

Building Interdisciplinary Partnerships to Prevent Violent Extremism



COPS
Community Oriented Policing Services
U.S. Department of Justice



POLICE EXECUTIVE
RESEARCH FORUM

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Letter from the Director

Dear Colleagues,

As recent events such as the terrorist shooting deaths in Orlando, Florida and San Bernardino, California demonstrate, one of the most serious threats facing us today is violent extremism. It's a growing challenge to law enforcement, and one that can be most effectively addressed with the help of communities, faith-based groups, schools, and other stakeholder organizations, as well as collaboration with local, state, and federal agencies.

To explore strategies for developing these kinds of collaborative relationships, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) and the COPS Office held a forum on Building Interdisciplinary Partnerships to Prevent Violent Extremism in Minneapolis in 2015. The participants, who were drawn from a wide range of law enforcement and other professions, discussed their own experiences with interdisciplinary partnerships, debated approaches, and made recommendations.

This report on the forum is intended to help other law enforcement agencies create or enhance their own collaborative programs. Through the participants' lessons learned, it shows how police departments can play a key role in empowering their communities to be resistant to extreme ideologies by building strong relationships with their members, keeping communication channels open, and providing access to services and resources that support prevention and intervention.

Forging the partnerships to provide these services and creating the organizational framework for their delivery presents many challenges. But, as demonstrated by the four case studies in this report, police departments across the country are making headway. Key to success in all of the programs was the attitude of the officers and their leaders, who were open to new ideas, empathetic, and willing to learn the language and culture of their communities.

On behalf of the COPS Office, I thank the many forum participants who so generously gave their time and shared their experiences. It is our hope that their contributions will inspire as well as inform law enforcement leaders across our nation. As the report notes, there has been success in establishing relationships to prevent violent extremism. But we still have far to go, and must explore all avenues to counter this insidious threat.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'R. Davis', written in a cursive style.

Ronald L. Davis
Director
Office of Community Oriented Policing Service

Acknowledgments

The Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) would like to thank the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) for supporting this examination of building interdisciplinary partnerships to prevent violent extremism. We are thankful to COPS Office Director Ronald Davis and Acting Deputy Director Sandra Webb for recognizing the importance of this issue. We are also grateful to our program managers at the COPS Office—Helene Bushwick, Billie Coleman, and Sarah Estill—for their support and encouragement throughout the project.

We would also like to thank the more than 90 representatives from police agencies, community organizations, academia, and the federal government who took time out of their busy schedules to participate in our September 18, 2015 forum in Minneapolis, Minnesota (see the list of participants on page 67; titles in this report reflect participants' titles at the time of the meeting). Their insights prompted a thoughtful discussion about how to forge partnerships among diverse stakeholders to make communities more resilient to violent extremism. Special thanks are due to William Braniff, the Executive Director for the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland, for moderating the day's discussion.

Finally, credit is due to PERF staff members who prepared for and hosted the joint COPS Office and PERF forum, and wrote and edited this publication: Jessica Toliver, Director of Technical Assistance; Research Associates Elizabeth Miller and Margaret Brunner; Craig Fischer, Director of Communications; and Research Assistant Adam Kemerer.

Introduction

“The potential for violent extremist groups to radicalize and recruit people to commit acts of terrorism is one of the biggest threats facing the United States today, and what sets this threat apart is that it can be virtually impossible to detect. Individuals can be indoctrinated online without ever leaving their homes. Violent acts can be carried out by perpetrators who never showed outward signs of criminal behavior. That’s why we need law enforcement agencies to work closely with their communities, strengthen prevention and intervention, and implement community-based strategies to build resilience to this type of violent extremism.”

—Sandra Webb, Acting Deputy Director of the COPS Office

On June 17, 2015, nine people were shot and killed in Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina.¹ The shooter, 21-year-old Dylann Roof, reportedly hoped that his act of violence would spark a race war.²

In November 2015, Robert Dear left three people dead and four wounded after he opened fire on a Planned Parenthood facility in Colorado Springs, Colorado. At a court appearance following his arrest, Dear referred to himself as a “warrior for the babies.”³

Two weeks later, 14 people were killed and 22 wounded in a terrorist attack in San Bernardino, California. The assailants, a married couple named Syed Riawan Farook and Tashfeen Malik, were self-identified supporters of the Islamic State (ISIL).⁴ Malik even proclaimed her loyalty to Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi on Facebook as their attack was under way.⁵

¹ Founded in 1816, “Mother Emanuel,” as the church is known, is the oldest African Methodist Episcopal church in the South and has one of the largest black congregations south of Baltimore.

² Harriet McLeod, “Friend of Charleston Church Shooting Suspect Pleads Guilty to Lying,” *Reuters*, April 29, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-south-carolina-shooting-idUSKCN0XQ17N>.

³ Sarah Kaplan, “‘I’m a Warrior for the Babies’ Planned Parenthood Suspect Declares in Court,” *The Washington Post*, December 10, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/12/10/im-a-warrior-for-the-babies-planned-parenthood-suspect-declares-in-court/>.

⁴ Faith Karimi, “San Bernardino Shooters ‘Supporters’ of ISIS, Terror Group Says,” *CNN*, December 5, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/05/us/san-bernardino-shooting/>.

⁵ Greg Botelho and Ralph Ellis, “San Bernardino Shooting Investigated as ‘Act of Terrorism,’” *CNN*, December 5, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/04/us/san-bernardino-shooting/index.html>.

Acts of violence inspired by extremist ideologies are a real threat with which communities across the country are increasingly contending. In the wake of each of these attacks, our nation and others have been left to grapple with why they occurred and how they can be prevented.

Increasingly, solutions for addressing these types of attacks have been found in partnerships among various types of government service providers—such as between the police and health and human services departments—as well as between government service providers and members of the community. The aims of these partnerships are to strengthen social cohesion within the community and to provide assistance to community members at risk of radicalization to violent extremism, diverting them from the path to violence.

Violent extremism is not a problem that law enforcement agencies can solve through arrests and prosecutions alone. At a 2015 National Institute of Justice conference, called “Radicalization and Violent Extremism: Lessons Learned from Canada, the U.K., and the U.S.,” researchers identified issues with identity, a desire for belonging, past trauma, personal connections to violent extremists and extremist narratives, and mental illness among some of the potential risk factors for radicalizing to violence.⁶ These are issues that police can address more effectively in cooperation with community leaders, social service providers, and other non-law enforcement stakeholders.⁷

To explore these issues, on September 18, 2015, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) and the Department of Justice’s Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) held a forum on Building Interdisciplinary Partnerships to Prevent Violent Extremism. This forum, which took place in Minneapolis in partnership with the Hennepin County Sheriff’s Office, the Minneapolis Police Department, and the Saint Paul Police Department, brought together police leaders and community partners from across the country to share their recommendations for how to build successful partnerships to prevent violent extremism.⁸

Format of the forum

The forum was divided into four panel presentations, each given by police executives and their partners from four geographically and demographically distinct areas of the country:

- The Minneapolis–Saint Paul–Hennepin County area
- The city of Cambridge, Massachusetts

⁶ National Institute of Justice, “Radicalization and Violent Extremism: Lessons Learned from Canada, the U.K., and the U.S.” (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2015), v, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/249947.pdf>.

⁷ For more, see Stevan Weine et al., “Lessons Learned from Mental Health and Education: Identifying Best Practices for Addressing Violent Extremism,” final report to the Office of University Programs, Science and Technology Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security (College Park, MD: START, 2015), 1, https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_LessonsLearnedfromMentalHealthAndEducation_FullReport_Oct2015.pdf.

⁸ All quotations are from forum participants at the September 18, 2015 event unless otherwise attributed.

- The Los Angeles, California, area
- Montgomery County, Maryland, a suburban county that borders Washington, D.C.

The agencies in each of these areas are nationally recognized for their expertise in community engagement and forging strong interdisciplinary partnerships to prevent violent extremism. Indeed, in 2014 the Los Angeles, Minneapolis–Saint Paul–Hennepin County, and Boston areas were chosen by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the National Counterterrorism Center as pilot sites to “identify promising practices that will inform and inspire community-led efforts throughout the nation. . . [and] broaden the base of community leaders and key stakeholders involved at the local level in order to help eliminate conditions that lead to alienation and violent extremism, and to empower young people and other vulnerable communities to reject destructive ideologies.”^{9,10} These promising practices were captured in frameworks for countering violent extremism, or CVE, developed by participating police agencies and their community partners.¹¹

In addition to the panel members, participants included police officials and their community partners from across the country. The ten participating police agencies were at various stages in the implementation of community outreach programs. For police departments in the early stages of building their community engagement efforts, the forum provided various approaches to organizing their efforts. For agencies with significant experience on these issues, the forum provided high-level discussions of the finer points of community engagement.

Broad lessons and individual case studies

The purpose of this report is to provide guidance to police agencies that are creating community engagement programs or refining their current programs. The report is divided into two sections:

1. A summary of lessons learned and recommendations that were common to *all* of the panel presenters
2. Individual case studies, which examine each panel’s jurisdiction and engagement efforts in depth and chart how the development of these efforts was guided by the particularities of each community

At its close, this report discusses next steps in the field.

⁹ “Pilot Programs are Key to Our Countering Violent Extremism Efforts,” blog post, U.S. Department of Justice, February 18, 2015, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/blog/pilot-programs-are-key-our-countering-violent-extremism-efforts>.

¹⁰ This program was an outgrowth of the *Strategic Implementation Plan for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States* (Washington, DC: White House, 2011), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/sip-final.pdf>.

¹¹ For more, see the Los Angeles, Cambridge, and Minneapolis–Saint Paul–Hennepin County case studies.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations: Themes Common to All of the Panel Presentations

Each of the four panels in the Minneapolis forum described panelists' unique experience in their efforts to prevent violent extremism, based on the nature of their communities. While the details of these programs are different, they share certain core values, approaches, and lessons learned.

This section presents the recommendations and lessons learned that were shared by all of the panel participants.

Lesson 1. Violent extremist ideologies are varied and need to be addressed in their entirety

Forum participants stressed that violent extremism comes in many forms, and building community resilience against violent extremism means addressing it in all of its forms. Police agencies need to educate their officers and their communities about the nature of the different types of extremism and ensure that their outreach efforts encompass all community members who might be at risk for radicalization to violent extremism. Participants emphasized that these efforts must take into account the impact of isolation and the potential for mental illness to play a role in radicalization.

"There is a spectrum of extremism. On one end, we have recruitment by groups like ISIL and al-Qaeda, and on the other end, we have white supremacists and anti-Muslim groups. While the number of cases of radicalization with respect to ISIL is on the rise, and fairly dramatically so, that number still pales in comparison to the number of people on the violent far right."

—Bill Braniff, Executive Director of National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland

Lesson 2. Countering violent extremism is about building healthy, resilient communities

The joint DOJ and DHS Countering Violent Extremism Task Force define Countering Violent Extremism as proactive actions to counter efforts by extremists to radicalize, recruit, and mobilize followers to violence and to address the conditions that allow violent extremist recruitment and radicalization.

CVE is about building stronger communities. In practice, this means forging productive partnerships among government agencies, community members, and nongovernmental organizations to close service-delivery gaps and address issues that might make a community member more vulnerable to radicalization to violent extremism. This network of community and government partners is built through outreach and engagement. Community-led groups and service providers are central to prevention efforts.

“The Countering Violent Extremism program (CVE), when it was first established, had a different connotation for the community. Because of the way it was presented, it was understood as being a counterterrorism program. Within the community, it was as though someone had shouted ‘Fire!’ Everyone quickly distanced themselves from it, because counterterrorism is something that community members are very sensitive about.

What CVE stands for today is very different. Engaging with the community, providing services, being able to help in ways that are going to be beneficial to the community and to law enforcement is what CVE is, and what it should have been from the very beginning.”

—*Imam Ismail Fenni, Islamic Society of Boston*

“Preventing violent extremism is really about communities, building resiliency, making sure that people have access to government, teaching problem-solving skills, and intervening with at-risk community members. It’s about providing resources to make communities healthier and to address discrimination and their challenges that they’re facing. That’s the real message: empowering communities and getting them access to social services, intervention services, and diversion programs to give people constructive ‘off-ramps’ if they’re in crisis. It’s not about stigmatizing communities or profiling communities.”

—*Mike Downing, Deputy Chief of the Los Angeles Police Department*

Community organizations are essential to intervention efforts for community members in crisis. Interventions often are conducted informally by religious leaders, school counselors, and social workers, but all of the panelists agreed that it is also important to institutionalize these efforts in government agencies. Formal programs help to ensure that there will be a standardized procedure for connecting community members at risk of radicalization to violent extremism to social services, mental health services, and other forms of assistance, and to ensure that their needs are addressed.

“Up until now, outreach and relationship building have been centered in police departments. It has been about the police going out to each individual community. What we’re saying is that you really need to create relationships not only between the community and the police and county government, but also among the different communities in a given area. We can’t build cohesion and resilience without first developing relationships among ourselves.”

—*Dr. Hedieh Mirahmadi, President of the World Organization for Resource Development and Education (WORDE)*

Lesson 3. Preventing violent extremism is local

Every community is unique, and therefore every CVE program should be tailored to local conditions and demographics. What is more, local agencies and community stakeholders are the ones with the most comprehensive knowledge of their communities’ needs and concerns and are therefore often best positioned to address them. As a result, preventing violent extremism should be seen as a local issue in a national context.

“There is no silver bullet for this; there is no ‘one size fits all.’ You have to understand how your community expresses itself, and then design your outreach program around that expression.”

—*Mike Downing, Deputy Chief of the Los Angeles Police Department*

Lesson 4. The support of police leaders is vital

Forum panelists repeatedly emphasized that community outreach programs cannot be started or maintained without the support of law enforcement leadership. This is because law enforcement is responsible not only for providing institutional support for outreach efforts, but also for creating a culture of community engagement in which outreach programs are considered a vital part of police work.

“In order for CVE to work within an agency, the commitment has to start at the top. It works its way through the organization, but you need a commitment to community outreach from the chief law enforcement officer, the U.S. Attorney, the FBI Special Agent in Charge—whoever it is in your agency who is in charge. Without that commitment from the top, an agency-wide culture of outreach won’t take hold.”

