

INTRODUCTION: COMMUNITY VIOLENCE AND COVID-19

Many communities across the country have seen a rise in homicides and gun violence in the wake of the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. From increases in gang-related violence to higher rates of domestic violence, researchers and journalists have identified various ways in which community violence has been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. Examples of specific factors correlated with community violence that have become more pronounced during the pandemic include:

- Homelessness;
- Social isolation;
- Anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues;
- Substance abuse;
- Lack of economic opportunity; and
- Neighborhood blight.

While the pandemic has exacerbated contributing factors to community violence, the root causes can be traced to decades of disinvestment and economic isolation in certain communities, disproportionately impacting Black and Hispanic neighborhoods. HUD has made billions of dollars available to help communities prepare for, prevent, and recover from the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. These funds can also be leveraged to address the causes of community violence and help build stronger, safer, more equitable, and ultimately more resilient communities.

This quick guide identifies evidence-based strategies to mitigate and reduce community violence and provides suggestions on how such activities could be funded with Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) or Community Development Block Grant CARES Act (CDBG-CV) resources.

EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNITY VIOLENCE INTERVENTION

IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT OF NEIGHBORHOODS

There are numerous studies that link neighborhood environment to the prevention or exacerbation of violent crime. The John Jay College of Criminal Justice Research and Evaluation Center reviewed this research and identified evidence-based strategies to reduce violent crime by improving a community's physical environment. They write that

“Increasing the prevalence of green space in a neighborhood, improving the quality of neighborhood buildings and housing, and creating public spaces with ample lighting suitable for pedestrian traffic can be cost-effective ways of decreasing community violence.”¹ Below is an outline of strategies to improve the physical environment from this report and the corresponding studies that support them.

IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	EVIDENCE-BACKED STRATEGIES TO PREVENT AND REDUCE COMMUNITY VIOLENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add tree coverage and other plants to neighborhoods, including the grounds of public housing 	Kondo et al. 2017a; Kondo et al. 2017b; Kuo and Sullivan 2001a; Kuo and Sullivan 2001b
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean up debris and add greenery to vacant lots; partner with residents to improve vacant lots 	Brenas et al. 2011; Brenas et al. 2018; Garvin et al. 2013; Heinze et al. 2018; Kondo et al. 2016; Moyer et al. 2019
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor lead levels and reduce children’s exposure, especially children younger than age 3 	Aizer and Currie 2019; Billings and Schnepel 2018; Grönqvist et al. 2020
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce number of abandoned buildings, prevent foreclosure of homes and prevent foreclosed homes from becoming vacant 	Branas et al. 2016; Cui and Walsh 2015; Ellen et al. 2013; Kondo et al. 2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fine business owners for uncovered doors and windows in occupied buildings 	Kondo et al. 2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close streets and create cul-de-sac streets in neighborhoods affected by or at risk of violence 	Southworth and Ben-Joseph 2004; Lasley 1996; Welsh and Farrington 2009a
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install surveillance cameras in subways and other public areas 	Priks 2015; Welsh and Farrington 2009b
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase street lighting in residential areas 	Chalfin et al. 2019; Farrington and Welsh 2002
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase funding for Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) 	Cook and MacDonald 2011
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce traffic congestion 	Beland and Brent 2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase use of bulletproof glass 	Smith 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alter school district boundaries to decrease grouping of disadvantaged students within same schools 	Billings et al. 2019
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase social connectedness among neighborhood residents 	Stuart and Taylor forthcoming

¹ “Reducing violence without police: A Review of research and evidence.” John Jay College of Criminal Justice Research and Evaluation Center. November 9, 2020. <https://johnjayrec.nyc/2020/11/09/av2020/>

Most of these strategies may be funded by CDBG-CV if the activity prepares for, prevents, and responds to coronavirus (also known as “CDBG-CV tieback”), is an eligible activity under the program, and meets a CDBG national objective, such as the low-moderate income (LMI) areas and households.

