approach to addressing violent crime. Additionally, the VCRG team provides the community with resources for direct support and conducts community debriefs when homicides occur. The VCRG team's work is integral to the work of the CARE Coalition. Both are leaders in community outreach work in Columbus.

Notably, all core organizations within the Columbus CVI ecosystem use consistent, intentional, and direct communication to engage with the Columbus community.

Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs

Violence Outreach, Intervention, Community Engagement (VOICE) is a hospital-based program that offers essential resources to individuals aged 18–40 in the City of Columbus who have been victims of violent crime.¹⁶ VOICE aims to prevent reinjury and jail time as well as aid in recovery for victims of violent crime. This voluntary case management program provides comprehensive services, connecting participants to various medical, clinical, and social service resources in the community.



VOICE utilizes a dual social work and intervention team to guide participants through four structured program phases: Crisis Intervention, Stabilization, Action, and Self-Sufficiency. Each phase provides tailored support and resources to participants and their families to address their specific needs for recovery and stability. This begins when social workers from Columbus Public Health and interventionists from Columbus Recreation and Parks go in as a team to make contact with the participant bedside at the hospital. VOICE staff evaluate the individual's basic needs, which may include transportation, housing, employment, medical care, drug and alcohol counseling, mentoring and case management, and victim assistance. Once needs are identified, the team introduces coping strategies to initiate the healing process. The team also focuses on building rapport with the participant and establishing connections with referral services for continued support. Participants receive financial incentives as they progress through the phases, working toward achieving their life plans and overcoming barriers using the cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) model. Through these comprehensive services, the VOICE program aims to empower individuals and families affected by violence to rebuild their lives and achieve self-sufficiency.

16. [Columbus Recreation and Parks Department: VOICE](#)

Mediation and Violence Intervention

Columbus Violence Reduction (CVR) works to reduce gun violence by focusing on those at the highest risk of group/gang involvement and those at the highest risk of being exposed to violence. With a focus on the small number of high-risk individuals responsible for a disproportionate amount of violence, CVR aims to reduce violence and enhance quality of life while adhering to principles that prioritize community empowerment and strategic enforcement. This includes partnering with the



Columbus Police Department to conduct custom notifications that provide high-risk individuals with information about the CVR team and their role in assisting the community in safety strategies while emphasizing the community's investment in the individual's well-being. CVR also conducts call-in sessions to engage with individuals involved in street groups, encouraging them to live peacefully and recommending resources for transitioning away from violence.

End The Violence (ETV) is an organization dedicated to eradicating violence at its source through real-time intervention efforts.¹⁷ Central to this mission is their violence intervention program, which operates on the ground, day in and day out, within communities where intervention is most urgently required. This program encompasses a wide range of activities aimed at squashing disputes, de-escalating tense situations, and meeting individuals at their level within the community. The ETV team is actively engaged in the neighborhoods with the greatest needs, attending events and interfacing with community members to identify and address potential conflicts before they escalate. ETV's hands-on approach emphasizes the importance of building trust and relationships, enabling them to effectively intervene in crises and promote lasting peace and safety. ETV also provides emergency housing, employment leads, and a food pantry for their participants. Through their dedicated efforts, they seek to create a safer environment where all individuals can thrive free from the threat of violence.

17. [End The Violence](#)

Columbus Urban League (CUL) is a nonprofit dedicated to empowering Black and urban communities by working to increase wealth and stabilize families.¹⁸ Columbus Urban League provides a variety of services meant to help dismantle systemic barriers that these communities face, with the hopes of bringing society closer to an inclusive economy. CUL



serves the community through 19 different initiatives that address various issues related to career support, entrepreneurship, family enrichment, financial empowerment, homeownership, and youth leadership, including Incubate Her, Minority Business Assistance Center, Accelerate Her, Journey to Wealth, and Journey to the Dream.