—Richard Stanek, Sheriff of Hennepin County, Minnesota

Lesson 5. Outreach programs should address the identity issues faced by youths in immigrant communities

Young people in immigrant communities face special identity challenges. They often find themselves caught between the culture of their parents and the culture of their peers, causing communication issues at home and in school that leave them without a strong sense of belonging.

A desire to belong can make young people vulnerable and more likely to join gangs¹² or participate in violence inspired by extremist ideologies.¹³ Outreach programs should work with parents and young people to bridge this divide and help adolescents feel more solidly rooted in their communities. Forum participants also stressed the importance of facilitating positive and constructive communication platforms and opportunities among community members from different neighborhoods, schools, or cities to address issues of isolation that contribute to identity challenges.

¹² Daryl Harris et al., *Understanding the Psychology of Gang Violence: Implications for Designing Effective Violence Interventions* (United Kingdom Ministry of Justice, 2011), 1, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/217379/research-gang-violence.pdf.

¹³ Sarah Lyons-Padilla et al, “Belonging Nowhere: Marginalization & Radicalization Risk among Muslim Immigrants,” *Behavioral Science & Policy* 1, no. 2 (2015): 1–12, [http://gelfand.umd.edu/papers/BSP_2_Lyons_2p%20\(002\).pdf](http://gelfand.umd.edu/papers/BSP_2_Lyons_2p%20(002).pdf).

“One thing that we need to address is the identity crisis among our young people. In my experience in the Somali community, lots of kids don’t know if they’re Somali or American, and they feel caught between the two.

I have two kids, and I teach them that their nationality is American and their ethnicity is Somali. But not all parents are aware of the identity crisis their children face.

It’s not about assimilation; it’s about integration. I’m Somali, I’m Muslim, I’m tall, I’m black, and I’m also an American. I can have my name, my faith, my cultural background, and look the way that I do, and still be an American. That’s an important lesson that young people need to learn.”

—Abdi Mohamed, Somali Community Liaison for the Hennepin County Sheriff’s Office

Lesson 6. Anticipate inevitable setbacks and build contingency plans

Miscommunications, panelists agreed, are likely to happen in the course of building relationships between the police and their communities. Police officers might unintentionally run afoul of a community member’s cultural mores; community members might not follow through on plans that police officers had considered settled.

These incidents should be anticipated; they should also be turned into opportunities to improve communication between the police and community members. When things go wrong, departments should have a plan for reaching out to the community and engaging in an honest dialogue about where things went awry and how efforts can be improved moving forward.

“I am going to give you all one piece of advice: if you are going to work with communities, expect difficulties, pushback, conflict. . .

This is all part of the deal, so don’t sign up for this if you’re not ready to handle that.”

—Saida Abdi, Associate Director for Community Relations in the Refugee Trauma and Resilience Center at Boston Children’s Hospital

Lesson 7. Take a whole-community approach

Building community resilience to violent extremism and working to improve the overall health of the community requires that the entire community be taken into consideration. As forum participants explained, this means that outreach efforts should encompass all of the groups represented in a given jurisdiction, including community members of diverse faiths, cultures, races, socioeconomic statuses, and sexual orientations. Outreach initiatives that do not take the whole-community approach risk stigmatizing the groups on whom they do focus (who might view police outreach as a cover for intelligence-gathering), as well as the groups they seem to ignore (who might feel that resources are not being shared equally).

Our philosophy in Cambridge is to focus on helping our whole community thrive and succeed, so we've always focused on working with the community as a whole rather than only with certain groups. This approach is important because it demonstrates our core belief that we are all part of one shared community, which we are all working to make healthier and stronger.

—Dr. William Pollack, Cambridge Health Alliance and Harvard Medical School

Each community has some special needs, and we want to make sure that we're reaching out to all of them. Don't place all your eggs in one basket. Connect with all sectors of the community and in all areas. We have reached out to African-American, Native American, Latino, and Asian communities. We've also found that we need to expand to other parts of the community, including the LGBT and senior populations.

—Janeé Harteau, Chief of the Minneapolis Police Department

Lesson 8. Be adaptable

Panelists highlighted adaptability as one of the key features of a successful outreach program. Some community members, for instance, might feel more at ease when officers are wearing “soft” uniforms (e.g., khaki pants and a pullover or a polo shirt with the department’s logo on it). In order to be successful in their efforts, outreach officers need to be able to recognize and adapt to the engagement styles of different community members.

“Another thing we’ve learned is how important it is to be flexible in how we collaborate with community members and build solid partnerships. Even within an agency’s outreach effort, there’s no ‘one size fits all.’ We have to constantly reassess and modify our efforts and our engagement styles, so that we’re as effective as we can be in connecting with different communities.”

—Christine Elow, Deputy Superintendent of the Cambridge Police Department

Lesson 9. Engage in consistent and reliable outreach

Even the most resource-rich outreach programs will founder if community engagement efforts are inconsistent. Outreach officers, forum participants said, need to be a near-constant presence in the lives of community members. Building and sustaining relationships with the community requires an extraordinary investment of time and energy and the success of outreach teams depends on how consistently they are available and responsive to community members.

Similarly, if outreach team members promise to do something for the community—whether it’s attend a wedding, help to coach a swim team, or work with the city transportation department to get a stop sign installed—they need to follow through. Doing so demonstrates that they can be trusted to keep their word.

“Building trust through engagement with the community requires that police keep their efforts consistent. Engagement with no consistent follow-up can lead to mistrust.”

—Anila Ali, Founder and President of the Muslim American Women’s Empowerment Council

Lesson 10. Police should not wait for the community to come to them

Building relationships with community members who may be distrustful of law enforcement requires that law enforcement engage with these community members in spaces that are familiar to the community, even if they are not the places that law enforcement would have chosen. As panelists explained, reaching out to community members on their terms is a necessary first step in relationship-building. In many cases, community members are initially more comfortable engaging with the police in their own neighborhoods and gathering places. Recognizing this and responding accordingly is one way that police departments can demonstrate their commitment to building relationships with community members.

The 10 recommendations above are a foundation on which community outreach and resiliency-building programs can be built. The specifics of those programs, however, should be based on thoughtful consideration of the particular communities being served.

The case studies in the following sections of this report—Montgomery County, Maryland; Minneapolis—Saint Paul—Hennepin County, Minnesota; Los Angeles County, California; and Cambridge, Massachusetts—outline these jurisdictions’ efforts to build community resilience to violent extremism in the ways that reflect their communities’ needs.

“If police agencies don’t reach out to form partnerships with community members, especially community members who are distrustful of the police, those partnerships won’t happen. You can’t just invite community members to meetings and hope that they’ll show up. You need to get out there into the community yourselves and start talking to people and getting out of your comfort zones.”

—Tom Smith, Chief of the Saint Paul Police Department

Case Study: Los Angeles County, California

At the close of 2015, the Los Angeles area was the site of one of the deadliest terrorist attacks in American history. On December 2, Syed Rizwan Farook and his wife, Tashfeen Malik, opened fire at a staff meeting and holiday party for county employees being held in San Bernardino, California.¹⁴ Fourteen people were killed and 22 seriously injured in the attack. An investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) revealed that Farook and Malik were “homegrown violent extremists.”

In the Los Angeles area, the effort to build community resilience against violent extremism is led by the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department (LASD) in partnership with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD).

Each agency has its own outreach programming, and they also lead the greater Los Angeles area’s resilience-building effort through the Los Angeles Interagency Coordination Group (ICG). The ICG was created by the LASD to bring together representatives from various local and federal government agencies to coordinate their outreach and community-building programs.

“We can’t arrest our way out of this problem. This is a high-consequence threat, and the long-term solution rests with local communities and local efforts to build relationships and build trust, so that we can intervene before there is violence.”

—Mike Downing, Deputy Chief of the Los Angeles Police Department

¹⁴ San Bernardino is not within Los Angeles County but just beyond its eastern border in San Bernardino County.

Facts and figures: Los Angeles County, California

Population:¹⁵

- 10,116,705 residents (Los Angeles County is the most populous county in California)

Demographics:¹⁶

- 35% of residents were born outside the United States
- 57% of residents speak a language other than English at home
- 48% of residents are Latino
- 27% of residents are White
- 15% of residents are Asian
- 9% of residents are African American
- 3% of residents are multiracial
- 2% of residents are Native American

The Los Angeles area outreach effort

Overview and organization

Government agencies in the Los Angeles area take a multi-pronged approach to building interdisciplinary partnerships to prevent violent extremism. The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department (LASD) have their own outreach programs, and they keep in close communication and work collaboratively with each other, and with other local government agencies and federal law enforcement officials.

The formal group through which these various stakeholders collaborate is the Los Angeles Interagency Coordination Group (ICG). ICG members work together to coordinate their outreach efforts and address the concerns of community members. ICG members include the LASD, the LAPD, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, the Los Angeles City Office of Human Relations, and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Central District of California. ICG members also work closely with community groups, nongovernmental organizations, and social service providers in the Los Angeles area.

As LASD Sergeant Mike Abdeen explained, "Since we established it in 2008, the ICG meets monthly to discuss our outreach efforts. Our overall purpose is streamlining our collective efforts, working together to enhance our community engagement, raising awareness and engagement among law enforcement

¹⁵ "Quickfacts: Los Angeles County, California," U.S. Census Bureau, accessed September 7, 2016, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/06037,00>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

and the community, and coordinating our communications. We work together when tensions are high with the community as a result of events nationally and globally, and we coordinate our engagement with our interfaith and community partners.”

The goals of the ICG and its member agencies’ outreach initiatives are to (1) build trust and strong partnerships between community members and local police and government agencies; (2) ensure that community members have ready and easy access to resources that they need; (3) build social cohesion and a sense of shared belonging to the greater Los Angeles community; and (4) in so doing, improve the overall health and security of the community in its entirety so that it is more resilient to all forms of extremism and violence.

The greater Los Angeles area was one of three pilot sites chosen in 2014 to participate in the U.S. Department of Justice’s program to counter violent extremism. These pilot sites were selected based on their robust engagement programs to identify and promulgate promising practices for building community resilience against violent extremism. *The Los Angeles Framework for Countering Violent Extremism* was developed by the ICG in cooperation with its community partners.¹⁷

”At the ICG monthly meetings, we plan joint events, share successes and challenges, and brainstorm about how to solve issues that one or all of us might be facing. We recognize that it is not always easy for us to agree on everything, but we talk everything out. That’s important because eventually we reach a point where, when we go out into the community, our message is consistent.”

—Mike Abdeen, Sergeant with the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department

Genesis of the Los Angeles County program

Los Angeles’ coordinated outreach effort began in 2008 and was a product of a poorly-received mapping initiative, according to said LAPD Deputy Chief Mike Downing. LAPD officials said that the initiative was intended to identify where isolated parts of the Muslim American community were located, and then connect members of the community with social services provided by local government agencies and other organizations. Deputy Chief Downing explained that the initiative was designed as a community policing strategy modeled on a similar project that the LAPD had done with the Orthodox Jewish community.

¹⁷ *The Los Angeles Framework for Countering Violent Extremism* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Interagency Coordination Group, 2015), <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Los%20Angeles%20Framework%20for%20CVE-Full%20Report.pdf>.

Although the intention of the project was to strengthen relationships between the LAPD and Muslim-American community members, it ended up sowing deep distrust with the Muslim-American community. They perceived the mapping initiative as religious profiling that unduly targeted Muslim Americans.¹⁸

The Muslim Mapping Initiative: Turning a Crisis into an Opportunity

By Mike Downing, Deputy Chief of the LAPD

In late 2007, we started an initiative that really put us into a crisis situation with the Muslim American community. It was a mapping initiative for the Muslim American community that was similar to something we had done with the Orthodox Jewish community. Our goal was to identify where pockets of communities were, especially those who were isolated and therefore more likely to be victims of crime and also susceptible to recruitment to things like gangs, narcotics, and violent extremism.

We had an agreement with the University of Southern California and with Muslim Public Affairs Council* to begin this project. It was completely overt: part of the initiative was our stated intention to give the results of the mapping project to the Muslim-American community, academics, and other local police agencies. It wasn't a counterterrorism strategy; it was a community policing strategy.

The initiative was designed to identify underserved community members so that we could more effectively connect them with social services, ensure that they had access to local government, and make sure that all of the public safety and quality of life concerns that were important to them were being addressed. I went to Congress, I testified about it, we got a lot of accolades about it for about a week.

And then it started to go downhill as community members spoke out and said that it was religious profiling.

We realized that there was a huge gap between our intentions and community perceptions, and that was because the community didn't have the level of trust in us that we thought. So we got rid of the mapping program, went back to the drawing board, and used this crisis as an opportunity to take a hard look at our outreach efforts and figure out how we could make them better, to not only rebuild the trust that we'd lost, but also to make that trust stronger than it had ever been before.

*"Vision & Mission," Muslim Public Affairs Council, accessed January 6, 2017, <http://www.mpac.org/about/vision-and-mission.php>.

¹⁸ See Richard Winton, Teresa Wantanbe, and Greg Krikorian, "LAPD Defends Muslim Mapping Effort," *Los Angeles Times*, November 10, 2007, <http://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-lapd10nov10-story.html>.

The LAPD decided to reevaluate its relationships with the Muslim-American community and create new programming to build strong relationships of trust.

“I refer to that whole experience as failing forward,” Deputy Chief Downing explained, “because it was a failure. It created a crisis that was both dangerous and an important opportunity, and we took that opportunity to get back into the trenches, go grassroots, and roll up our sleeves. We redoubled our efforts to get deep into the community and connect with people who were mistrustful of the police and felt really isolated, to see what we could do to help them feel a part of the larger Los Angeles community.”

In order to address the problem, Deputy Chief Downing first brought an officer on board to rebuild trusting relationships with the Muslim American community. As its relationship-building efforts grew, the LAPD then created a free-standing unit, called the Liaison Unit, dedicated to conducting outreach with community members. The Liaison Unit has officers dedicated to reaching out to various communities in Los Angeles, including Muslim Americans and Orthodox Jews.

In response to these efforts, and in recognition of the need for collaboration among the various police and government agencies serving the public, Sergeant Mike Abdeen of the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department’s Muslim Affairs Unit created the Interagency Coordination Group (ICG) in 2008 to augment the success of each agency’s individual outreach initiatives.

