

Afterword:

A Note About Community Gun Violence

This Playbook focuses on shooting rampages in public places resulting in four or more victims killed by the assailant because of the extraordinary challenges these extreme emergencies pose to mayors. While horrifying, this type of mass shooting is exceedingly rare, averaging about six per year since 2006. Only three mass shootings met this definition in 2020, largely as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic that forced closure of schools, restaurants, and other public venues. However, over the first five months of 2021, as the nation moved toward a more normal way of life, there have already been five public mass killings.

The Associated Press/USA Today/Northeastern University database takes a broader approach, defining a “mass shooting” as any incident in which at least four people are killed by gunfire. Using this definition, there were 21 mass shootings in 2020. Most of this community gun violence occurs in U.S. cities, often in specific areas within neighborhoods. The perpetrators are usually young men and are often gun violence victims themselves. Their crimes upend promising lives, often of young people, and create a ripple effect of collective trauma in otherwise vibrant Black and Hispanic communities.

There are, of course, hundreds of large-scale shootings in the U.S. every year in which, fortunately, most of the victims survive their gunshot wounds. According to an alternative definition of a mass shooting used by the Gun Violence Archive, there were more than 600 cases in 2020. Although half of these incidents resulted in no fatalities and another quarter involved but one death, surviving victims still endure painful and debilitating injuries. Like the deadly mass shootings discussed above, this form of mass violence frequently occurs in city neighborhoods with high concentrations of racial and ethnic minorities.

This Playbook does not address the everyday toll of community gun violence because the root causes (including poverty,¹ racism, underresourced schools, and ineffective public safety strategies and social services) differ from the root causes of the indiscriminate rampages committed by active shooters (often motivated by a perceived grievance, hate, or terrorist ideology).² There is no known way to prevent the latter attacks; therefore, mayors need to prepare for them.

In contrast, research has shown that community gun violence *can* be reduced by (a) implementing programs that focus on known perpetrators (*e.g.*, violence interrupter programs), (b) making improvements in gun tracing, (c) providing needed social services (*e.g.*, through hospital-based interventions), as well as (d) building community-based support for at-risk youth (including after-school programs). These evidence-informed programs have proved effective across the nation regardless of socioeconomic neighborhood contexts. Partner with your police chief and leaders of the affected communities to plan and implement intervention programs (and improve existing programs) that are appropriate for your community. More needs to be done to combat community gun violence with the urgency and funding that the issue requires.

¹ Note that some communities of high poverty have low crime rates. These communities demonstrate what criminal justice researchers describe as “community collective efficacy,” which is characterized by social cohesion, shared identities and social norms, and a willingness to take action to defend norms particularly when the interests of vulnerable populations are at stake.

² We use the term “public mass shooting” or the shortened “mass shooting” to refer to these crimes.

At the same time, many of the recommendations in this Playbook *do* apply to community gun violence. For starters, you should publicly acknowledge when instances of community gun violence rise to the level of a “mass shooting” (with a large number of victims even if fewer deaths than the usual threshold) and use that term when speaking about the violence. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio learned this lesson after he was criticized for waiting more than three days to acknowledge that a Brownsville shooting in 2019 that left one dead and another 11 injured was, in fact, a mass shooting. He later announced \$9 million in funding for programs to help the affected community.

The trauma described in this Playbook is, of course, experienced by the victims of community gun violence and their families. Yet when a shooting kills multiple partygoers or people on the street in an city neighborhood, there is scant press coverage, no POTUS visit or attention from elected officials, and no victims’ fund or Family Assistance Center established in response. This disparity is not lost on the affected communities, and local advocates frequently note that the families and victims affected by community gun violence deserve the same attention and resources they would if the shooting occurred at a festival, a theater, or a school in an affluent neighborhood.