CUL operates a Neighborhood Violence Intervention Program (NVIP) that seeks to reduce the likelihood that youth and adults will become involved in gang-related crime and increase the likelihood that they will lead successful and productive lives.¹⁹ A five-person NVIP team operates within the community, focusing on schools and all four city quadrants to engage with children and young adults. The team works to regularly de-escalate incidents and reach out to youth to encourage their participation in various activities related to recreation, work readiness, and academic support. With over 12 years of experience, the team offers assistance and opportunities for around 60 kids on their caseload, aiming to promote safety and support through collaboration with recreation centers and families. NVIP also offers a classroom curriculum to teach advocacy for safe streets and provides mediation and support following shootings involving gangs or groups.

The **Linden Anti-Violence Team** is a place-based intervention group that provides outreach, intervention, and resource linkage in the Linden area for individuals between the ages of 18–40 who are at the highest risk of violence.²⁰ Established in 2022, this team has grown to six full-time staff and a host of volunteers. The Linden Anti-Violence Team primarily receives community referrals. They also canvas in areas where violence has occurred to offer the community support, and they facilitate community healing meetings in a variety of settings, including community centers, apartment complexes, local recreation centers, and even libraries. The Linden Anti-Violence Team also hosts healing circles and beautification events in the Linden community.

18. [Columbus Urban League](#)

19. [CUL: Neighborhood Violence Intervention Initiative](#)

20. [City of Columbus: The Linden Anti-Violence Team](#)

Halt Violence is a nonprofit whose mission is straightforward: ending community conflict and saving lives. Halt Violence specializes in street mediation and mentorship. With expertise in addressing conflicts and guiding individuals toward constructive paths, this organization has established a strong reputation for transformative impact. Halt Violence earns the trust of community members by pledging to handle matters without police involvement, regardless of the context of violence.²¹ The organization intervenes proactively, resolving conflicts before they escalate into tragedies. Every incident is meticulously documented and analyzed anonymously, enabling the organization to continuously refine its methods while safeguarding the confidentiality of those it serves.²²

Preventative Youth Development

The **Columbus Urban League** Strive Toward Empowerment & Potential (STEP) initiative supports families with youth ages 11–17 who are in danger of involvement in the criminal justice system by providing opportunities for the youth to develop self-esteem, communication skills, and leadership abilities.²³ STEP adapts its approach to suit the age of the participants. Currently in its eighth cohort, the program has successfully avoided violent incidents with cohort participants who are from various neighborhoods.

STEP referrals primarily come from the courts, but the program also receives referrals from schools and through word of mouth, with social media playing a significant role in outreach. The program typically includes an intake process of two to three weeks, followed by eight weeks of classes meeting two to three times per week for two hours at a time, though the schedule may vary. STEP programming includes mentoring, mental health awareness, life skills training, and critical thinking activities. Additionally, STEP organizes an event that brings together youth and members of the Columbus Police Department to share their feelings regarding the dynamics between police and youth within the city. The program also offers opportunities for youth to set academic and personal goals to ensure they meet and exceed their own expectations.

A distinctive feature of STEP is the distribution of guaranteed meals for the participants, which were noted as a crucial support. STEP is also inclusive of girls, as program leaders noted a previous uptick in young girls being impacted by gun violence within the community. STEP also empowers parents by offering curriculum and resources that help them with areas such as conflict resolution and intervention. Additionally, parents of children in STEP receive priority access to other CUL programs, providing comprehensive support for families.

21. [Halt Violence](#)

22. While Halt Violence was invited to Columbus OVP 2024 Convening, the organization declined participation in the interview and reporting process and subsequent technical assistance.

23. [CUL: STEP](#)

Community for New Direction (CND) offers a six-week summer youth program; an afterschool program; and Future Opportunities Created for Urban Students (FOCUS), a youth-led leadership development program. CND also has a violence intervention program that serves youth and young adults who are involved in gang violence. By meeting participants where they are and building relationships over time, CND works one-on-one with each young person to establish and guide them toward attainable goals. The success of the violence intervention program is measured by how effectively the organization connects participants to employment and education opportunities. CND also hosts community activities such as resource fairs and pop-up barbecues, often in collaboration with other local agencies, to connect youth with valuable services and support networks.