Tenets of the Los Angeles approach

The three pillars of the Los Angeles area effort to address violent extremism and build strong community relationships are prevention, intervention, and interdiction.¹⁹ First, the LASD, LAPD, and their partners focus on prevention. “These prevention efforts,” said Deputy Chief Downing, “are geared toward building community resilience to violent extremism and numerous other influences and circumstances that might result in community members moving down the wrong path.”

Los Angeles is also working to formalize an intervention program for community members in crisis.

Lastly, and as a final resort when confronted with criminal activity, is interdiction. This component is necessary for ensuring that individuals who are intent upon committing acts of violence inspired by violent extremist ideologies are prevented from harming others, and that the community is kept safe.

¹⁹ *The Los Angeles Framework* (see note 17).

Recommendations for police agencies

Getting outreach efforts off the ground

In the process of developing their outreach efforts, the LASD and LAPD have become internationally-recognized leaders in the effort to build robust and productive partnerships between police agencies and the communities they serve. At the PERF forum in September 2015, they laid out their key recommendations, based on their experiences, for police agencies looking to build community outreach initiatives.

“We need to develop a culture of prevention. I know that this is hard for law enforcement because we think that we’re first responders, we’re tactical. But we need to start thinking about ourselves as ‘first preventers.’

In the CVE context, it’s about reaching community members at risk of radicalization before they head down that road. This is about developing a culture of first preventers and getting communities on board with the idea that they’re first preventers, too.”

—Mike Downing, Deputy Chief of the Los Angeles Police Department

Recommendation: Choose the right people for outreach

As Deputy Chief Downing and Sergeant Abdeen explained, choosing the right people to participate on an outreach team can play a significant role in an initiative’s success.

Outreach teams should be diverse and representative of the community with which they work. “Over the years,” said Deputy Chief Downing, “we’ve made sure to have an Egyptian Arabic-speaking Muslim-American officer, an Iranian-born Farsi-speaking officer, a Hebrew-speaking Orthodox Jewish officer, and so on. We need to make sure that our outreach team is representative of the people we’re trying to engage.”

It is important to recognize that having a diverse outreach team is not an immediate guarantee of success. Sergeant Abdeen said that the characteristics that ultimately matter most in an outreach officer are not necessarily linguistic ability or cultural background, but the officer’s personality.

“Getting the right people on board doesn’t necessarily mean that you have to have somebody who speaks the language or is from the community itself,” Abdeen said. “What you need is somebody who is willing to learn, who is open-minded, who is cultured, who is educated, and who is willing to go out and learn and listen to people’s concerns.”

“When I was asked to start our program, I assumed that since I’m an American Muslim and I speak Arabic, it was going to be an easy task. I thought I would go out into the community and everyone would welcome me with open arms, and that I was going to do really well right off the bat.

Well, it was a wakeup call when I first started reaching out, because the program was new and everyone was like, ‘Who is this guy here talking about being friends with the cops and the government?’ What I learned is that, while cultural competency is important to have, what matters even more is having the right mindset for the job.”

—Mike Abdeen, Sergeant in the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department

Equally important in an outreach officer is a commitment to the job in the long term, as relationship-building is time-intensive. “You need people who are willing to stick with it for a while,” Sergeant Abdeen said, “because it’s a position that you can’t keep turning over every month. Relationships take time to develop.”

Recommendation: Take a “whole community” approach

Outreach efforts should not focus only on one or two subsets of a community. A narrow focus can cause more problems than it solves, by alienating the community members police are engaging and those they are not engaging. The result can be the opposite of the social cohesion and sense of belonging to the larger community that outreach efforts should be building.

“We need to focus on all communities. It’s a recognition of the fact that violent extremism is not a Muslim problem, it’s not a Jewish problem, and it’s not a Christian problem. It’s a human problem. The only way we are going to solve it is through developing these partnerships among different government agencies and with the community.”

—Mike Downing, Deputy Chief of the Los Angeles Police Department

“I always say ‘Muslim communities’ instead of ‘Muslim community,’ because there is no such thing as one Muslim community. There is no one area that I can go to and say, ‘This is where the Muslims are.’ Muslims come from various ethnic groups with different cultural backgrounds. There are Southeast Asian Muslims, Latino Muslims, African American Muslims, and they all have different experiences and different needs. ‘Muslim community’ is too simplistic. Muslims are Americans—they’re part of the community.”

—Mike Abdeen, Sergeant in the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department

“Don’t put all your eggs in one basket,” said Deputy Chief Downing, “because if the community feels that you’re favoring a certain organization or that you’re better partners with one person rather than another, it’s going to delegitimize your position in the community. What we are trying to do is create this ‘starfish’ environment so that decisions, influence, and power don’t rest with a single hierarchical source. We are always trying to spread out our contacts in the community so that everyone feels like they have equal access to us.”

Recommendation: Never “securitize” outreach

Outreach efforts should never be used to gather intelligence on community members or otherwise engage in counterterrorism activities. Outreach is about building trusting relationships with community members, a mandate that is diametrically opposed to covert intelligence gathering.

“This is not about intelligence,” said Deputy Chief Downing. “It can never be about intelligence. You can never use it as a platform for exploitation of your relationships with community members, because if you do that, you will delegitimize yourself and communities will no longer trust you. What we’re doing is about trust building, it’s about engagement, it’s about relationships. It’s not about intelligence.”

As a result, any contact databases associated with outreach efforts should always be kept completely separate from databases used by investigators. If community members approach outreach team members with crime tips, because they have built a relationship of trust in the police, the tips should be passed along to investigators, but outreach officers should be completely divorced from any resulting investigations.

Just as importantly, outreach officers should be transparent with community members about how they will handle any crime tips that are shared with them.

Recommendation: Avoid locating outreach units in investigative divisions within a police agency

Ideally, outreach should be kept separate from intelligence-gathering units, so there will be no opportunity for misperception among community members that outreach efforts are a cover for other activities.

“It depends on the size of your agency and what your goals are,” said Sergeant Abdeen, “but if you have a community relations or community coordination section, outreach efforts should be led from there.”

In the LAPD, the Liaison Unit is organized under the Counter-Terrorism and Special Operations Bureau. While this might seem counterintuitive, keeping the Liaison Unit in the CTSOB was a conscious choice by Deputy Chief Downing, so that he could personally ensure that the unit stayed intact and true to its engagement mandate. “As long as I’m with the LAPD,” he explained, “it will stay with me. Ultimately it should go into the public affairs and community relations division, but it will stay with me for now, so that I can ensure that it stays focused and that its work is fully supported. In my current role, I ensure that there is absolutely no mission creep between the Liaison Unit and investigative units.”

Recommendation: Focus on building interagency partnerships

Just as police agencies should reach out to all members of their communities, so too should they work to build productive partnerships with other government agencies. This improves the delivery of services to community members in need, and ensures that all of the government agencies that interact with the community are sharing the same messages and connecting people with the same types of resources. It also helps the agencies to work in concert and adapt quickly to changing circumstances and crises in the community.

Overcoming challenges

Los Angeles’ outreach efforts have faced challenges.

One of these is limited resources and competing demands. Like other cities, Los Angeles contends with numerous types of crime and has a finite amount of funding and staffing available. Despite these competing demands, police leaders must be committed to staffing and funding outreach initiatives, or the efforts will wither. In the Los Angeles area, police executives have thrown their weight behind outreach efforts, and the community has shown support for these efforts. This has created a culture of engagement within police agencies and within the community as a whole.

Even given the general support in the community, Los Angeles agencies have had to face the challenge of misinformation and misperception within the community that outreach efforts are part of a counterterrorism and intelligence-gathering program. “What you’re going to have to realize,” said LASD Sergeant Mike Abdeen, “is that this misunderstanding is a fact of life, and so you need to design a strategy to work around it and not get discouraged when it happens.”

One way to address these misconceptions is to work with community members to constantly spread the message about what outreach and preventing violent extremism initiatives entail. Muslim-American women in Los Angeles have proven important partners in this effort. “Women serve as a first line of defense against any kind of radicalization,” said Anila Ali, founder and President of the American Muslim Women’s Empowerment Council.²⁰ “All they want is to make sure that their children are successful and don’t get involved in criminal activity. That’s why educating women about CVE is so important. Once they understand that it’s not about spying and sending informants into mosques, but is instead about building bridges between communities and government agencies and services to make communities stronger and healthier, they get it and they want to get involved.”

Overcoming Resistance within the Department

Question from the Audience: We appreciate everything that you’ve shared today about your successes and the challenges that you’ve faced. As a law enforcement officer, one of the questions I have is what kind of challenges you’ve faced internally, in dealing with some of the “good ol’ boy” police guys who don’t want to get on board with this type of policing?

Deputy Chief Mike Downing, Los Angeles Police Department: One of the reasons that the Liaison Unit is still in my bureau is because I think that we still need to do some work in that area, and I want to make sure that the outreach team has all of the institutional support they need to do this important work.

Outreach is so important in terms of where we’re headed as a country, and how we can best address the violent extremist threat that we’re facing from all across the spectrum, from white supremacists to Islamic extremism. What police agencies need is someone who will be the cheerleader for outreach and who will continually drive it, because you don’t want to get lost in other priorities.

It’s so incredibly important, and it has an impact that goes beyond preventing radicalization. It has an impact on emergency preparedness, on community resiliency, on the health of communities, on interagency communication. It can even help mitigate some of the anti-law enforcement sentiment that we’ve seen across the country.

²⁰ LAPD, “American Muslim Women’s Empowerment Council,” news release, last updated April 23, 2015, http://www.lapdonline.org/west_bureau/news_view/58544.

Productive community partnerships: Examples from Los Angeles

The LAPD and LASD have worked diligently to build productive partnerships with numerous community members and community organizations. Young people and women in the Muslim American community are often not easily reached through traditional outreach efforts, and they have concerns that are often different from those of older people and men in their communities. Recognizing that these communities have unique needs, the LASD and LAPD took special care to address them.

Reaching out to young people

Young Muslim Americans, especially those whose parents were born outside of the United States, can sometimes struggle with their sense of identity and feel caught between the culture of their parents and the culture in which they are raised. While educating parents about this conflict is important, so too is providing opportunities for young Muslims to develop a sense of belonging to the American community. This is not to say that they should be pressured to assimilate. Rather, young Muslim Americans need to be given the chance to fully integrate into their communities, so that they no longer feel that there is a conflict between the cultural traditions of their families and their American identities.

LASD Sergeant Abdeen established the **Young Muslim American Leaders Advisory Council (YoungMALAC)**, whose purpose is to promote civic engagement among young Muslim Americans, build avenues for communication between them and police agencies, and develop their leadership skills. YoungMALAC is composed of 12 young people, ranging in age from 19 to 27, who meet several times a month to plan activities, community service events, and training workshops. Members also conduct their own outreach to young people in the community and connect young Muslim Americans with the sheriff's department and other local police agencies.

Finding My Muslim American Identity

By Ali Jakvani, Chairman, YoungMALAC

I am the product of a multicultural family. My mother is from Mexico—she's a Mexican Muslim—and my father is from Pakistan. I grew up in a Muslim American household where we didn't have certain cultural touchstones, so finding a sense of who I am and my identity was difficult.

In trying to figure everything out, I was drawn toward my Muslim roots, but it was difficult at the beginning to figure out whether I was a Muslim or whether I was an American, since it didn't seem like the two identities could coexist. It was through my experience with law enforcement and with YoungMALAC, which began when I was 15, that I began to understand that these weren't two different identities at all. Now I am proud to say that I am an American Muslim.

According to Ali Jakvani, the chairman of YoungMALAC, his group's activities include feeding and providing other aid to the homeless, arranging ride-alongs for young people interested in learning more about police work, and producing outreach events at local schools.

YoungMALAC's message to young Muslim Americans, Mr. Jakvani explained, is that the most effective way to make substantive changes in how local government does business is by working with local government representatives. "I encourage civic engagement," he said, "and I believe that the best way to make change is by sitting at the table and helping to shape policy, not separating yourself from the government. Young Muslim Americans are part of the fabric of American society, so we should participate in it to make sure that it's a welcoming space for us."

Beyond helping young Muslim Americans become more engaged with their communities, YoungMALAC also develops Muslim American communities' future leaders. "One of the main components of our program is working with young people and developing young leaders," said Sergeant Abdeen. "We realized that while it is of course important to work with those who are leading the community today, it is equally important that we develop new, young leaders so that we can sustain our community partnerships in the decades down the road."

"It's very difficult to get young people engaged and for them to understand that law enforcement is there to help us and isn't out to get us.

I understand this, and the people who are part of my team understand this. That's why we work so hard to spread our message of civic engagement and bridge the trust gap between law enforcement and Muslim communities."

—Ali Jakvani, *Chairman of the Young Muslim Americans Advisory Council*

Reaching out to Muslim-American Women

From the outset, the LAPD and LASD have made a concerted effort to reach out to Muslim-American women. "I take pride in saying that law enforcement saw the needs of our community—especially the women—and came forward to support us," said Anila Ali, founder and President of the **American Muslim Women's Empowerment Council**. "They facilitated the empowerment of Muslim women and as a result we have a very high level of trust with them."

As Ms. Ali explained, "We realized that Muslim women are quite powerful, and when they have a voice they speak up. But we felt that they needed a platform, and if they could be given that platform with support from federal government agencies and law enforcement, they would take a leadership role."

Part of the work of the LAPD and LASD was helping Muslim-American women create that platform by encouraging their civic engagement and supporting the creation of community organizations tailored to them, such as Ms. Ali's American Muslim Women's Empowerment Council (AMWEC).

For Muslim-American women, the police have served not only as an ally but also an important resource. In cooperation with AMWEC, the LAPD has provided guidance and educational programming on domestic violence to women in Muslim American communities. The FBI also speaks at the AMWEC conference every year about women's civil rights.

