

# Reducing Gun Violence in Our Communities:

A Leadership Guide for Law Enforcement on Effective Strategies and Programs

with support from  
**TheJoyceFoundation**





## Acknowledgements

The IACP wishes to acknowledge the following individuals who contributed to the development of this publication:

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# How to Use This Guide

The overall goal of this guide is to provide information about notable programs and policing strategies that can be implemented by law enforcement agencies, regardless of size, in order to enhance the critical and life-saving mission of reducing gun violence. By highlighting innovative approaches developed by law enforcement departments and communities across the country, local leaders are encouraged to expand upon their current efforts in order to create a comprehensive program to enhance community and officer safety.

The guide is structured with sections that address many existing gun violence problems including: gangs, youth violence, domestic violence, and federal firearms trafficking. If a community is experiencing a particular form of gun violence, the corresponding section of the guide offers practical information on effective countermeasures and ways to involve the community, as appropriate. Local law enforcement agencies, together with community leaders, can review this guide to learn about proactive programs and strategies that can be replicated and/or customized to fit into an individual agency's policing model.

For a community or agency looking to develop a gun violence reduction program, IACP's *Taking a Stand* summit report and companion planning guide are useful resources available free of charge on the IACP website. These documents provide both a "big picture" view of the issue along with 39 strategic recommendations in three key areas:

## 1 Keeping Communities Safe

## 2 Preventing and Solving Gun Crime

## 3 Keeping Police Officers Safe

The recommendations of the *Taking a Stand* report seek to engage elected officials and the wider criminal justice system in gun violence prevention by addressing overarching problems such as the criminal possession of firearms, illegal guns, and the lack of law enforcement training. This guide takes that work to the next level by bringing to the attention of community leaders and local law enforcement numerous successful programs and strategies that can proactively reduce gun violence.

All too often discussions about reducing gun violence get confused with the issue of gun control. Therefore, it is important to note that this guide is about reducing gun violence in our communities—a critical mission with which all law-abiding citizens should agree. This guide is not about gun control; it is about the implementation of proactive policing strategies in conjunction with the application of available resources in order to produce a long-lasting reduction in gun violence.



This guide has been developed as part of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) – Joyce Foundation collaboration that began with the 2007 *Great Lakes Summit on Gun Violence*. The resulting summit report titled *Taking a Stand: Reducing Gun Violence in Our Communities* served as the foundation for this guide that was created through roundtable discussions with law enforcement personnel, interviews with subject matter experts, and a review of notable programs/initiatives in place across the country.

For additional information, links to actual programs have been included as available.



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# Introduction

When the problem of gun violence is raised, the tendency is to focus on homicide. However, as law enforcement officers responding on the front lines recognize, gun violence occurs in a range of situations, all of which negatively impact communities across the United States. Robberies, assaults, domestic violence, suicides, and officer-involved shootings are all scenarios where firearms are too often a key part of the criminal act or incident. Additional challenges for law enforcement extend to gangs, firearm traffickers, and people who by law are prohibited from possessing firearms. This very real violence inflicts harm on our communities and severely compromises officer safety.

Fundamental to the mission of protecting and serving the community, gun violence reduction must be factored into each law enforcement agency's overall policing strategy. The IACP has developed this guide with support from the Joyce Foundation to inform and support expanded efforts to enhance community safety through the reduction of gun violence.



# I.

## Understanding and Responding to Gun Violence



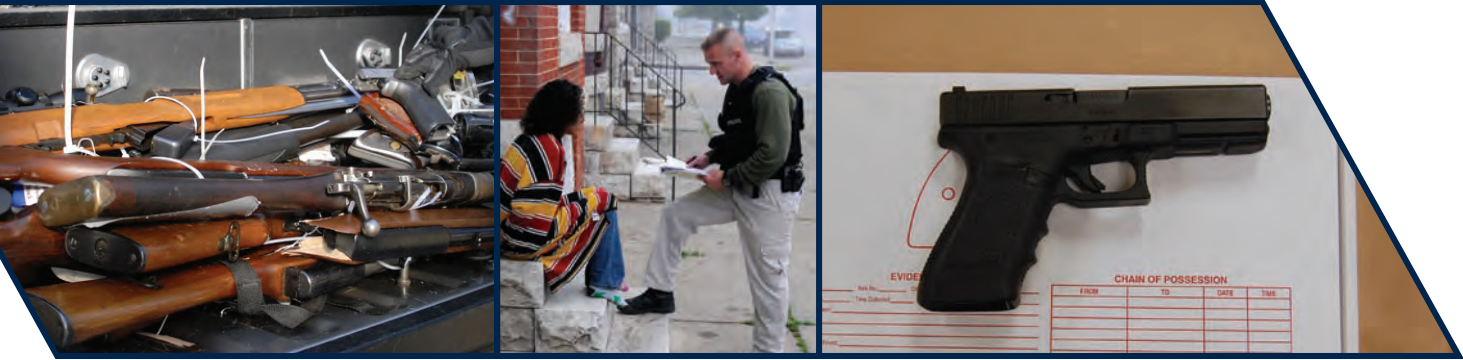
**O**n average 80 Americans die from gun violence each day, and 92 percent of law enforcement officers feloniously killed in the line of duty are murdered with a firearm. Violent offenders use firearms in furtherance of criminal activity and against police as they attempt to evade apprehension. To effectively counter this risk to community and officer safety, federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies must coordinate and collaborate. Every law enforcement agency, regardless of size or community served, must factor a strategic response to the reality of gun violence into its overall policing strategy.