Reentry Services

Columbus Urban League's Reentry HUB empowers returning citizens by helping them plan for reintegration into their community and develop the skills needed to obtain employment and attain stability.²⁴ The program focuses on two primary components: in-reach, which provides services within jails, and community outreach, which extends support for several weeks after release. Upon release, participants receive assistance with transportation, housing, coaching, mental health and substance use disorder care, continued education and certification opportunities, and employment. A recently resumed pilot program within the Reentry HUB engaged 35 individuals in the first quarter of 2024, connecting them with necessary family and community services.



24. [CUL: Re-Entry HUB](#)

School-Based Violence Intervention Programs

Community for New Direction (CND) provides services to Columbus youth and young adults ages 13–23.²⁵ CND began serving the community 35 years ago as the city experienced low graduation rates and a surge in teenage pregnancies. Throughout the years, CND has expanded their services and programs to meet the needs of the greater Columbus community, including through counseling, crisis intervention, case management, anger management, life skills training, and employment support.

Within schools, CND provides mediation before, during, and after school hours for youth who are at high risk of violence. The organization works closely with counselors, principals, and other staff to identify students who could benefit from their services. CND staff also interact with students during lunch and other school activities to offer support and serve as positive influences. Additionally, the CND Youth Ambassadors for Peace (YAP) program includes a nine-week curriculum focused on anti-bullying, violence prevention, and leadership development. The program is designed to be delivered to elementary through high school students in small group settings during regular school hours. YAP is currently offered in schools within the Columbus City and Reynoldsburg school districts.

Victim Services

As noted above, **VOICE** provides comprehensive victim services aimed at supporting individuals affected by gun violence. VOICE partners with several organizations to enhance these services, including Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA) for transportation needs, Columbus Public Health Alcohol and Drug Services for substance abuse support, and the Grant Hospital Trauma Clinic and Southeast Mental Health and Lighthouse Services for medical and mental health support, among others. VOICE also partners with the Ohio Attorney General and the Ohio Crime Victims Justice Center. Additionally, VOICE works with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services to provide employment and financial assistance, ensuring a comprehensive approach to victim support.

Wraparound Services

ReRoute was initially established within Columbus Recreation and Parks, but it has now solidified its identity as a partnership between Columbus Public Health and Columbus Recreation and Parks, seamlessly integrating clinical and intervention services.²⁶ The program offers micro-interventions specifically tailored for the city's most vulnerable youth between the ages of 13 and 21 and their families affected by community and/or gun violence.

25. [Community for New Direction](#)

26. [Columbus Recreation and Parks: ReRoute](#)

Within ReRoute, social workers from Columbus Public Health and interventionists from Columbus Recreation and Parks work as a team to provide services. ReRoute provides trauma-focused services aimed at empowering youth, families, and communities through comprehensive wraparound support. By addressing survival instincts and trauma reactions, ReRoute aims to enhance coping skills and promote positive thinking patterns among participants. The program also emphasizes building resilience by developing a collective understanding of the roots of at-risk behavior in traumatic experiences. Finally, ReRoute connects families with resources and intervention strategies that prioritize trauma-informed approaches, conflict resolution, and active family engagement.



ReRoute Family Engagement is a community-based intervention program dedicated to empowering families and fostering the success of young people through respectful and effective interventions, groups, and program initiatives. The organization's mission is to create meaningful partnerships with families and youth, recognizing them as vital experts and stakeholders in shaping positive outcomes. ReRoute Family Engagement offers comprehensive support services, including counseling, employment assistance, and connections to community resources for families, ensuring they have the tools they need to thrive. The organization's youth-focused initiatives provide counseling, case management, conflict resolution support, and mediation to help young people navigate challenges and stay on the path to success. The organization works closely with families to identify their needs and challenges, understand their perspectives on their child's needs, and assess their readiness for support. The organization also offers a safe environment where families and parents can connect with others facing similar challenges, receive practical guidance, and benefit from the wisdom of peers and parent mentors. Furthermore, ReRoute Family Engagement links families to essential community resources, including employment, housing, support groups, and medical assistance, helping them build a stable and supportive foundation for their children.