STRATEGY	CDBG-CV TIEBACK	CDBG/ CDBG-CV ELIGIBLE ACTIVITY AND NATIONAL OBJECTIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase tree coverage and green space 	Increase suitable, outdoor space for residents	Public facility or street improvement; most likely as Low Mod Area Benefit (LMA) national objective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Converting vacant lots to public spaces/ community gardens 	Increase suitable, outdoor space for residents	Public facilities and Improvements; most likely as LMA national objective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing/ preventing evictions and foreclosures 	Stabilize households or neighborhoods impacted by COVID-19	Subsistence payments; most likely as Low Mod Limited Clientele (LMC) national objective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve street lighting 	Increase access to outdoor space	Public facilities and Improvements; most likely as LMA national objective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce traffic congestion/ Improve pedestrian space 	Increase access to outdoor space	Public facilities and Improvements; most likely as LMA national objective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase social connectedness among neighborhood residents 	Support community revitalization planning	Planning and Administration

Building on the last bullet, municipalities should seek opportunities to build social connection and cohesion across all of these strategies. Choice Neighborhoods incorporates this strategy into its approach to neighborhood revitalization by bringing together diverse stakeholders across the community to strategize and implement plans.

REDUCE SUBSTANCE ABUSE

The John Jay report also describes that “Numerous studies show that interventions to reduce harmful substance abuse are associated with lower rates of community violence, and not all strategies involve treatment”. While some policies to achieve this goal are not the focus of CDBG-CV funds—such as enforcing age limits on alcohol access and restricting alcohol sales in certain areas or during specific times—at least one key strategy—increasing access to treatment—has been shown to decrease violent crime. Public service activities that support organizations that provide mental health and substance abuse services can be a key contributor to reducing violent crime.

STRATEGY	CDBG-CV TIEBACK	CDBG/ CDBG-CV ELIGIBLE ACTIVITY AND NATIONAL OBJECTIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Substance Abuse Treatment Services 	Identify a study or local data showing that COVID-19 increased the incidence of substance abuse within the community	Public Service; LMC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mental Health Services 	Identify a study or local data showing that COVID-19 increased the incidence of need for mental health services within the community	Public Service; LMC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health Facilities Acquire, construct, or rehabilitate a public health, substance abuse or mental health facility 	Identify a study or local data showing that COVID-19 increased the incidence of need for mental health or substance abuse services within the community	Public facilities and Improvements; LMC or LMA

INCREASE FINANCIAL STABILITY AND MOBILITY

Several studies have found a link between financial stress and violence, conversely as the John Jay report identifies “Financial stability and economic opportunities help to reduce crime. Short-term assistance, especially when coupled with behavioral therapy programs, appears to affect rates of violence and the timing of financial aid plays a role in community safety. People experiencing negative income shocks are less inclined to behave violently when they receive timely financial assistance.” Below are several evidence-based strategies captured by the John Jay Report, several of which can be funded by CDBG-CV, including workforce developing training focused on preparing residents for living wage jobs, including those who are returning from incarceration, and providing financial assistance for utilities and rental payments.

STRATEGY	CDBG-CV TIEBACK	CDBG/ CDBG-CV ELIGIBLE ACTIVITY AND NATIONAL OBJECTIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing/ preventing evictions and foreclosures 	Stabilize households or neighborhoods impacted by COVID-19	Subsistence payments; most likely as LMC national objective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food Assistance 	Stabilize households or neighborhoods impacted by COVID-19	Public Service; LMC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workforce Development Provide job training to individuals impacted by COVID-19 	Provide job training to individuals impacted by COVID-19	Public Service; LMC

STRATEGY	CDBG-CV TIEBACK	CDBG/ CDBG-CV ELIGIBLE ACTIVITY AND NATIONAL OBJECTIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Microbusiness and Special Economic Development 	Support local businesses impacted by COVID-19 to revitalize communities and create and retain jobs	Economic Development; LMC or Low Mod Job Creation (LMJ) activity