Summary of recommendations for police agencies

- **In building community trust, challenges should be expected, and should be seen as opportunities to improve.** Setbacks are an opportunity to learn and improve outreach and community engagement efforts. As Deputy Chief Downing expressed it, "Part of what CVE is, in my view, is putting credits in the community trust 'bank.' So when you make a mistake, you may use up a few of those credits, but you won't go bankrupt."
- **Consistency is crucial in building community trust.** Engaging and then disengaging can create mistrust in the community, because it calls into question the commitment of outreach officers and the police department.
- **Look for the right personality traits when recruiting outreach officers.** It is important to develop outreach teams that are culturally competent and reflect the community. A number of police officials have said that it is even more important that officers have the right personality traits for the job. Successful outreach officers are genuine, open-minded, persistent, and interested in learning from the community.
- **Collaborate with other government agencies and social service providers to coordinate outreach efforts and messaging.** This ensures that all participating agencies have contacts they can use when they must quickly help community members in need. It also ensures that all local agencies are united in their outreach efforts and are not working against each other unknowingly.
- **Embrace the whole-community approach.** If one of the goals of an outreach program is to build community resilience against violent extremism, then everyone in the community should be involved. Focusing outreach efforts on any single group within the community has the potential to alienate that group, who might see those efforts as a cover for surveillance activities. It can also alienate others in the community who might feel that resources are being unfairly funneled toward one particular group.

- **Outreach should never have an intelligence-gathering mandate.** Outreach efforts should be about building relationships, not gathering intelligence. Mixing functions can delegitimize outreach officers in the eyes of the community.
- **Find ways to engage with community members who might not be accessible through traditional outreach efforts.** In Los Angeles, this has meant devising novel ways to connect with young Muslim Americans and Muslim-American women, identifying their particular needs, and finding ways to address them.

Case Study: Minneapolis–Saint Paul—Hennepin County, Minnesota

Violence inspired by extremist ideologies is a closely-watched issue in the Minneapolis–Saint Paul area because a number of people from the area have been charged with providing material support to terrorist groups overseas.

As Hennepin County Sheriff Richard Stanek explained, “Unfortunately, we learned first-hand in 2008 and early 2009 about the reality of radicalization when we had about a dozen young men radicalize and go abroad to fight with al-Shabaab. Most of these young men had never seen Somalia and had only known their American lives. But as we have learned, this problem is not limited to one group. Radicalization is a threat to young people in every community.”

Each of the police agencies represented on this panel—the Hennepin County Sheriff’s Office, the Minneapolis Police Department, and the Saint Paul Police Department—has its own community engagement initiatives. In addition, they have a joint outreach and community-building effort, led by the U. S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Minnesota and a task force of community members.

Facts and figures: Minneapolis, Saint Paul, and Hennepin County

Jurisdictions:

- Minneapolis is the county seat of Hennepin County
- Saint Paul is the county seat of Ramsey County

Population:

- Hennepin County: 1.2 million residents (407,000 of whom live in Minneapolis)²¹
- Ramsey County: 538,000 residents (298,000 of whom live in Saint Paul)²²

²¹ “Quickfacts: Hennepin County, Minnesota,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed September 7, 2016, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/27053,00>.

²² “Quickfacts: Ramsey County, Minnesota,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed September 7, 2016, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/27123,00>.

Demographics:

- Minneapolis²³
 - 15% of residents were born outside the United States
 - 60% of residents are White (non-Latino)
 - 19% of residents are African American
 - 11% of residents are Latino
 - 6% of residents are Asian
 - 4% of residents are multiracial
- Saint Paul²⁴
 - 18 % of residents were born outside the United States
 - 56% of residents are White (non-Latino)
 - 16 % of residents are African American
 - 15 % of residents are Asian
 - 10 % of residents are Latino
 - 4% of residents are multiracial

The Minneapolis–Saint Paul–Hennepin County approach to building community resilience

Overview and organization

The Minneapolis–Saint Paul approach to community engagement operates on two levels. First, each of the agencies in the area—the Hennepin County Sheriff’s Office (HCSO), the Saint Paul Police Department (SPPD), and the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD)—has its own particular approach to outreach and its own outreach initiatives. Second, all of these agencies collaborate in an area-wide engagement effort to prevent violent extremism.

All of these engagement programs are characterized by a commitment to building productive partnerships with community members, social service providers, and the school system. Their goals are to improve social cohesion, reinforce community trust in the police, and strengthen community resilience to violent extremism in all of its forms.

²³ “Quickfacts: Minneapolis City, Minnesota,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed September 7, 2016, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/27/2743000.html>.

²⁴ “Quickfacts: St Paul City, Minnesota,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed September 7, 2016, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/2758000,00>.

At the individual agency level, the program in the HCSO is led by a Community Engagement Team comprised of two officers and two other professional outreach specialists. The MPD's Community Engagement Team includes five outreach officers, two bike officers, and two supervisors. Saint Paul's outreach efforts are not operated out of a single unit, but rather are supported by the entire department.

At the regional level, the joint effort, described in a seven-page report by the U.S. Attorney's Office,²⁵ was created through the U.S. Justice Department's 2014 Countering Violent Extremism pilot program. Minneapolis–Saint Paul was one of three areas in the country chosen to develop and disseminate a collaborative model for preventing violent extremism. These sites were chosen based on their already robust community outreach and engagement efforts.

The Building Community Resilience Program is led not by law enforcement agencies, but rather by Andrew Luger, the United States Attorney for the District of Minnesota, and a task force of 15 community members. As Mohamed Farah, Executive Director of Ka Joog,²⁶ described it, "The task force was created by the community, for the community, to lead the program alongside the U.S. Attorney's Office."

Genesis of the Minneapolis–Saint Paul—Hennepin County outreach initiatives

The MPD's and HCSO's Engagement Teams were created in response to the "travelers crisis" of 2008 and 2009,²⁷ when 18 young Somali American men left the Twin Cities area to fight with al Shabaab in Somalia, and in recognition of the fact that both departments needed to formalize and enhance their efforts to engage with the East African community. Their outreach programs have since expanded to the other communities in their jurisdictions.

In early 2013, the MPD, in collaboration with the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), PERF, and other justice system partners, initiated another program to build police-community relationships in the predominantly East-African community of Cedar-Riverside. The goal of this program was to test the benefits of using the concepts of procedural justice during every police interaction in the community, in combination with evidence-based crime reduction strategies to help drive down crime (see the sidebar on Procedural Justice on page 32). This initiative focused on such strategies as increasing positive, informal police-community interactions; increasing officer understanding of cultural challenges and community perceptions of the police; implementing educational efforts to increase community understanding of the U.S. justice system and processes; developing specific ways for using every

²⁵ *Building Community Resilience, Minneapolis–St. Paul Pilot Program: A Community-Led Local Framework* (Minneapolis, MN: U.S. Attorney's Office, 2015), <http://www.justice.gov/usao-mn/file/642121/download>.

²⁶ Ka Joog is a Minneapolis-based organization dedicated to improving the lives of Somali-American young people. Its mission, according to its website, is to motivate youth to attain a higher education, realize their potential, and achieve their dreams and to raise multicultural and health awareness and build community ties by providing educational, cultural, and beneficial events through the arts. "Ka Joog," accessed September 7, 2016, <http://www.kajoog.org>.

²⁷ "Timeline: Minnesota Pipeline to al-Shabab," *Minnesota Public Radio*, September 25, 2013, http://minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/ongoing/somali_timeline/.

interaction to demonstrate civil, unbiased, fair, and respectful policing; and increasing opportunities for engaging youth. The official report on the study has not been released; however police officials and community members reported that the initiative was highly successful, increasing mutual respect and trust among the police, justice officials, and community members who were involved in the program.

The SPPD's official outreach to the Somali community began in 2003. Its goal was to cut through the distrust that had grown between police agencies and Muslim communities in the wake of 9/11 and to build relationships between SPPD and underserved community members.

These engagement efforts were reinforced through a 2010 grant called the African Immigrant Muslim Community Outreach Program (AIMCOP).

These three police agencies worked together in the years before the DOJ pilot program, and their cooperative efforts were formalized in 2015 as part of the Building Community Resilience Program.

Tenets of the Building Community Resilience Program

The tenets of the Building Community Resilience Program, based on the already successful outreach efforts of the program's constituent agencies, are engagement, prevention, and intervention.²⁸ First, the program seeks to increase engagement between government agencies and underserved communities. Second, it aims to redouble prevention efforts, to reduce factors that make community members more vulnerable to recruitment to violent extremism. Third, program participants are currently working to develop community-led intervention models, to help young people who appear to be at risk of radicalization to violent extremism.²⁹

In dealing with CVE and building communities of trust, you must be open to taking risks Developing the relationships we have in Saint Paul, such as our East African youth summits, the hiring of the first Somali [woman] allowed to wear a hijab at work, came with criticism from some who felt it was not American to do so. Law enforcement leaders need to continue to move forward and educate naysayers and be willing to take some heat if they truly want to be successful.

—Tom Smith, Former Chief of the Saint Paul Police Department

²⁸ *Building Community Resilience* (see note 25).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

“Violent extremism is clearly a local threat. Local law enforcement is on the front lines, educating and strengthening our communities to prevent these threats. The full spectrum of our responsibilities includes engagement, prevention, and intervention. It’s the three of these that are really challenging and require that we work closely with our community partners.”

—Richard Stanek, Hennepin County Sheriff

Recommendations for police agencies

Getting outreach efforts off the ground

Following are recommendations based on the experiences of police agencies and community leaders who developed outreach programs in Minneapolis–Saint Paul.

Recommendation: Get the right people involved in outreach

A number of officials said that while cultural competency is an important quality or skill for outreach officers to have, it is not the only characteristic that agencies should look in building outreach teams. Agencies should ensure that they are recruiting officers with the right *personalities* for the job.

Outreach officers need to be able to connect easily with people and put them at ease. They need to be engaging, persistent, and committed to the importance of outreach and engagement to police work.

“We’re looking for people with really good people skills. Community members often have limited exposure to the police, so we need to be the ones to reach out to them, to make them feel comfortable, to have conversations with them and approach them in a non-confrontational manner.

These folks in outreach need to be very outgoing and comfortable with what they do. They need to have an ability to problem-solve and spend time in doing it. It’s going to take time to build a trusting relationship, and you need to have people on your team who are willing to put in the time to do so.”

—Janeé Harteau, Chief of the Minneapolis Police Department

Procedural Justice: The Foundation of the Minneapolis Community Engagement Program

By Chief Janeé Harteau, Minneapolis Police Department

The foundation on which our community engagement team is built is procedural justice. Everything that we do is founded on the key principles of procedural justice.

The first element is treating people with dignity and respect, no matter who they are and where they have been. Be transparent in what you do. During police encounters, we need to explain why we have done what we've done, so that people understand the process. And when you can de-escalate a situation, you should.

Second is providing people with a voice and listening to what they say. We shouldn't just *tell* the community what we're going to do; we need to bring them to the table to have a two-way conversation about how we can be most effective in their community.

And the last element is trust. In order to have the trust of the community, your word needs to mean something. If you promise to do something, you need to follow through and do it.

They also need to be willing to invest the extraordinary amount of time that it takes to build relationships of trust with community members.

Chief Smith said that some officers are better at community engagement than others, and those with a talent for it should be tapped to lead outreach initiatives. "Finding the right officers is key," he said. "The right officers for this job have a passion for taking on challenges and learning new things, especially learning about the different cultures of community members."

Recommendation: Provide cultural awareness training

While cultural competency is not necessarily a prerequisite for new outreach officers, cultural competency training is an important part of ensuring that they can succeed in their work over time.

"When we first started doing outreach in 2003," Chief Smith said, "I struggled the first year to develop relationships with some of our Somali communities. I walked around with some of my outreach officers, trying to develop relationships, but it didn't work, because I hadn't learned about their culture. What I want to tell law enforcement executives here today is that you need to take the time to learn about their traditions and culture, or your outreach efforts will hit a brick wall."

Chief Smith was able to provide cultural awareness training to every member of the department in 2010, as a result of funding provided by an AIMCOP grant.³⁰ In Hennepin County, cultural awareness training is provided to all agency personnel by members of the Community Engagement Team to ensure that all officers have a basic understanding of the communities with which they engage.

Education also should be extended to members of the community, many of whom do not have a good understanding of what police officers do and their role in the community beyond enforcement.

“Outreach officers, and officers in general, need to clearly explain why officers do what they do. I think that the general public doesn’t really understand what we do as police,” said Chief Harteau. Sharing this information with community members makes the work of the police seem less opaque—and therefore less intimidating—and promotes mutual understanding between the police and community members.

Recommendation: Connect with young people

It is critically important for police departments to reach out to young people, because young people tend to be the most vulnerable to recruitment to violent extremism. Engaging with young people, offering them a voice in the community, and providing them with institutional support to help them succeed in life are critical to preventing violent extremism and building community cohesion.

“One of the goals of our youth engagement programs is to give young people opportunities to connect frankly with our officers and see them in a different light. If the only exposure you ever have to a police officer is when the police respond because you were a crime victim or something similarly traumatic, you are going to see that officer in a negative light.

Through our outreach to young people, we are working to rewrite that narrative, so that young people begin to see police officers as mentors and partners in the community.”

—Janeé Harteau, Chief of the Minneapolis Police Department

³⁰ “African Immigrant Muslim Community Outreach,” City of Saint Paul, accessed September 2, 2016, <https://www.stpaul.gov/departments/planning-economic-development/about-ped/saint-paul-programs-and-reports/african>.

In Minneapolis, police reach out to young people through an “organized dialogue” series of police-community forums. Abdirahman Mukhtar, the community engagement coordinator for Pillsbury United Communities, a Minneapolis organization that fosters resilience and self-sufficiency of individuals, families, and communities, explained, “We started working with MPD in 2006-2007. When we started, we had a lot of young people who were complaining about the relationship with the police in their neighborhood. So we started bringing the police officers and the young people together to talk about these issues. This led to a forum in which young people and police officers could discuss these issues and figure out ways to address them.”

Field Notes

Question from the Audience: For those of you from the Somali community who have partnered with the police: Does doing so mark you as an informant in your community? Is this a problem that you ran into? If so, how did you solve it?

Hashi Shafi, Executive Director of the Somali Action Alliance: Working with law enforcement is not personal; it’s a community issue. We see this especially in the Somali culture we came from, in which the police were always working against their own citizens. So to get where we are now takes a long commitment to intensive meetings and an intentional inclusion of us as part of the team. And in that respect, it’s all about leadership in law enforcement.