STRENGTHS OF EXISTING CVI ECOSYSTEM

At the forefront of Columbus's CVI ecosystem lies a remarkable asset: the Office of Violence Prevention. The development of an OVP exemplifies the City's dedication to and investment in reducing gun violence and allowing citizens of Columbus to live safe, healthy, and productive lives.

The OVP plays a crucial role in coordinating the CVI ecosystem by acting as a bridge between CBO and City efforts and partnering with both in the 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 both the OVP leadership and Mayor are deeply invested in the work. These dynamics embody the boldness of the City of Columbus and its commitment to gun violence reduction.

Another significant strength is the diverse programming offered by the city's core violence reduction CBOs. Columbus currently has four community-based organizations and six City programs that cover nine of the 11 CVI ecosystem components, with some components addressed by multiple organizations or programs. These organizations serve an array of ages, are located in various areas of the city, and aim to address a variety of root causes of gun violence. Notably, there are a number of organizations that serve those directly involved in and impacted by gun violence. In particular, the City's established hospital-based violence intervention program, which has been formally serving Columbus since 2021, is a significant asset. The presence of an HVIP strengthens the CVI ecosystem by integrating healthcare and community services for a more comprehensive response to violence. HVIPs are proven to maximize a keen window of opportunity to provide victims with services and resources to lessen their chances of reinjury and further harm.^{27,28}

27. [Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs: A Guide to Implementation and Costing](#)

28. [What is a Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Program?](#)

The deep community roots of CBO leaders in Columbus also represent a significant strength of the CVI ecosystem. Two of the core organizations have been serving the Columbus community for decades 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 Columbus better.

The diverse skills and lived experience of the CBOs' staff is another key strength. Staff within the interviewed organizations possess a range of skill sets as previous school teachers, social workers, and community corrections and City government employees. Some staff are system impacted or previously system involved, and some have experienced gun violence firsthand. Staff also have lived experience as natives of Columbus with generational ties to the city. As a result, they truly understand the underlying dynamics of the city and are able to authentically connect with high-risk individuals and violence-impacted communities.

Finally, the City agencies' and CBOs' dedication to meeting community members where they are is a major strength of the CVI ecosystem. Each organization mentioned either hosting or supporting community resource fairs to display their services and programs. One organization even mentioned setting up a booth outside of a nightclub. Two organizations also mentioned hosting events in specific neighborhoods to engage with youth and alleviate violence. By maintaining proximity to areas of greatest need, hosting and attending events to engage community members, and finding unique ways to make information digestible and appealing to their target participants, these organizations are able to better engage those who have been impacted by gun violence but who may not seek out services.

CHALLENGES

As noted above, in its current state, the Columbus CVI ecosystem includes providers who are active in components of an effective violence reduction ecosystem. This coverage is a strong start, but there are missing components that represent important gaps that need to be addressed. At the same time, some components are covered by multiple organizations, representing potential duplications in services. These gaps and duplications point to a pressing challenge: the lack of collaboration and coordination among Columbus's violence reduction programs and services.

Many of Columbus's CVI organizations operate in silos and, in some cases, seek to operate as one-stop, comprehensive solutions. When these organizations attempt to meet every need of an individual, their workload increases significantly, and they are unable to focus on the areas where they are most needed and effective. This also leads to significant overlap in services across CBOs, and the redundancy results in larger gaps being left unaddressed throughout the ecosystem. There are also challenges inherent to the fact that many of the organizations serving those directly involved in or affected by gun violence have been established for less than three years. Building trust and collaboration requires time and effort, and the city's core CVI CBOs are still early in this process. Providers also noted that maintaining separation from law enforcement while still collaborating with them to identify high-risk individuals requires a delicate balancing act that is an ongoing challenge in their work.