MITIGATE FINANCIAL STRESS	EVIDENCE-BACKED STRATEGIES TO PREVENT AND REDUCE COMMUNITY VIOLENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce negative income shocks following divorce 	Cáceres-Delpiano and Giolito 2012
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase one-time, immediate financial assistance 	Palmer et al. 2019
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase short-term financial assistance and programs that support the development of emotional and social skills 	Blattman et al. 2017
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase social welfare (relief) spending that combines income and a work requirement 	Fishback et at. 2010
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase availability of high-wage entry-level jobs 	Bell et al. 2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase low-skilled wages for individuals returning home after periods of incarceration 	Yan 2017
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer housing voucher programs (e.g. Moving to Opportunity) with priority for residents of demolished public housing 	Aliprantis and Hartley 2015; Chyn 2018; Jay et al. 2019; Ludwig et al. 2001
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit 	Freedman and Owens 2011
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use electronic benefit transfer (EBT) instead of cash 	Write et al. 2017
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alter the timing of income support payments to stagger them across each month 	Foley 2011
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stagger the timing of delivery of federal foods benefits (SNAP) 	Carr and Packham 2019

ENGAGE AND SUPPORT YOUTH

Young men are more likely at risk of violent behavior, and the “victims of community violence are overwhelmingly young people of color, especially young Black men, for whom violence is by far the leading cause of death.”² It is important to target programs and services to those who are most likely to be at risk. Public service activities that focus

² <https://giffords.org/issues/community-violence/>

on youth employment and workforce training, mentorship, conflict resolution and critical thinking programming, and educational supports are particularly helpful.

STRATEGY	CDBG-CV TIEBACK	CDBG/ CDBG-CV ELIGIBLE ACTIVITY AND NATIONAL OBJECTIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Construct or Rehabilitate Park or Community Center Space 	Provide safe fitness, outdoor or social space where insufficient facilities are available	Public Facility; most likely LMA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth Services 	Provide COVID-19 safe activities and services for youth	Public Service; LMC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workforce Development Provide job training to individuals impacted by COVID-19 	Provide job training to individuals impacted by COVID-19	Public Service; LMC

FOCUS VIOLENCE INTERVENTION AND DETERRENCE

As reported by *Giffords Courage to Fight Gun Violence*, the majority of shootings take place in small geographic areas. These neighborhoods are often economically disadvantaged and highly segregated, forged by past and present racial discrimination and fraught police-community relations. *Giffords* reports on three evidence-based strategies—group violence intervention, relationship-based street outreach, and hospital-based violence intervention—to reduce community violence by focusing intervention and deterrence efforts on persons most at risk of violent behavior or those who are most vulnerable to them. Their findings are summarized below.

Group Violence Intervention. Operation Ceasefire originated group violence intervention in Boston in the 1990s. This strategy involves analyzing violent incidents and trends to identify those most likely to commit or fall victim to violent crime. Once identified, they are invited to “call-ins,” where law enforcement, social service providers, and community members convey the message that the community wants to see them alive, safe, and out of prison—but the shooting must stop. At the end of the call-in, service providers offer case management, access to mental health services, and other long-term support services. Independent evaluations of group violence intervention have associated the program with between 30% and 60% reductions in overall homicides. The Oakland Ceasefire Partnership³ serves as a more recent successful example. Between 2012 and 2019 (when a case study was written about the Oakland Ceasefire Partnership) Oakland had cut its annual shootings and homicides nearly in half since 2012. The Oakland program had five main components: 1) analysis of violent incidents and trends; 2)

³ <https://giffords.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Giffords-Law-Center-A-Case-Study-in-Hope.pdf>

respectful, in-person communications; 3) relationship-based social services; 4) narrowly focused law enforcement actions; and 5) an intentional management structure.⁴

Relationship-based Street Outreach. Known more commonly today as “violence interrupters,” these strategies use a public health model, treating gun violence as a communicable disease and working to interrupt its transmission among community members. “Violence interrupters” and other outreach staff help identify and mediate potentially violent conflicts, respond to shootings, support victims and their families, and provide much needed access to social services. One of the earliest models of relationship-based street outreach is Cure Violence, pioneered in 2000 in Chicago, and expanded to other communities. An independent evaluation of this initiative in the South Bronx associated the program with a 37% decline in gun injuries and a 63% decline in shooting incidents, such as armed robbery or murder.⁵