Luckily, our city leaders never hesitated whenever the community called them into a mosque or a neighborhood to meet with us and start building trust from there. It wasn’t just about us going into their offices; it was about them coming to us. When a police leader like Chief Smith from Saint Paul leaves his office and sits down with imams in the mosques, it changes the community perception that the police are our enemies. We are also grateful for the federal law enforcement partners that made the effort to engage with us, including the Department of Homeland Security Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, the US Attorney, and the Minneapolis Field Office [of the] FBI.

Of course, the stigma of working with the government is always there. We have people in the community saying bad things all the time. What that shows is that we in the community must commit ourselves to continue to engage in open conversations with the police.

That’s how we’ve ended up with more than 20 Somali-American police officers in Minnesota, because our relationship with the police and our respect for the police profession are so strong.

Recommendation: Hire officers from diverse communities

As Hashi Shafi noted, hiring police officers from within immigrant communities has had a positive impact on promoting understanding and relationship-building between the police and community members. “Six years ago, we had three or four Somali police officers in the Minneapolis–Saint Paul area. Now we have about 20 Somali police officers in the Minneapolis PD, the Saint Paul Police Department, and the Sheriff’s Department. It was especially ice-breaking when Minneapolis hired the first Somali officers. And when the Saint Paul Police Department added a female Somali officer, that changed the whole culture. We never thought this could happen so quickly.”

Challenges

While the law enforcement agencies in the Minneapolis–Saint Paul area have built robust outreach programs and strong relationships with community members, the work has been challenging.

One major issue, said U.S. Attorney Andrew Luger, is funding. Engagement, prevention, and intervention programming is resource-intensive, requiring a large investment by government agencies and their community partners. These programs are impossible to create and sustain in the long term without a reliable funding stream, even when officers and community members volunteer their time. Hennepin County Sheriff Richard Stanek also emphasized the need for federal assistance in funding local law enforcement community engagement programs, and expressed concern regarding the sustainability of such programs without dependable funding sources.

Luger called on the federal government to dedicate less funding to studying programs for preventing violent extremism, and instead to devote more funding to sustaining programs. “We’ve had at least 10 different researchers just in the last year come through Minnesota,” he said, “so we’ve been studied to death. We know what the issue is, we know what the solutions are, and we know what we need here. We need the funding to implement the solutions.”

Promising programs: Examples from Minneapolis–Saint Paul—Hennepin County

- **Somali Elder Council:** In 2006, the Saint Paul Police Department established a Somali Elder Council. The Council is a group of Somali elders elected from within their own clan structures to serve as spokespersons for their communities and work directly with the police department and the mayor’s office. The group meets regularly with Chief Smith and other local government officials.
- **Organized Dialogue with Police Officers and Young People:** Since 2006-2007, the Minneapolis Police Department has engaged in scheduled dialogues with young people in the Somali community. These conversations are meant to address issues the young people are facing in a non-

confrontational manner. As Abdirahman Mukhtar explained, “Our goal is to create a comfortable environment in which young people can talk about any concerns that they have with the police. This program has really strengthened the relationship between young people and the police.”

- **Bike Cops for Kids:** The Minneapolis Police Department also has a program called “Bike Cops for Kids” in which officers hand out free helmets, lights, locks, and sometimes bicycles to children in need in the Minneapolis community. Their goal is to improve the lives of these children and to build trust in the police among residents in various communities.

Summary of recommendations for police agencies and their community partners

- **Recruit outreach officers who have a talent for communicating:** Some officers are more suited to community engagement than others. Those charged with building their agencies’ outreach programs should hire officers who have a facility for communication, a genuine interest in other people, and an ability to put people at ease to serve as outreach officers.
- **Educate outreach officers and community members about each other:** Outreach officers, and ideally every member of a police agency, should receive cultural awareness training. This helps to give officers a foundation of knowledge about different communities’ cultural traditions and mores so they begin communicating, without inadvertently saying things that might be considered disrespectful or insensitive.

Similarly, outreach officers should educate community members about the work of the police and about the goals, mission, and philosophy of policing in their department. Providing this programming, even informally, helps to demystify the work of police agencies and make them seem less intimidating. This in turn facilitates engagement efforts.

- **Connect with young people:** Young people have particular needs and are especially vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremists. Outreach programs should create safe spaces, such as youth-centered community forums, in which young people in the community can discuss their concerns about the police and their lives more generally with outreach officers. Outreach programs should also work with children from a young age to demonstrate their commitment to children’s health and success.
- **Hire officers from diverse communities:** The Minneapolis Police Department, Hennepin County Sheriff’s Office, and Saint Paul Police Department have all recruited officers and other personnel from within the diverse communities they serve. This promotes community investment in their departments, increases cross-cultural understanding, and demonstrates to community members that these agencies represent them and their needs.

Case Study: Montgomery County, Maryland

Threats of violent extremism are taken very seriously in the Washington, D.C., area, including Montgomery County, Maryland, a suburban county that borders Washington.

Montgomery County's approach to preventing violent extremism is novel: It is led by a community group rather than the police department.

An organization called the World Organization for Resource Development and Education (WORDE), in partnership with the Montgomery County Department of Police (MCP) and the Montgomery County Office of Community Partnerships' Faith Community Working Group (FCWG), forms the backbone of this effort, which is known as the Montgomery County Model (MCM).

"We are a majority-minority community. Thirty-two percent of us are foreign-born; there are 138 languages spoken in the public school system and students from 157 countries; and 39 percent of our households speak a language other than English. We think that's something worth celebrating."

—Reverend Mansfield "Kasey" Kaseman, *Interfaith Community Liaison for Montgomery County*

Facts and figures: Montgomery County, Maryland

Location:

- Just northwest of Washington, D.C.

Population:³¹

- 1,040,116 residents (Montgomery County is the most populous county in Maryland)

³¹ "Quickfacts: Montgomery County, Maryland," U.S. Census Bureau, accessed September 7, 2016, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/24031,00>.

Demographics:³²

- 32% of residents were born outside the United States
- 39% of residents speak a language other than English at home
- 46% of residents are White/not Hispanic or Latino
- 19% of residents are African American
- 19% of residents are Latino
- 15% of residents are Asian
- 3% of residents are multiracial

The Montgomery County Model

Overview and organization

Montgomery County's community-led initiative for building resilience to violent extremism is called the Montgomery County Model (MCM). The core functions of the MCM are to (1) build community members' awareness of violent extremism; (2) increase community understanding of potential risk factors that might make someone vulnerable to radicalization to violent extremism; and (3) ensure that community members (such as educators, faith leaders, and police officers) know how to intervene before someone chooses to embrace violence to achieve social, political, or economic goals. Knowing how to intervene includes knowing where at-risk individuals can go for counseling and other services.

The MCM does not focus on any one particular type of violent extremism but rather addresses all forms of extremism that Montgomery County faces. "Our goal is very simple," said Montgomery County Assistant Chief of Police Darryl McSwain. "We want to promote social cohesion and public safety, not just in the area of CVE." The Montgomery County Model aims to build a sense of community among the diverse segments of the county's population through training, educational programming, community events, and network-building activities in the community.

The MCM is the product of a public-private partnership among the Montgomery County Executive's Office of Community Partnerships, the Montgomery County Department of Police (MCP), and the World Organization for Resource Development and Education (WORDE).³³ WORDE is a nonprofit, educational organization whose mission is to enhance communication and understanding between communities to reduce social and political conflict. WORDE administers the International Cultural Center, and also implements programming through an interfaith working group it belongs to, the Montgomery County Executive's Faith Community Working Group (FCWG).

³² Ibid.

³³ For more information, see "WORDE," <http://www.worde.org/>.

The goals of the FCWG are to increase understanding of Montgomery County's various faith traditions, coordinate and facilitate interfaith collaboration, and increase collaboration between the faith community and county government. The FCWG is organized within Montgomery County's Office of Community Partnerships, which includes liaisons to the faith community, the African and Caribbean communities, the African American community, the Latino community, the Asian community, and the Middle Eastern community. Montgomery County also has an office called the Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity, the mission of which is to provide services and programming for the county's immigrant communities.

Genesis of the MCM: A community-led CVE model

Following the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013, WORDE President Dr. Hedieh Mirahmadi, the county government, and the police department formed a new partnership to increase Montgomery County residents' role in public safety, and created the FCGW to serve as the convening mechanism for the multi-stakeholder collaboration. Over the next two years, the FCWG mobilized several public agencies, along with over 300 faith organizations and community service providers. The resulting four-part program draws in multiple public and private stakeholders who can address a wide range of issues including social cohesion, disaster preparedness, multicultural community collaboration, and responding to acts of hate- or identity-based violence.

Montgomery County's strong history of community and cross-governmental collaboration made it especially fertile ground for this multi-stakeholder initiative. Police Chief Tom Manger and County Executive Ike Leggett "strongly encourage partnership-building and interagency cooperation," said Assistant Police Chief McSwain. "The County Executive requires that county agencies find ways to leverage the assistance and resources of the community to accomplish community goals more effectively." Rev. Mansfield Kaseman, the county's interfaith community liaison, added that the people of Montgomery County have long been committed to progressive government and multicultural integration. Kaseman's own position, appointed by the county executive to work with county officials and local nonprofit heads, is itself an example of the commitment to collaboration that led to a robust buy-in to the MCM.

The tenets of the MCM

The MCM is built upon four key principles: engage, educate, connect, and intervene.³⁴

First, it is built on engaging stakeholders from across the county to form a well-integrated network of actors including public officials, law enforcement officers, educators, social service providers, community leaders, and civic activists. Together they form an early warning network of trusted adults and peers who can intervene in the lives of troubled individuals.

³⁴ "The Montgomery County Model," WORDE, accessed September 6, 2016, <http://www.worde.org/programs/the-montgomery-county-model/>.

Second, it includes educational programming, such as specialized training programs and workshops, addressing a wide variety of public safety concerns including radicalization and recruitment to violent extremism.

Third, the MCM connects stakeholders with public and private providers of mental health care and other social services to which they can refer at-risk individuals.

Fourth, the MCM coordinates interventions facilitated by professionals trained to reduce potential risk factors of violent extremist behavior, using a culturally competent, trauma-informed framework.

“Up until now, outreach and relationship-building have been centered in police departments. It has been about the police going out to each individual community. What we’re saying is that you really need to create relationships not only between the community and the police and county government, but also among the different communities in a given area. We can’t build cohesion and resilience without developing relationships among ourselves.”

—*Dr. Hedieh Mirahmadi, President of WORDE*

The role of the interfaith community in building productive partnerships

The relationship-building function of the MCM is executed by the FCWG. As a result, the faith community plays a vital role in the MCM’s community-building efforts.

The prominence of faith leaders in the MCM is not by happenstance. There are approximately 90 different faith traditions represented in Montgomery County,³⁵ making interfaith outreach a necessary part of any community-building efforts. In a community as culturally and religiously diverse as Montgomery County, the focus on building bridges among those of different faith traditions is central to creating a sense of shared belonging to the larger community as a whole. Creating this feeling of belonging is one of the primary goals of the MCM.

While WORDE serves as the principle non-governmental partner for the FCWG, the lead government agency is operated through the County Executive’s Office of Community Partnerships. “Our primary goal within the county’s Office of Community Partnerships is to make Montgomery County the most welcoming county in America, and we’re very serious about that,” said Reverend Kaseman. “That dedication to welcoming people of every cultural background and faith tradition is part of the culture of Montgomery County.”

³⁵ “Montgomery County, Maryland (MD) Religion Statistics Profile,” City-Data.com, accessed September 6, 2016, <http://www.city-data.com/county/religion/Montgomery-County-MD.html>.

As Kaseman explained, “If you want to understand what’s going on in another ethnic community, you do it by working with the faith leaders. That’s where the doors are open and that’s how you develop an understanding of each other’s traditions.”

To further integrate faith leaders in public safety issues, the FCWG created the interfaith **Faith Leaders Response Team (FLRT)** in recognition of the need to demonstrate and reinforce a sense of unity among Montgomery County’s myriad faith communities. FLRT deploys 24/7 to incidents of hate crimes and other acts of violence in Montgomery County to demonstrate solidarity and to provide support to those in need. “What FLRT has done,” said Reverend Kaseman, “is create a symbol of unity, and help the community to understand that any expression of hatred in the community, whether based on race or religion, is a problem for all of us.”

Equally important, of course, is relationship-building between the faith community and government leaders. An outgrowth of FLRT’s programming is Montgomery County’s **Emotional Spiritual Care Volunteer (ESCV)** group. Through this group, faith leaders can become trained and certified to volunteer directly with the police and fire rescue services to provide emotionally and spiritually informed care in response to all types of emergencies (whether or not they are a result of violent extremism).

Reverend Kaseman said that ESCV participants attended an 18-hour disaster-response training for interfaith leaders, and that 36 faith leaders are now certified to engage in this type of emergency response.

As Rabbi Batya Steinlauf, co-chair of the FCWG, explained, the ESCVs are the only group of faith leaders in the country who are trained in this way and have the necessary certifications to be deployed by the Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (OEMHS) to a disaster site. “We know who to report to and the appropriate protocols to follow,” she said. “We know how we can be useful to both first responders and members of the community who are suffering.”

“We talk about the range of public safety threats. For example, we recently completed a cyber civility’ curriculum for use in our public schools that addresses the range of public safety threats that kids can be exposed to online. That means everything from pedophiles to extremist recruiters.

We’ve also done training on security for houses of worship and training on how to engage with congregants who have mental illnesses. And we work to help immigrants with the stress they experience as part of acculturation to a new environment.”

—Dr. Hedieh Mirahmadi, President of WORDE

When building relationships between members of the faith community and county government agencies, it is important to ensure that these relationships are reciprocal. In Montgomery County, the faith community provides services to the county government in support of their relationship-building efforts; and the county provides services to the faith community.

Protecting Community Members from Charges of Assisting Violent Extremists

Question from the Audience: We have been having discussions about legal protections for clergy members who work to prevent acts of violence. If a clergy member engages and tries to help an at-risk person, but that person later commits an act of violence, how do we make sure the clergy member isn't seen as an accessory to the crime, or accused of providing material support? How do you ensure that your community partners don't find themselves in legal hot water?