Every organization identified a lack of stable funding as the foremost obstacle impeding their ability to maintain, expand, and innovate services for those directly affected by and involved in gun violence. Organizations noted the need for discretionary funding when dealing with participants who are in crisis or who have immediate needs. Emergency housing, food, and bus passes are examples of expenses that may not be allowable under the terms of strict contracts or grant agreements, yet they are needs that must be met to effectively serve participants. Multiple CBOs also noted the many ways the reimbursement process can be burdensome when serving those with urgent needs. Many organizations also described a constant struggle of balancing operational costs with the increasing demand for their services, leading to potential gaps in coverage and support. Further, several CBOs highlighted the impacts of inconsistent funding, which include an inability to expand programming, provide professional development for staff, or hire additional staff. Without

adequate financial support, the invaluable work of community violence intervention risks being compromised, leaving vulnerable populations without essential resources and assistance.

Another major challenge is ensuring consistent and sustained participant engagement. Several CBOs noted a struggle to keep participants engaged in voluntary programming once their immediate needs are met. In particular, programs meant to engage participants for six months to a year or longer require considerable organizational infrastructure. Interviewees discussed the difficulty of building an effective team, especially for intervention roles requiring a genuine passion for community service. Youth-serving organizations pointed to the added challenge of identifying and prioritizing their target high-risk youth population amidst referrals that are not appropriate for their specific programs. Overcoming these hurdles requires resilience, adaptability, and a steadfast commitment to driving positive social change.

A related challenge is difficulty engaging with the Somali (First American) community in the Westside of Columbus. Multiple 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.

Finally, many organizations noted that they do have access to data, but they are unsure how to use it. Leaders of the city's core CVI CBOs identified a need for training on data-driven decision making as they continue to expand and refine their work. Relatedly, there is a lack of knowledge among the CBOs regarding how a robust CVI ecosystem should function. Without a solid understanding of the framework and their place within it, organizations are limited in their ability to make data-driven decisions that benefit the system as a whole. These challenges not only impact the organizations themselves, but also ripple through the entire CVI ecosystem, hindering its growth and ability to address community needs.

Major Challenges Faced by Columbus CVI Organizations

- Lack of collaboration and coordination among violence reduction programs and services.
- Lack of stable funding and discretionary funds for participants in crisis.
- Difficulty ensuring consistent and sustained participant engagement.
- Barriers to serving the Somali (First American) community.
- Need for training on data-driven decision making.

GOALS FOR ORGANIZATIONS WITHIN THE EXISTING CVI ECOSYSTEM

Overwhelmingly, the City's OVP and community-based organizations emphasized their desire to learn, grow, thrive, and save lives. Each entity noted their passion for reducing violence and the amount of heart work that goes into violence reduction, particularly in Columbus. They also expressed a desire for collaboration to maximize resources, expertise, and impact in addressing the complex roots of violence within Columbus. Many organizations noted their commitment to improving access to services and social support systems, community engagement, and trust across communities and partners as a means to address underlying social and economic factors contributing to violence.

Interviewees also pointed to areas where they are eager to learn. Many organizations noted a need for additional training to strengthen their understanding of what a well-functioning CVI ecosystem entails and how their organizations fit into that system. Many CBOs also expressed a desire to better understand data collection and management best practices so they can strengthen their current data practices and better understand the actual impact their organization has on the community.

Ultimately, the goal of each organization and the OVP is to create safer communities by leveraging the collective strengths of both CBOs and government agencies in Columbus.

ORGANIZATIONS IDENTIFIED THROUGH THE OVP CONVENING

Below are the additional organizations that were identified as community partners during the 2024 OVP Convening. While the current CVI ecosystem consists solely of the four community-based organizations and six City programs described above, these other organizations have been noted as being capable of filling gaps and enhancing the ecosystem.

Community Outreach

Mothers of Murdered Columbus Children (MOMCC) was created in response to the increase of violence within the City of Columbus. MOMCC is dedicated to raising awareness about gun violence while also developing collaborative efforts aimed at community outreach, crime prevention, and providing supportive services to those affected by gun violence.²⁹ MOMCC is deeply rooted in faith-based principles that guide its mission and values, and it uses a data-driven approach to decision making. The organization advocates for combating violence through the "three P's" of peace, prayer, and positivity. MOMCC believes in the transformative power of direct advocacy and faith to reclaim their streets and restore households one community at a time. This CBO prioritizes community engagement and social justice, collaborating with various organizations, agencies, and community members to achieve peace, positivity, and protection. MOMCC also emphasizes the importance of unity and collaboration between law enforcement and citizens to foster safe communities.