Drawing on the recommendations elsewhere in this Playbook, you can:

- Schedule a press conference to inform the public of law enforcement actions taken in response to the shooting.
- Your trauma-informed messaging can promptly identify the victims, convey messages of unity and healing, highlight local mental health resources, and announce services available to families and victims.
- Describe violence intervention programs that you have established—or plan to implement—to reduce community gun violence. (The federal government has made additional funding available for this type of program.)
- Reach out to the families to comfort them and ensure their needs are met. Coordinate with your Police Chief and/or prosecutor’s office to ensure they connect families to victims’ advocates and state victim compensation programs.
- Meet with affected community leaders and local partners to listen to their concerns. Determine what else your office can do to address the challenges experienced by the affected community.
- Be innovative: Is there a Resiliency Center already established in your community? If so, could the victims and families of other forms of gun violence access its concierge services? If not, could you establish one for them? It could serve as an on-demand resource should the *other* kind of mass shooting take place in your community. Cities such as Washington D.C. and San Francisco are taking this approach to adapt infrastructure developed for victims of mass violence to support victims of urban gun violence.
- There are approximately forty Family Justice Centers located in the United States and other countries. The concept is to create a family-friendly environment in which a multi-disciplinary team of professionals work together in one, centralized location to provide coordinated services to victims of family violence. Could the services in an existing Family Justice Center in your community be broadened to assist families recovering from the loss of a loved one to gun violence, whether from suicide, domestic violence, or urban gun violence? If your community lacks one of these centers, could you work with community partners to establish one?

Key Resources: Community Gun Violence Prevention

Cities United: supports a national network of mayors who are committed to reducing the epidemic of homicides and shootings among young Black men and boys.

<https://citiesunited.org>

Everytown for Gun Safety: The City Gun Violence Reduction Insight Portal (CityGRIP) is an online clearinghouse of data-informed gun violence reduction strategies, and the Mayors Against Illegal Guns coalition provides a host of resources to member mayors to support local gun violence reduction efforts. <https://citygrip.org/>



Giffords Law Center: this report summarizes effective intervention strategies to reduce urban gun violence.

<https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/other-laws-policies/intervention-strategies/>

Conclusion

Obviously, all victims of gun violence deserve your compassion and support. All the neighborhoods in your city deserve to be safe from gun violence. Fortunately, we know how to reduce community gun violence, and most of the evidence-informed actions must be implemented at the local level. Therefore, mayors like you are in the best position to reduce community gun violence, even as you work to implement the recommendations in this Playbook to prepare for, respond to, and recover from a public mass shooting.

Endnotes

¹ Anthony A. Braga, David M. Hureau & Andrew V. Papachristos, *Deterring Gang-Involved Gun Violence: Measuring the Impact of Boston's Operation Ceasefire on Street Gang Behavior*, 30 J QUANT CRIMINOL 113–139 (2014).

² CITY OF CHICAGO, Gun Trace Report 2017, 5(2017), <https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/mayor/Press%20Room/Press%20Releases/2017/October/GTR2017.pdf> (last visited May 20, 2021).

³ Carnell Cooper, Dawn M. Eslinger & Paul D. Stolley, *Hospital-based violence intervention programs work*, 61 J TRAUMA 534–540, 535 (2006).

⁴ Sara B. Heller, *Summer jobs reduce violence among disadvantaged youth*, 346 SCIENCE 1219–1223, 1219 (2014).

⁵ Noah Goldberg, *Mayor calls Brownsville tragedy a “mass shooting” after days of hesitation*, BROOKLYN EAGLE (2019), <https://brooklyneagle.com/articles/2019/07/31/mayor-calls-brownsville-tragedy-a-mass-shooting-after-days-of-hesitation/> (last visited May 26, 2021).

⁶ CITY OF NEW YORK, *Mayor de Blasio Announces Nearly \$9 Million in Funding to Support Brownsville*, CITY OF NEW YORK (2019), <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/381-19/mayor-de-blasio-nearly-9-million-funding-support-brownsville-following-mass> (last visited May 20, 2021).