Dr. Hedieh Mirahmadi, President of WORDE: I think there needs to be an ongoing dialogue with the FBI about these questions. The FBI should be offering to educate members of the community about the classifications of material support, so that community members are aware of where the boundaries are.

I'm not worried that the imams that I work with would be brought in on the grounds of having provided material support, but that's because I'm very familiar with the classifications and the laws around this issue. What isn't clear, though, and what we should be addressing, as part of a larger conversation about where the community's efforts stop and the FBI's efforts begin, is what the definition of a radicalized individual is.

So if a community is dealing with folks in the "pre-radicalization space," at what point is that person considered radicalized, and at what point should it get kicked up to the FBI or the police department? At what point do you leave the lane of a clinical, community-based intervention, and enter the traditional law enforcement realm? I still don't think that that's entirely clear.

Guidelines Respecting Religious Diversity: An Example of Collaboration between the Faith Community and Montgomery County Schools

Rabbi Batya Steinlauf, Co-Chair of the Faith Community Working Group

The Montgomery County Public Schools has released a document called *Guidelines for Respecting Religious Diversity*,* and it grew out of a conversation that I had with members of the Muslim community. There was a real concern about schools not closing for the Eid holiday. I spoke with a member of the Muslim-American community to try to understand their concerns. What one community member told me was, “We want religious holidays to be an excused absence.” I said, “Religious holidays are an excused absence; of course they are. I’m Jewish. I expect my kids to take off Jewish holidays.” And this community member told me, “No, they are not. It doesn’t say that anywhere.”

From that conversation, we learned that there was a gap in communication between the school system and community members. Religious holidays are an excused absence, but that wasn’t stated on the school’s website, and I wasn’t able to find the policy written down. I arranged for the two of us to meet with the Superintendent of Schools, who confirmed that religious holidays are of course an excused absence.

Given that there was this communication gap, we worked with the school system, which is very invested in working with different faith communities, to fill it. The result of that work is the Guidelines Respecting Religious Diversity document. It’s printed in nine different languages and spells out all of the guidelines—Board of Education policies, Montgomery County Public Schools policies, and state and federal laws—regarding accommodations that are made for students’ religious beliefs and practices.

The document also includes contact information that community members can use to get in touch with someone in the school system if they need more information or if they feel like an amendment needs to be made to the guidelines. Not only are these guidelines now on the MCPS website, but we’re also doing outreach and educational programming for parents about what the guidelines mean. And we are working with a social worker from Dr. Mirahmadi’s organization to discuss issues of bullying and acculturation stress around religious practices.

* *Guidelines for Respecting Religious Diversity* (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Public Schools, 2016), http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/students/rights/1373.16_ReligiousDiversityGuidelines_ENG_web.pdf.

“I’ll give you an example of what reciprocity looks like,” said Rabbi Steinlauf. “Police Chief Manger put together a program about how we can help with disaster preparedness and response. So we can help the county with that. Meanwhile, we were planning an interfaith service for victims of Ebola, and the county made the civic center, a government venue, available to us. There was a need in the community for that service, and the government was able to work with us to make sure that it was met.”

“It’s been an amazing experience,” Steinlauf continued, “because we are able to bring together the faith communities and have a responsive government, where the faith communities are able to identify and communicate their needs and the ways that we can work together with the county government. It’s a community-led initiative, but we are able to contact the people in the government that we need to in order to make things happen.”

The role of training and educational programs in building bridges and increasing awareness

Improving community awareness of public safety issues such as violent extremism is a central tenet of the MCM, and the process of providing and participating in educational programming helps to build partnerships and expand the network of stakeholders involved. Training programs offer an opportunity for community members and county agencies such as the police department to learn from each other and to demonstrate their mutual commitment to the safety and security of their shared community.

Dr. Mirahmadi, the president of WORDE, provides training for the MCP. Past trainings have included *Enhancing Cultural Literacy and Improving Community Outreach*, *Understanding the Violent Extremist Threat in the Homeland*, and *Potential Risk Factors for Radicalization*. “Dr. Mirahmadi started providing training to the Montgomery County Police Department a couple of years ago,” said Assistant Chief McSwain, “and from that point on, it really took off. She delivers unbiased and well-informed training to our officers. She’s an important resource if officers have questions about Islam, religious practices, and the types of violent extremism that they might encounter in their daily work.”

Dr. Mirahmadi and the WORDE team also provide numerous trainings and workshops for diverse communities, with the goal of increasing their awareness of the risk factors to radicalization so that they can refer vulnerable individuals for an intervention. The training that WORDE provides does not center on extremism rooted in radical interpretations of Islam, but rather the full spectrum of violent extremist threats. As Dr. Mirahmadi said, “sovereign citizens³⁶ are considered a threat in Montgomery County and other parts of Maryland, so we cover a lot of the white nationalist movements as well. It’s an important part of how we educate the population about potential indicators for violent extremism.”

³⁶ According to the FBI, “sovereign citizens are anti-government extremists who believe that even though they physically reside in this country, they are separate or ‘sovereign’ from the United States. As a result, they believe they don’t have to answer to any government authority, including courts, taxing entities, motor vehicle departments, or law enforcement.” See “Domestic Terrorism,” FBI, last updated April 13, 2010, https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2010/april/sovereigncitizens_041310/domestic-terrorism-the-sovereign-citizen-movement.

“We are really focused on training, training, training,” Dr. Mirahmadi explained, “because we think that it’s an important part of building awareness about public safety issues with the community. We are up to about 400 county residents who have gone through our training at one point or another.”

Relationship-building through educational programming requires a long-term commitment from all parties involved, according to Rabbi Steinlauf. “The communication between the faith community and the government is based on continuing relationships and educational programming. That programming has to happen over time. We don’t develop relationships by having a press conference and then having everyone go home.”

Intervention: Providing culturally competent assistance for vulnerable community members

Intervening with people who may be on a path to committing acts of violence has been a critical element of the Montgomery County Model since it began. The goal of intervention programs is to identify and address the underlying causes of a community member’s attraction to violent extremism, such as alienation, acculturation stress, and mental health issues. For example, by helping community members who are under stress and giving them a sense that they belong in a community, members of the community and the police can reduce the attraction of violent or extremist ideologies.

To respond to the complex needs of individuals who may be vulnerable to radicalization, WORDE’s International Cultural Center established a social service agency, Crossroads, to provide trauma-informed, cultural proficient counseling, mentoring, and wellness services to South Asian, Middle Eastern, and North/West/East African communities in Montgomery County. Its clients suffer from trauma, acculturation challenges, anger management issues, and emotional disorders that have made it difficult for them to adjust to life in the United States.

Crossroads’ goal is to connect underserved members of Montgomery County’s population with the public and private social services that they need and might not otherwise be able to access. Crossroads clinicians provide culturally- and linguistically-competent counseling and case management. This means that they are well-versed in the integration challenges that are particular to their target population and are also proficient in the languages most often spoken by these community members, including Bengali, Farsi, Arabic, and Urdu.³⁷

“We really want community members, social service providers, and others to feel that they can refer individuals for specialized care way before you need to call the police,” explained Dr. Mirahmadi. “We use a clinical model and are a HIPAA-mandated agency and mandated reporters. It’s very important for people who participate in the program to feel that they have confidentiality and trust with their clinicians. It’s also important for us that we have a trusting relationship with law enforcement, so that they are confident that we will let them know if there is a situation when someone poses an imminent risk to the public.”

³⁷ “About Crossroads,” International Cultural Center, accessed September 6, 2016, <http://www.theicc.net/programs/crossroads>.

A focus on providing specialized, clinical care is central to the intervention assistance that Crossroads offers. “From the law enforcement perspective,” said Dr. Mirahmadi, “you might want to do interventions, but you can’t just knock on the door of your local mosque and ask for clinical care, because it might not be in their realm of experience to offer that.”

The MCM also provides services to county residents through the MCP Crisis Intervention Team (CIT), which was established in 2000 to provide specialized mental health services for anyone in need. Crisis Intervention Team members receive 40 hours of training to earn their certification (and then attend annual refresher courses in order to maintain it) and are responsible for responding to calls for service related to community members with mental illnesses.³⁸

The Police Department has also hired a licensed clinical social worker to be a part of the Crisis Intervention Team. As Dr. Mirahmadi explained, this social worker “has 20 years of clinical experience with trauma and violence, and she is a tremendous resource for anybody who wants to get real, concrete advice and direct service referrals, cases in which the person involved has a mental illness, or cases with a radicalization or violent extremism component.”

Providing Community-Based Services to Clients Who Might Be of Interest to Police or the FBI

Question from the Audience: Do you worry that you might unknowingly work with a client who is of interest to law enforcement because they have been, for instance, communicating with ISIS and others overseas?

Dr. Hedieh Mirahmadi, President of WORDE: Absolutely, because we have no way of knowing that. All of our cases are in the pre-criminal, pre-radicalization space.

Our focus is on getting underserved members of the population the help that they need. In that process, we address some of the underlying factors that might put someone at risk for radicalization, such as PTSD, alienation and acculturation problems, unemployment, discrimination, and so on.

Anything related to monitoring criminal activity is totally outside of our purview, though we are mandated reporters if we discover that a client poses an imminent threat to others.

³⁸ Scott Davis, “The Montgomery County Police Crisis Intervention Team (CIT),” presentation given to the Montgomery County (MD) Council Public Safety and Health and Human Services committees March 31, 2011, http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/agenda/cm/2011/110331/20110331_PSHHS1.pdf.

The role of the police in the Montgomery County Model

The MCM is a model in which the police play a supporting role. As Assistant Chief McSwain explained, the MCM emerged in part because community members in need of assistance might not always feel comfortable approaching the police for that help. “We realized that not every single community member is going to feel comfortable openly walking into a police station and asking for help, so there must be different access points for them where they can seek out the services that they need,” McSwain said.

At the same time, the MCM could not be successful without the support of the police. Representatives from the police department are often present at WORDE and FCGW events, and the police department works with Dr. Mirahmadi to provide educational and awareness programming for community members. Past events have included forums at which teenagers engaged with and asked questions of the police, town halls to address faith communities, and information sessions for young people about how to protect themselves from online predators.

The police department’s commitment to the MCM is based on a department culture that values relationships with the community and building officers’ cultural competencies. This commitment is institutionalized in departmental policies and practices. Community engagement, for instance, is assessed during officer evaluations and is directly tied to promotions.

“Under Chief Manger, we made community engagement and outreach something that every officer is expected to do,” said Assistant Chief McSwain. “We also made it part of our promotional process at every rank, from sergeant all the way through assistant chief.”

District commanders are also expected to report at weekly staff meetings about their engagement activities and the specific outreach programs in which they are involved. In Montgomery County, these include the Explorers Program, an educational program designed for young people between the ages of 14 and 20 who are interested in becoming police officers; Project Lifesaver, which is geared toward members of the community who have autism, Alzheimer’s, and related disorders as well as their caregivers; and citizens’ academies. MCP also supports a family justice center, which provides services for community members dealing with domestic violence.

“In our model, the police department serves as a resource. The community itself drives the program, and we make ourselves available to them in whatever capacity they need.”

Darryl McSwain, Assistant Chief of Police for the Montgomery County Department of Police

Transparency is central to MCP's efforts to build trust with the community. "We believe in transparency," Assistant Chief McSwain said. "Every year we post on our website annual reports that deal with crime statistics. We also publish statistics on police use-of-force incidents, pursuits, hate crimes, and internal affairs complaints. Our goal is to continually work to build trust with the community by being as forthright as possible about everything we're doing."

The police department also has created a hiring protocol to foster community engagement. According to Assistant Chief McSwain, MCPD focuses on hiring people with a proven ability to collaborate effectively with others and a strong commitment to civic engagement.

Education is also important in the hiring process. "We have a great deal of respect for education," McSwain said. "Well-educated officers have a more global perspective, which is important in a community as diverse as ours."

MCP also has its own officers train each other on issues where they have knowledge to share, such as certain types of cultural competency. "We've developed a program where we utilize the expertise of our officers themselves," Assistant Chief McSwain said. "We have worked with senior officers of various ranks to provide training on things such as gender identity and different religious traditions."

Summary of recommendations

Perhaps the most important lesson from Montgomery County, especially for jurisdictions in the early stages of developing community programs to prevent violent extremism, is that that effort does not have to be led by the police. With strong community leadership and subject matter expertise, and a local government willing to empower community groups, the police department can take a supporting role.

Recommendations for the police department

- **Be open to taking a secondary role in efforts to build community resilience against violent extremism and promote social cohesion.** In jurisdictions where there is expertise, leadership, and the will among community members to spearhead these efforts, police departments should be open to allowing them to do so.
- **Do not be afraid to evolve.** Many programs to counter violent extremism started in the counter-terrorism field, but they do not have to stay there. As Assistant Chief McSwain noted, "Right after 9/11, we developed a video to post on our website called 'Seven Signs of Terrorism,' which gave citizens the general idea of what to look for regarding terrorist activity. That's what we knew to do at that particular point. Since then, we've greatly expanded our knowledge. We're looking for opportunities to intervene in the lives of vulnerable community members to get them help before they commit a crime."

- **Create a culture of community engagement in the police department by considering officers' outreach activities in performance evaluations and promotions.** This establishes an expectation that all members of the department should build relationships with community members.
- **Invite community experts into the department to provide training in important subject areas, including cultural awareness.** Not only does this ensure that officers receive the most accurate and pertinent information about the communities they serve, it also provides opportunities for relationship-building between the police and community members.
- **Make yourself a resource for the community.** Ensure that representatives from the police department are available to attend community events. The police should also be a willing partner in offering educational programming on its areas of expertise to the community. This might include information sessions on disaster preparedness or best practices to avoid being victims of cybercrime.