MOMCC's community engagement efforts include hosting events in high-risk areas where they display signage conveying the impact of gun violence on the community. The organization also provides programming and resources to support families and communities. For example, their service department offers holistic and preventative support for mothers affected by gun violence, and they offer a prison ministry as well. MOMCC is also active in advocacy. Their goal of keeping homicides in the Columbus area under triple digits by December 31, 2024, drives their advocacy efforts, which include engaging with state and county organizations, youth and adult confinement facilities, and other jurisdictions, often in partnership with Chief Latasha Potts and other key stakeholders.

29. [Mothers of Murdered Columbus Children](#)

Preventative Youth Development

We Are Linden is a nonprofit built by and for the Linden community with a focus on creating a safer and healthier Columbus. We Are Linden organizes a variety of programs and initiatives designed to uplift and empower the Linden neighborhood through meaningful connections and community building—particularly where youth are concerned. The organization connects Black youth with positive role models, supports them in developing skills that are fundamental to success as adults, and provides opportunities for civic engagement and service.³⁰

The We Are Mentors program connects youth ages 8–17 with successful community members to expose them to various career paths through a variety of initiatives. Jays for A’s encourages academic success by giving a new pair of shoes to students who earn high grades throughout the school year. We Are Block History is an educational initiative that exposes youth to the achievements of Black leaders in different disciplines. We Are For the Culture allows youth to learn about the fashion industry, and We Are Good Brothers, Good Sisters presents youth with age-appropriate work opportunities.

We Are Linden also has an Ambassador Program that specifically serves Black youth ages 11–17. The overall goal of the program is to decrease and prevent youth delinquency and violence. Within this program, an initiative called Block by Block connects youth with resources, and the We Are Cleaning initiative helps to collect litter in the neighborhood and educate the community about how to manage waste. Additionally, We Are Linden organizes several annual community-building events that respond to the wants and needs of the community.



30. [We Are Linden: Our Programs](#)

Reentry

Alvis is a nonprofit human services agency that provides wraparound services to vulnerable populations such as those who have been involved in the justice system, those struggling with substance abuse, and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.³¹

Alvis's work includes providing residential and nonresidential reentry services to individuals who are returning to their communities following justice involvement.³² These services are crucial to helping participants navigate common reentry hardships related to housing, employment, and restoring family relationships. The Alvis residential reentry programs provide participants with a stable and safe living environment as they engage in services such as cognitive behavioral treatment and workforce skills training. Program staff also assist participants in planning for life after program completion, including coordinating housing and aftercare. Alvis's community reentry programs also provide counseling services and behavioral healthcare, assistance in securing work, and family support.

Alvis also has a Workforce Development Training program that helps participants with securing employment—particularly those individuals who are facing challenges related to justice involvement. Staff provide individualized support to ensure participants are able to reintegrate into society and retain jobs. Likewise, the Alvis Community Reentry Center provides services to participants struggling to obtain a job, including GED classes and training to develop skills that are necessary and beneficial in the labor market. Similarly, the Help In Reentry and Employment Education (HIRE) program supports participants with a history of justice involvement in finding and securing employment.

Wraparound Services

As noted above, **Alvis** provides wraparound services to members of vulnerable populations. Their evidence-based programming and services aim to achieve impactful, transformative results for those seeking to reintegrate into society, attempting to secure employment, and trying to overcome addiction. Alvis prioritizes taking a compassionate, comprehensive approach to address people's complex needs and challenges, with the goal of empowering them so they realize their potential and are able to turn their lives around.