Hospital-based Violence Intervention. This strategy focuses on reaching high-risk individuals who have recently been admitted to a hospital for treatment of a violent injury, which presents a unique “teachable moment” when an individual may be open to positive intervention. Research shows that patients who receive these services are four times less likely to be convicted of a violent crime and four times less likely to be subsequently reinjured. Evaluations have documented success in the form of lower levels of future offending, fewer retaliations, reduced hospitalizations, and cost savings from reductions in future injuries and incarcerations following this intervention strategy.⁶

STRATEGY	CDBG-CV TIEBACK	CDBG/ CDBG-CV ELIGIBLE ACTIVITY AND NATIONAL OBJECTIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community-based crime intervention 	Identify a study or local data showing that COVID-19 increased the incidences of community violence.	Public Service (Matrix code 05I); LMC or LMA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Domestic violence services 	Identify a study or local data showing that COVID-19 increased the incidences of domestic violence.	Public Service (Matrix code 05G); LMC

⁴ For more information on the Oakland Ceasefire program, see: McLively, Mike and Nieto, Brittany. “A Case Study in Hope: Lessons from Oakland’s Remarkable Reduction in Gun Violence.” *Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence; Faith in Action*; and *BBGVPC*. April 2019

⁵ See also City of Los Angeles Mayor’s Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development for another current example. <https://www.lagryd.org/>

⁶ “Critical Care: The Important Role of Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs.” John Jay College of Criminal Justice Research and Evaluation Center. May 15, 2018. <https://johnjayrec.nyc/2018/05/15/criticalcare/>

COMMUNITY EXAMPLES

MARYLAND – GOVERNOR’S OFFICE OF CRIME PREVENTION, YOUTH, AND VICTIM SERVICES

Source: <http://goccp.maryland.gov/governors-office-of-crime-prevention-youth-and-victim-services-announces-more-than-130-million-in-funding-amid-coronavirus-response/>

- \$132 million in grant funding through fiscal year 2021 to allow for continued operations for law enforcement, youth services, and victim services agencies; protect jobs; and provide direct services to the people of Maryland by:
 - Reserving \$85 million in continued state and federal funding for current grant recipients to reduce administrative burden
 - Allocating \$47 million in competitive funding to new and existing applicants – both plans offer the flexibility to utilize funding for resources needed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

CALIFORNIA – CALIFORNIA’S DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, PROJECT HOMEKEY

Source: <https://www.hcd.ca.gov/grants-funding/active-funding/homekey.shtml>

- Building on the success of Project Roomkey, Opens in New Window, Homekey is the next phase in the state’s response to protecting Californians experiencing homelessness who are at high risk for serious illness and are impacted by COVID-19. Administered by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), \$600 million in grant funding is available to local public entities, including cities, counties, or other local public entities, including housing authorities or federally recognized tribal governments within California to purchase and rehabilitate housing, including hotels, motels, vacant apartment buildings, and other buildings and convert them into interim or permanent, long-term housing.

SAN LUIS OBISPO, CALIFORNIA – HOUSING AUTHORITY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO

Source: <https://www.haslo.org/housing-programs-4>

- Use of CDBG-CV funds in Project Homekey “Motel 6” Property: 102-room property across two buildings for interim to permanent housing for unhoused (homeless community).

ORANGE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Source: <https://www.ocgov.com/gov/occr/hcd/>

- Use of CDBG-CV funds in Project Homekey “Stanton Inn” & “Tahiti” properties: 130 units across two properties for interim to permanent housing for unhoused (homeless community).

CITY OF VANCOUVER, WASHINGTON

Source:

https://www.cityofvancouver.us/sites/default/files/fileattachments/community_and_economic_development/page/1016/cdbg_public_service_covid-19_response.pdf

- Funding for response to public services (\$300,00, comprising \$250,000 CDBG and \$50,000 CDBG-CV), supported local agencies with shelter, food, domestic and crime violence/abuse relief. Examples are:
- *Clark County Volunteer Lawyers Program (Family Safety-Legal Aid)*. Agency has seen an increase in frequency and severity of adult and child abuse due to COVID-19 isolation, being out of school/away from reporters of abuse, and reduction in capacity of shelters. The funds support new and existing services to support domestic violence clients.
- *National Women's Coalition Against Violence and Exploitation (Dignity Clothing Program)*. Services have been and will be expanded to help other vulnerable patients who are suffering from COVID-19, who are homeless and/or victims of crime and abuse.