Recommendations for the local government and the community

- **Use the subject matter expertise of people in the community.** For example, community experts on various religions can offer training on the basic principles of the religions to community members and government agencies. The goal of drawing on these local experts is not only to build community awareness, but also to build a shared sense of investment in the community.
- **Institutionalize your efforts.** Whether through a local government agency, a nonprofit organization, or both, communities looking to lead their own resilience-building efforts should formalize the programming to ensure that it is consistent and endures in the long term.
- **Ensure that your efforts are multicultural and interfaith.** By their very definition, social cohesion-building efforts should include all subcommunities in a given jurisdiction, so that everyone is represented and invested in the effort.
- **Develop strong partnerships with a wide range of public and private service providers, paying particular attention to cultivating close relationships with schools, mental health care providers, and social service providers.** Ensuring that you have the capacity to identify people who are in crisis and quickly connect them with the full complement of social services they need requires strong working relationships among community leaders, schools, the mental health community, and social service providers. Intervention and prevention efforts are impossible without them.
- **In creating educational programming on violent extremism, be sure to include all forms of violent extremism.** This includes everything from sovereign citizens to white nationalists to ISIS-inspired ideology. Violent extremism may arise from all of these belief systems, and from many others.
- **Actively work to develop and maintain trust with the police department.** The police department should have full faith in the intervention, prevention, and social cohesion-building efforts of the community. The community should also consider the police to be close working partners and resources for the community.

Case Study: Cambridge, Massachusetts

Violent extremism is a particular concern for the city of Cambridge and the greater Boston area, a concern underscored by the terrorist attack at the Boston Marathon in April 2013. That attack left three people dead and more than 260 injured. Brothers Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev were responsible for the attack, which was motivated by their belief in Islamic-inspired violent extremism.

The Cambridge Police Department (CPD) leads some of the most robust community outreach and violence prevention programs in the Boston area, including comprehensive programming for young people and community members in need of mental health services. The CPD is also part of a larger Boston-area initiative for building community resilience against violent extremism.

“Our goal was working with our communities and building our communities’ resilience. We never had the notion that we were trying to find extremists within our population.

Our philosophy in the Boston area and in Cambridge in particular is that we need to help our community thrive and succeed. We need to keep our kids on a conveyor belt that successfully gets them from birth all the way through college, so that as adults they have the best opportunities possible. We’ve never focused on one group in the community; we see and work with our community as a whole.”

—Robert Haas, Superintendent of the Cambridge Police Department

Facts and figures: Cambridge, Massachusetts

Location:

- Across the Charles River from Boston, Massachusetts. Cambridge is home to Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

Population:³⁹

- 110,000 residents

³⁹ “Quickfacts: Cambridge city, Massachusetts,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed September 7, 2016, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/2511000,00>.

Demographics:⁴⁰

- 28% of residents were born outside the United States
- 32% of residents speak a language other than English at home
- 62% of residents are white
- 15% of residents are Asian
- 12% of residents are African American
- 8% of residents are Latino
- 4% of residents are multiracial

Outreach efforts in Cambridge and the Greater Boston area

Overview and organization

The “Greater Boston”⁴¹ approach to preventing violent extremism is multidimensional. Police agencies like the CPD have their own ongoing engagement initiatives. In addition, these agencies work with each other, with social service providers, and with other governmental agencies to forge productive partnerships and share strategies for building community resilience.

The Greater Boston Collaborative

This effort is outlined in *A Framework for Prevention and Intervention Strategies: Incorporating Violent Extremism into Violence Prevention Efforts*⁴² (Boston Framework). Like the Los Angeles and Minneapolis–Saint Paul areas, Greater Boston was chosen in 2014 to participate in a U.S. Department of Justice initiative to develop and disseminate a model program for countering violent extremism. Led by Carmen Ortiz, the U.S. Attorney for the District of Massachusetts, the Greater Boston Collaborative (also known as the Collaborative) is a multiagency, interdisciplinary, and multijurisdictional effort.

From the outset, the initiative centered on non-police service providers. “U.S. Attorney Ortiz decided that this was not going to be a law enforcement–centric effort,” Cambridge Police Commissioner Robert Haas explained. “In fact, police were in the minority when we first met to put the framework together. The majority of people in the room were educators, social service providers, religious leaders, community leaders, and community activists.”

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Greater Boston is a metropolitan statistical area comprising the city of Boston and the municipalities that surround it, including Cambridge.

⁴² Greater Boston Regional Collaborative, *A Framework for Prevention and Intervention Strategies: Incorporating Violent Extremism into Violence Prevention Efforts* (Boston: U.S. District Attorney’s Office, 2015), <http://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/usao-ma/pages/attachments/2015/02/18/framework.pdf>.

The Boston Framework identifies seven focus areas, ranging from negative depictions of religions and cultures in the media to social isolation, that need to be addressed in order to build community resilience to violent extremism.⁴³ The solutions proposed are tailored to each focus area and include specific skills development programs, educational and awareness programs, and engagement initiatives.

The Cambridge Police Department

The promising practices outlined in the Boston Framework are based on the community-building initiatives of its authors, including the Cambridge Police Department (CPD). CPD works closely with faith leaders, mental health providers, educators, and other local government agencies, both informally and as part of well-established programs, to improve the health of the community and foster a sense of shared belonging among community members.

Much of CPD's outreach programming is conducted by its Community Services Unit, which includes a Youth and Family Services Unit and a Community Relations Unit.⁴⁴

Tenets of the Cambridge Police Department's engagement effort

The central tenets of the CPD's community engagement effort are prevention, intervention, and diversion. Key to CPD's prevention efforts are the productive partnerships that it has forged with stakeholders across agencies and disciplines in the community. These partnerships are central to CPD's efforts to intervene in the lives of community members who are struggling or seem to be headed down a path to violence. Finally, CPD Youth Resource Officers have the option of placing young people who have committed a nonviolent criminal offense into a diversion program rather than sending them through the juvenile justice system.

"The fact that law enforcement and communities are working together will transform us both. It will change communities' ideas and beliefs about law enforcement; it will change law enforcement's ideas and beliefs about the community; and ultimately it will make this thing called "CVE" that we're fighting over unimportant, because the most important thing that's going to come out of this is that we work together and that we keep our children safe."

—Saida Abdi, Associate Director for Community Relations, Refugee Trauma and Resilience Center at Boston Children's Hospital

⁴³ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁴ Cambridge Police Department, "Community Services Unit," City of Cambridge, accessed September 7, 2016, <https://www.cambridgema.gov/cpd/policeunits/operationsdivision/communityservicesunit>.

The larger goal of these efforts is improving social cohesion and the community’s resilience against violence in all its forms, not just violent extremism. “This really is about building healthy communities and not about CVE,” CPD Deputy Superintendent Christine Elow said. “It’s about connecting effectively with all members of our population.”

Recommendations for police agencies: Lessons for success from Cambridge

At the PERF meeting, the Cambridge panelists shared their best practices and lessons learned for building productive partnerships between community members and local government agencies.

“Less than one percent of the people we’re talking about when we talk about radicalization and violent extremism are sociopaths. They are either empty vessels, or they believe very strongly in something that’s dangerous. It’s our job to bring them back from the precipice.

What the Cambridge Police Department, the Boston regional program, people of faith, mental health providers, and the school system have been able to do is create programs that stop people from getting to that crisis point in the first place, and if they do get there, help bring them back.

We can’t afford to lose them, because not only will people get hurt, we will lose ourselves and our sense of what a positive and healthy society is.”

—Dr. William Pollack, Cambridge Health Alliance
and Harvard Medical School

Recommendation: Full uniforms can undermine engagement efforts

It is crucial for officers engaged in outreach work to always be forthright about the fact that they are police officers, and about what they are trying to achieve. This shows community members that they have no hidden agenda—such as gathering intelligence—and therefore reinforces community trust. Officers can demonstrate transparency about the fact that they are police officers by wearing their uniforms when they attend community meetings or other events.

However, the experience of the Cambridge Police Department has been that being in *full* uniform can be less than ideal in some cases. Some community members are intimidated by outreach officers in full uniform, making these officers’ community engagement efforts more challenging. The solution, Deputy

Superintendent Christine Elow said, has been “soft uniforms” for outreach officers (e.g., khaki pants and a pullover or a polo shirt with the department’s logo on it). They are still readily identifiable as police officers, but their appearance makes them seem more approachable.

“We have learned that the uniform is a huge barrier to interacting with a lot of community members,” said Deputy Superintendent Elow, “since it can put them ill at ease. As a result, a lot of our outreach officers are now in a soft uniform, with a CPD polo shirt and 5/11 pants.⁴⁵ They’ve found that to be a lot more effective when it comes to engaging with different communities.”

Recommendation: Engage with the right community leaders

Forging relationships with community leaders is a crucial first step in building bridges between local authorities and the communities that they serve. Community leaders are gatekeepers who can help ensure that police departments and their partners are able to find and help those who are most in need of services.

These leaders should have influence and standing in the community, and a genuine interest in facilitating relationships between the police and community members. The best way to so identify community leaders, Cambridge panelists said, is to cast a wide net and not assume that the first person who is willing to engage is the best person for the role.

“I’ll go to community members and ask who they’ve reached out to when they’ve needed help,” said Saida Abdi, Associate Director for Community Relations in the Refugee Trauma and Resilience Center at Boston Children’s Hospital. “I make a list of those names, and work to build partnerships with those people, since I know that the community already goes to them for help and respects them. I don’t look at who has the most money or the biggest name. I go to the mothers and the fathers and ask them, ‘If tomorrow your child has a problem, who would you reach out to in the community for help?’ Those are the people I want to work with.”

“Departments need to think about influence, access, and standing in the community. It’s very hard to engage with a community if the partner that you’ve chosen to work with might not be the best person for what you need. Departments need to partner with someone from the community who is well-respected and has the type of access to community members that the police do not.”

—*Saida Abdi, Associate Director for Community Relations, Refugee Trauma and Resilience Center at Boston Children’s Hospital*

⁴⁵ 5/11 pants are tactical cargo pants.

Recommendation: Address the factors that make young people vulnerable to violence

The factors that make young people vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremists—social isolation, untreated mental illness, bullying, acculturation stress—are often the same things that put them at risk of engaging in (or being the victim of) any type of violent behavior. The approach that the Cambridge Police Department and the greater Boston Area Collaborative have taken is to address these factors in their totality, rather than just as they pertain to violent extremism.

Not only is this better for the health and security of the community in the long term, it also helps the community understand that violent extremism is just one facet of a larger picture of violence that CPD and its partners are working to address.

“As a clinician,” explained Associate Director Abdi, “I know that there are some foundational risk factors shared by gang recruitment and recruitment to violent extremism, for instance. If we are going to look at kids who become vulnerable to radicalization, we must look at what makes young people vulnerable to all sorts of bad outcomes. That’s our approach in Cambridge and the Boston area, and that’s what the community is interested in and how we can get them engaged in this larger effort.”

“The Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev went to a Cambridge Public School. This kid was a stellar student, with absolutely no indicators that he was going to be on the path to violent extremism. Every case presents so differently, and we are figuring out that all of the different relationships that we have with our educators and the school system, with our faith communities, and with our youth centers are really critical.”

—Christine Elow, Deputy Superintendent of the Cambridge Police Department

Recommendation: Address the community’s concerns

Associate Director Abdi also said it is important to address the community’s concerns as they are defined by members of the community, rather than the police department. For example, community members might be more worried about quality of life issues or gangs than about violent extremism, since the former issues have a greater impact on their daily lives and their children’s futures. The police department and its partners must address the community’s public safety priorities. This not only builds trust between the department and the community, it improves the health and security of the community as a whole.

“Yes, radicalization is an issue that we are worried about, but I also know that people in the community are worried about their children being safe in their schools, in their neighborhoods, in their homes,” said Associate Director Abdi. “When we talk to people in the community, we talk about how we can work together to prevent all kinds of violence and problems that children are facing. That’s what we really want to do and how we’ve engaged people in our project.”

Recommendation: Take a multidisciplinary, multiagency approach

As all of the panels during the PERF forum made clear, forging productive partnerships is crucial in ensuring the long-term success of community-building efforts. In Cambridge, the police department has paid particular attention to building relationships with educators, faith leaders, and mental health care providers.

These partnerships have made possible the early interventions and multiagency support for young people that is a primary feature of CPD’s engagement efforts. The partnerships ensure (1) that there is a large network of trusted leaders in the community who are looking out for young people who might be in trouble, and (2) that all of these leaders, in the police department or other agencies, have an established network of providers with whom they can connect at-risk youth. The goal of these early interventions is to divert these young people away from criminal activity.

As Dr. William Pollack of the Cambridge Health Alliance and Harvard Medical School said, “The key when you are dealing with youth who may become radicalized toward violence or become swept up in a gang is how well you have built up your partnerships beforehand. You need to create programs that unite the mental health community, the police department, the schools, and families so that we can inoculate the pathway toward violence of any sort. And then, if a young person goes down that path anyway, you have a mechanism in place where the young person can easily reach out for help before things progress to criminality.”

Recommendation: Engage with people who disagree with you

There are many different opinions in any given community about how to best address the factors that make certain people, and especially young people, vulnerable to recruitment to violence. These opinions are often especially polarized in the CVE programs. What is crucial, Cambridge panelists underscored, is to engage with those who disagree with you.

Listening to those who disagree will improve the reception of any resulting violence-prevention programs, because it ensures that everyone in the community will feel that they had a voice in the process of creating the program. It will also help to ensure that those efforts are as effective as they can be, because they will have been refined based on the concerns of community members.

“When formulating the Boston framework, we brought into the room people who disagreed with us, who challenged us,” said Associate Director Abdi. “We will never succeed if we don’t bring in the dissenting voices, because all the people who agree with me are seeing the problem through the same lens as I do. We all need to understand that there are people who don’t agree with us, because often they represent the people in the community that you’re trying to reach. So you listen, and you may change your position and your framing based on those conversations.”

Addressing the Generation Gap in Immigrant Communities

By Imam Ismail Fenni, Islamic Society of Boston

Most of the migrants who have come to the United States have come with a single idea: to make a living, to make a life for themselves and their families, and to eventually go back to their home countries, which they consider home.

What they may not realize is that while they have been in the United States, their children have grown up in a different environment, and as a result they are disconnected from their children’s experiences. These children go to public schools, rub elbows with their schoolmates, and then come home to a different cultural world. This creates a generational gap that makes it harder for families to maintain congruency and harmony. It creates a vacuum, and young people will be influenced by anyone who fills this void for them.

So how does the community member, how does an imam deal with this? This is a problem that cannot be resolved over a dinner or a single house call with a family. I work with the Cambridge Police Department and get these young people the access to the services and the things that they need, so that they have outlets through which they are able to express their frustrations and have their personal questions answered.