31. [Alvis](#)

32. [Alvis: Reentry](#)

The **Center for Family Safety and Healing** (TCFSH) is dedicated to ending family violence in order to build safer, flourishing communities.³³ TCFSH's multidisciplinary team provides a comprehensive, personalized, and coordinated response to address family violence. This wraparound support includes child and family counseling via two programs: the Family Support Program and Home Based Counseling. The Family Support Program provides one-on-one therapy, family therapy, sexual abuse treatment group, and psychiatric services to support the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents who come from backgrounds of sexual or physical abuse and family violence or who are struggling to cope with traumatic grief. The Home Based Counseling program helps strengthen family stability and improve the well-being of children who come from traumatic backgrounds by offering services and support within the home. Treatments used by clinicians in this program can include parent-child interaction therapy and trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy. The Child Assessment Center also conducts medical evaluations and administers treatment in response to any child abuse or neglect allegations. TCFSH also offers services to support adults who have been victims of domestic violence.

TCFSH is also involved in advocacy, research, and community education. Their Community Training Programs provide education to ensure that community members and CBO staff are able to recognize signs of possible family violence and appropriately help those in need, typically by providing referrals to community resources. These programs target a variety of groups that are fundamental to community members, including faith-based organizations, healthcare organizations, schools, and service providers.

Huckleberry House provides a number of services and programs to youth and young adults through their Crisis Shelter, Counseling Center, Housing program, Youth Outreach Program, and Project Safe Place.

The Crisis Shelter offers a safe space for teens ages 12–17.³⁴ There, youth are provided food, clothing and hygiene items, group activities, and counseling to navigate familial issues. The Crisis Shelter allows teens to stay between three and five days. If long-term care is needed, Huckleberry House has a partnership with Franklin County Child Services to navigate family support. The Crisis Shelter distinguishes itself from detention centers, jails, or scared-straight programs by providing a safe and enjoyable environment for its residents. Residents have daily outings, and they may participate in extracurricular activities or outings with family members or friends with guardian approval, although with some limitations set by staff. Importantly, participation in the Crisis Shelter is voluntary.

33. [The Center for Family Safety and Healing: Services](#)

34. [Huckleberry House](#)

The Counseling Center serves youth and young adults ages 12–22 through personalized counseling sessions designed to address their unique needs, fostering long-lasting changes. The Center works with individuals who are dealing with anger, anxiety, stress, crisis, depression, and mood disorders, amongst a host of other challenges. Participants receive support from skilled therapists who are committed to understanding their concerns and assisting them in reaching their objectives. Staff work with participants weekly over the course of six to 12 months.

The Housing Program provides young people ages 17–24 with a secure, furnished residence for 12 to 18 months to assist with the development of essential independent living skills. Participants also receive personalized counseling to support their educational and employment goals; support addressing mental and emotional challenges; and, for those with children, parenting assistance. Upon program completion, participants receive guidance in securing permanent housing arrangements. A portion of the Housing Program’s apartments are reserved for individuals who have endured domestic violence. Those participants receive enhanced security measures and additional support, including around-the-clock access to workers trained in safety planning and victim services.

The Youth Outreach Program serves individuals who are unable to come directly to Huckleberry House. This program offers guidance on developing essential life skills and strategies for overcoming obstacles. Staff also connect youth to resources such as food, transportation aid, and health and hygiene items as well as support securing employment, completing their education, obtaining important documents, and obtaining housing. Additionally, youth are invited to engaging community and school events and skill-building workshops.

Finally, through Project Safe Place, Huckleberry House partners with 136 locations throughout the Columbus area, including fire stations, public libraries, youth centers, and restaurants. These Safe Space locations connect displaced youth or youth experiencing a crisis to immediate assistance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With the establishment of an Office of Violence Prevention, the City of Columbus has signified its commitment to reducing gun violence. The OVP is well-positioned to coordinate the continued buildout of a full, effective CVI ecosystem. While this can happen in a number of ways, NICJR recommends the following steps:

1. Increase collaboration and coordination among existing violence prevention and intervention organizations.

- a. Columbus has a number of organizations involved in violence reduction work within the CVI ecosystem. However, there is a real need to streamline this work and ensure all groups have access to services. To this end, we suggest the following:
 - i. Develop and implement a clear strategy to streamline efforts for engaging those at the highest risk for gun violence.
 - This strategy should enable cross-organizational coordination to meet the immediate and long-term needs of participants.
 - Organizations should be intentional in the services they provide and lean into the areas where they are most effective, rather than trying to meet all needs of every participant.
 - ii. As a part of this strategy, create partnerships and coordinate violence reduction efforts. These partnerships should:
 - Provide space for information sharing, including pursuing joint funding opportunities;
 - Produce collaborative and innovative strategies to combat gun violence;
 - Include co-learning communities where organizations are able to engage with one another;
 - Include mechanisms for transparency and accountability across partners; and
 - Include a wide variety of organizations, agencies, juvenile and adult courts, and city and county stakeholders, ranging from those with evaluation, policy, research, and technical assistance expertise to those who provide direct services to participants.



2. Create a community violence emergency preparedness plan.

- a. When a shooting takes place, Columbus should have a planned course of action that allows all entities within the ecosystem to work seamlessly together to support the victim of violence as well as community members where the incident occurs.
- b. This community violence emergency preparedness plan should also inform the citywide comprehensive violence reduction strategic plan.

3. Engage with those who are at the highest risk of involvement in gun violence throughout the City of Columbus.

- a. Develop services or initiatives that are inclusive of and tailored to those in the highest need of services
 - i. Develop services specifically tailored for First American Westside residents.
 - This may include truth and reconciliation discussions within the Westside to further understand needs within the area.
 - This may also include an exclusive convening with the First American community to bridge the gap between that community and service providers and to support a better understanding of the needs of that particular community.
 - ii. Continue work throughout the Linden community, which has been identified as greater risk.
 - iii. Use data and information from law enforcement to determine where violence is taking place and to identify zip codes and neighborhoods with greater need for gun violence intervention and prevention services.

4. Provide training and technical assistance to organizations already engaged in violence reduction work.

- a. There are a few organizations that are already doing remarkable violence reduction work within the city. However, there is a need for additional training to ensure that organizations holistically understand Columbus's gun violence problem and are equipped to implement transformative strategies that have worked for other cities in combating gun violence.
 - i. Technical assistance may include evaluations of existing services, programs, and initiatives within these organizations; general capacity building training for organizations; recurring on-site technical support to provide consistent feedback; support in implementing program benchmarking and performance measurement tools; and intensive data collection for continuous analysis of those involved in shooting incidents.
 - ii. Training for organizations can also include events such as conflict resolution workshops, training on de-escalation techniques and community engagement strategies, trauma-informed care seminars, and cultural sensitivity training.
 - iii. Additional specific recommended trainings and certifications include:
 - Life Coach training and certification
 - HAVI certification
 - Mediation training
 - Trauma-Informed Care training
 - Violence Interrupter training
 - Data Collection and Management training

5. Clarify service types.

- a. Service providers should work to clearly communicate the type of programs they offer, their geographic service area, and their target population—both to ensure that those who are seeking services are able to find them and to create more transparency and opportunities for collaboration among community-based organizations and with local government agencies.
 - i. As a first step, organizations should ensure they communicate these things clearly in public-facing materials (e.g., organizational website, social media accounts, brochures, etc.).

ii. In the longer term, the compilation of a comprehensive provider directory would be a valuable contribution to the city's violence reduction efforts. NICJR recommends incorporating the following data fields in such a directory:

- Service Type
 - Street/Community Outreach
 - Crisis Management
 - Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs
 - Life Coaching
 - Mediation and Violence Intervention
 - Neighborhood Stabilization
 - Preventative Youth Development
 - Reentry Services
 - School-Based Intervention Programs
 - Victim Services
 - Wraparound Service
- Target Population
 - Children (0–12)
 - Youth (12–17)
 - Transition Age Youth/Young Adults (18–24)
 - Adults (24 and older)
 - Very-high risk of engaging in gun violence
 - Gender-specific
 - Reentry
 - Homeless
 - Other specific populations
- Target Geographic Area

With the commitment of government officials, the Office of Violence Prevention, and the existing CVI ecosystem, the implementation of these strategic recommendations can greatly enhance Columbus's efforts to build a safer community, reduce incidents of violence, and promote a culture of peace and collaboration.

COLUMBUS, OHIO LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

AUGUST 2024