Productive partnerships in practice: The Safety Net Collaborative

Outreach

Among the Cambridge Police Department’s numerous outreach initiatives is the Safety Net Collaborative. Although it has no specific CVE mandate, this program’s goal is to provide assistance to young members of the Cambridge community who appear to be headed toward violence.

The Safety Net Collaborative was created in 2007, when Police Commissioner Robert Haas joined the Police Department and realized that the department had no specialized outreach for young people in the community. Haas partnered with members of the community to create the Safety Net program. These partners include families, schools, mental health service providers, youth activity programs, and

other key community members. With the police department, they comprise a tight network of stakeholders who can address the full spectrum of issues that make young people vulnerable to criminality.

The aim of the Safety Net Collaborative, explained CPD Deputy Superintendent Christine Elow, is to “foster youth development; promote mental health support, safe schools, and a safe community and family environment; and limit youth involvement in the juvenile justice system through coordinated prevention, intervention, and—when necessary—diversion.”

Every Cambridge public school and city youth program has its own designated Youth Resource Officer (YRO), who serves as a positive role model, mentor, and access point for delivering services to young people in the community. There are four additional Youth Outreach Officers (YOOs) who supplement the work of the YROs. Additionally, CPD has two dedicated juvenile detectives who are overseen by a sergeant and a lieutenant.

The Cambridge Police Department meets every two weeks with its partners in the collaborative—school leaders, mental health professionals, and others—to check in, discuss any concerns, and ensure that all engagement efforts with young people and their families continue to be as effective as possible.

“When I came to Cambridge nine years ago, there were only two choices for officers to make: either arrest or release. That was it.

We were finding that, on low-level offenses, officers were releasing the kids, which wasn’t sending the right message and was frustrating officers who kept running into the same kids engaged in the same behavior. When I asked them why they weren’t making arrests, they said it was because they knew that if these kids had a criminal record, it would follow them for the rest of their lives.

So we created a community-based diversion program that does not touch the criminal justice system at all. The only involvement of the criminal justice system is us at CPD.

We realized that, a lot of the time, the behaviors that we were seeing had underlying causation. We wanted to get at that underlying causation to support our kids and keep them out of the court system.”

—Robert Haas, Commissioner of the Cambridge Police Department

“The Safety Net program is meant to be a sort of pre-diversion program. My colleague Dr. Jamie Barrett and I use the term ‘inoculation against violence.’ We want to reach out to young people before there’s a pathway to extremism, and before these kids become empty vessels in whom any sort of extremist ideology can take root.”

—Dr. William Pollack, Cambridge Heath Alliance and Harvard Medical School

In order to discuss a case at these meetings and formulate an intervention plan, the parents of the young person involved need to sign a release. The release specifies who can be told about the details of the case and participate in the multiagency roundtable discussion about the case, as well as what information can and cannot be shared in that conversation. These discussions are kept general and do not include the sharing of information to which only a clinician treating the young person has access.

As Commissioner Haas explained, “These cases all go through what is called Youth Level of Services case management analysis, or ‘YLS.’ We don’t just have an open discussion about our kids. Our case workers are required to go through YLS training, which educates them about things such as risk factors and how to determine whether a young person is at risk, as well as balancing that against positive forces and influences in that child’s life. So when our case workers present their cases at our biweekly conference, they’ve already done extensive work on the case based on their YLS training, and what they’re looking to the group to help them understand is how to build a case plan for that child.”

Interventions

When a young person is referred to the Safety Net Collaborative, members of the program develop a specialized intervention plan for the young person. This might include connecting them with mental health services and youth development activities.

Increasingly, referrals are coming from parents. For Dr. Pollack, this is clear evidence of the program’s success in building trust with community members and helping young people achieve positive outcomes. “More and more, people in the community trust these officers and trust the youth workers, so they feel comfortable approaching them and saying, ‘I have a problem with my kid—can you help?’ It’s important that what we do opens up a channel not just for care and interventions, but also for parents to come forward and feel safe, particularly with anyone who feels alienated from what they feel is the majority of the community. It’s important that they can go somewhere and ask for help and get plugged into a centralized system to get access to services. In Cambridge, that place is the police department. They don’t run all of Safety Net, but they are a type of holding environment for all of these other services.”

Field Notes

Question from the Audience: I have a few technical questions about your program. First, as you mentioned, the Safety Net service was set up before the whole question of CVE. So it deals with individuals of all backgrounds and not just people from Muslim and/or immigrant backgrounds, is that right?

Second, given that this was formulated pre-CVE, have you adapted the program to include culturally competent care? In other words, do you have specialists who can communicate effectively with immigrant populations?

Third, you mentioned that parents have to sign a release in order for the police and the people from the other agencies in your Safety Net Collaborative to discuss a given case. What level of information is shared through that release?

Christine Elow, Deputy Superintendent of the Cambridge Police Department:

Regarding your first question, that is correct: our Safety Net program is for the entire community and for all of our kids.

Regarding your second question about cultural competency, we're currently working with our community partners like Saida Abdi to examine that and find the best way to approach these families in our community in a culturally competent manner and effectively engage them. We're trying to get all of the right people to the table to have those conversations.

Lastly, regarding your question about the release, it's very specific about who can and cannot be at the table to discuss a young person and what we can and cannot discuss.

To give you an example, we have a psychologist, Dr. Jamie Barrett, who has been with us for about 40 hours a week. All he can say regarding young people to the other members of the Safety Net Collaborative at the meetings that we have every two weeks is basic facts like whether or not they are being seen. We can say that a young person has been arrested, but we can't discuss any related sex crimes. The information we share, in other words, is very basic and general. It's not a clinical conversation.

“We talk about what’s going on in schools, what’s going on with young people. We try to figure out which families in our community need assistance, which kids are having a difficult time, and how we can support these families.

So our real goal is prevention and early intervention. We don’t want a crime to happen, and we don’t want these kids to end up in the juvenile justice system.”

—Christine Elow, Deputy Superintendent of the Cambridge Police Department

Summary of recommendations for police agencies and their partners

- **Create dedicated engagement initiatives for young people:** Young people—particularly young people from immigrant communities—face unique challenges and often struggle to feel understood by the adults in their families. Police agencies should take this into consideration when building their outreach programs and ensure that they develop programming that is specific to young people and their needs.
- **Be cognizant of how being in full uniform might impact relationship-building efforts:** It is important for outreach officers to be transparent about who they are. One way of telegraphing this is for officers to wear their uniforms when they attend community meetings or other events. In the experience of the Cambridge Police Department, however, community members can find officers in full uniform intimidating and feel less comfortable engaging with them as a result. Their solution has been “soft” uniforms, which communicate who outreach officers are while still ensuring that they are approachable.
- **Address the community’s concerns as they define their concerns:** Violent extremism is not always a top priority for community members. Often community members are more concerned about quality of life issues in their neighborhood, gangs, or other types of crime or violence with which they contend. The police department needs to ask community members what their public safety concerns are and then address them. This builds trust between the department and the community, and improves the health and security of the community as a whole.
- **Address the factors that make young people vulnerable to all sorts of violence:** The factors that make young people vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremists are often the same things that put them at risk of engaging in any type of violent criminal behavior. These factors and the types of behaviors in which they might result should be addressed in their totality. This is better for the

health and security of the community in the long term, and it helps the community to understand that violent extremism is just one facet of a larger picture of violence that CPD and its partners are addressing.

- **Engage with the appropriate community leaders:** Police agencies need to partner with leaders who are trusted within the community and who will work to facilitate relationships between the police and the larger community. In order to find these community leaders, police agencies need to cast a wide net and rely on community members themselves to point them in the right direction.
- **Partner with other agencies and service providers:** Forging productive partnerships with everyone from school administrators to social service providers is crucial in ensuring the long-term success of community-building efforts. In Cambridge, the police department has paid particular attention to building relationships with educators, faith leaders, and mental health care providers. This has allowed them to develop their robust prevention and intervention programming, typified by the Safety Net Collaborative.
- **Engage with community members who disagree with you:** Preventing violent extremism is, in many communities, a highly sensitive and polarizing topic. Police agencies should not shy away from community members who disagree with them. Instead, these community members should be purposefully involved in efforts to formulate violence prevention initiatives. Listening to these voices of dissent will improve the reception of any resulting violence-prevention programs, because it ensures that everyone in the community will feel that they had a voice in the process of creating the program. It will also ensure that those efforts are effective, because they will have been refined based on the concerns of community members.

Conclusion

As the PERF forum in Minneapolis made clear, great strides have been made in some cities in forging partnerships among police agencies, community members, social service providers, educators, and others to prevent violent extremism. Leading agencies are modeling an approach that addresses all of the risk factors that make a person vulnerable to being drawn into criminal behavior, including violence inspired by extremism.

This holistic approach to helping community members in crisis is effective not only in diverting individuals away from violence, but also in improving the health and cohesion of the community as a whole.

As efforts to build community resilience to violent extremism have matured across the country, common lessons and promising practices have begun to emerge:

- It is important to address the full spectrum of violent extremism, not merely one type of extremism.
- Outreach programs should anticipate inevitable setbacks, and use the process of addressing problems as an opportunity to develop closer ties with communities.
- Police agencies and their partners must understand the identity issues that young people in immigrant communities often face, and how a weak sense of their identity as part of the wider community can be alienating and can make them more vulnerable to violent extremist rhetoric.
- Listen to what community members have to say about their issues and concerns. Do not assume that you know what their concerns are.
- Ask community members who are the community leaders they trust, and seek out those leaders.
- Work together with community members, community organizations and other government agencies to make changes and fulfill communities' needs.
- Be consistent and sincere in efforts to build bridges between the department and the community. Meet people on their own turf if that is what they prefer.
- Expect that some people will be wary of engaging, be proactive in inviting them to meet with you, and know that setbacks will happen.
- Show up in the community regularly, demonstrate commitment and reliability, and follow through on promises you make.

Above all, community outreach is a matter of demonstrating to all of the communities that you serve that you have a genuine interest in understanding them and helping them solve their problems. Cultural competency is important, and officers should receive training to ensure they understand different cultures. But cultural competency can be learned. What is more fundamental is a police department's interest in serving the community.

As Sgt. Mike Abdeen of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department said, "What you need is officers who are willing to learn, who are open-minded, who are willing to go out and learn and listen to people's concerns. And you need to be persistent in working to build trust with the community."

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About PERF

The **Police Executive Research Forum** (PERF) is an independent research organization that focuses on critical issues in policing. Since its founding in 1976, PERF has identified best practices on fundamental issues such as reducing police use of force, developing community policing and problem-oriented policing, using technologies to deliver police services to the community, and evaluating crime reduction strategies.

PERF strives to advance professionalism in policing and to improve the delivery of police services through the exercise of strong national leadership, public debate of police and criminal justice issues, and research and policy development.

In addition to conducting research and publishing reports on our findings, PERF conducts management studies of individual law enforcement agencies, educates hundreds of police officials each year in a three-week executive development program, and provides executive search services to governments that wish to conduct national searches for their next police chief.

All of PERF's work benefits from PERF's status as a membership organization of police officials, academics, federal government leaders, and others with an interest in policing and criminal justice.

All PERF members must have a four-year college degree and must subscribe to a set of founding principles, emphasizing the importance of research and public debate in policing, adherence to the Constitution and the highest standards of ethics and integrity, and accountability to the communities that police agencies serve.

PERF is governed by a member-elected president and board of directors and a board-appointed executive director. A staff of approximately 30 full-time professionals is based in Washington, D.C.

To learn more, visit PERF online at www.policeforum.org.

About the COPS Office

The **Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)** is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing begins with a commitment to building trust and mutual respect between police and communities. It supports public safety by encouraging all stakeholders to work together to address our nation's crime challenges. When police and communities collaborate, they more effectively address underlying issues, change negative behavioral patterns, and allocate resources.

Rather than simply responding to crime, community policing focuses on preventing it through strategic problem solving approaches based on collaboration. The COPS Office awards grants to hire community police and support the development and testing of innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders, as well as all levels of law enforcement.

Another source of COPS Office assistance is the Collaborative Reform Initiative for Technical Assistance (CRI-TA). Developed to advance community policing and ensure constitutional practices, CRI-TA is an independent, objective process for organizational transformation. It provides recommendations based on expert analysis of policies, practices, training, tactics, and accountability methods related to issues of concern.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has invested more than \$14 billion to add community policing officers to the nation's streets, enhance crime fighting technology, support crime prevention initiatives, and provide training and technical assistance to help advance community policing.

- To date, the COPS Office has funded the hiring of approximately 127,000 additional officers by more than 13,000 of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies in both small and large jurisdictions.
- Nearly 700,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office-funded training organizations.
- To date, the COPS Office has distributed more than eight million topic-specific publications, training curricula, white papers, and resource CDs.
- The COPS Office also sponsors conferences, roundtables, and other forums focused on issues critical to law enforcement.

The COPS Office information resources, covering a wide range of community policing topics—from school and campus safety to gang violence—can be downloaded at www.cops.usdoj.gov. This website is also the grant application portal, providing access to online application forms.

Partnerships among police, community members, faith-based groups, mental health providers, educators, and other stakeholders are critical to preventing violent extremism. This report on the Forum for Building Interdisciplinary Partnerships to Prevent Violent Extremism documents the discussion of the forum participants and provides case studies of collaborative efforts in the Minneapolis—St. Paul—Hennepin County area; the city of Cambridge, Massachusetts; the Los Angeles area; and the Montgomery County, Maryland, suburb of Washington, D.C.

The report highlights the need for law enforcement to proactively engage with their communities, paying special attention to young people in immigrant communities, who can feel alienated from American culture. It also underscores the importance of personal attributes, such as the willingness of officers to learn the language and culture of a community and the role of police leadership in promoting community relationships and interdisciplinary partnerships. In addition to the case studies, the report includes the recommendations from forum participants, who represented law enforcement, community groups, social service providers and other stakeholders.



COPS
Community Oriented Policing Services
U.S. Department of Justice

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To obtain details about COPS Office programs, call the COPS Office Response Center at 800-421-6770.

Visit the COPS Office online at www.cops.usdoj.gov.



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