### **Agency Self–Assessment: Gun Violence in the Community**

Reducing gun violence must be a core objective in the overall law enforcement mission of ensuring safe communities. While a swift response to incidents of gun violence is critical, it is not enough to be reactive. Given the potential of intelligence-led and data-driven policing and the move towards “predictive policing,” agencies must perform a strategic review of their current operations and develop a [multifaceted plan](#) to address

the gun violence problems specific to their communities. To that end, departments should look to answer the following questions in order to assess the complete picture of gun violence:

- How is gun violence occurring? Is it random or is there a trend?
- When and where does it occur? Are there hot spots?
- Does your reporting/record-keeping provide an accurate overview? Can both first responders and crime analysts contribute to an accurate picture?
- Are your current countermeasures based on data? How effective are these measures?
- Have you enlisted the assistance of criminal justice and community stakeholders (probation and parole, elected officials, medical providers, domestic violence service providers, state and local anti-gun violence organizations, etc.) in collecting and examining gun violence data?



- Why does gun violence occur/continue to occur within your jurisdiction? Has an objective analysis been undertaken?
- What is not happening? What needs to be done in order to produce positive change?

Involving key stakeholders from the criminal justice system and the community, including business, faith, and media partners, in the assessment can give the department more information with which to work and create buy-in for new initiatives being implemented.

### Establishing a Foundation for Effective Gun Violence Reduction Efforts

Prior to implementing new initiatives to reduce gun violence and enhance community safety, the establishment of a clear philosophical foundation will ensure everyone in the agency understands the agency's commitment. Regardless of an agency's size, the following internal and external action steps should be implemented as a starting place for a comprehensive, pro-active gun violence reduction plan.

#### Agency Internal Action Steps

- **Designate Reduction of Gun Violence as a Priority Mission of the Agency** – As simple as this point may sound, it is imperative for the chief executive to communicate to all agency personnel (sworn and non-sworn) that reducing gun violence is a high priority and central to the department's mission to protect and serve the community.
- **Standardize the Use of Firearms Terminology** Ensuring a common understanding of firearms terms across the agency will foster better communication and support effective sharing with other law enforcement agencies regarding firearms offenses and illegal trafficking.

- **Establish a Firearms Investigation Unit\* or Department Designee** – It is critical for an agency, depending on resources and size, to have an identified unit or point person for gun violence issues. An assigned unit/point person tasked with the responsibility to track incidents, manage investigative progress, and share and receive critical information will embed gun violence as a core agency function and ensure all parts of the agency will be coordinated in the effort. This entity should conduct regular training for all departmental personnel on firearms-related matters including: safe and proper collection of crime guns; evidence processing for DNA and latent prints; accurate and complete NCIC (National Crime Information Center) gun file transactions; firearms trace submissions; ballistic evidence; follow-up on NCIC and firearms trace results; and pursuit of firearms-related charges where applicable (\*see [Firearms Investigations Unit, p. 5](#))
- **Create a Comprehensive Policy for Processing Crime Guns and Related Evidence** – Working in coordination with regional law enforcement partners, including forensic lab personnel and local prosecutors, agencies should develop a detailed policy that addresses the proper methods for processing crime guns and related evidence. Include in the policy procedures for processing ballistic evidence as well as DNA, latent fingerprints, and trace evidence from firearms; processing projectiles and casings through the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN); conducting crime gun traces; and reporting to NCIC. For an example, see the [Massachusetts Crime Gun Protocol](#).
- **Enter All Recovered Crime Gun Test Fires into NIBIN** With procedures in place, the agency can assign responsibility for entering evidence items and test fires into Integrated Ballistics Identification System (IBIS)



*Research in one midwestern city showed that on directed patrols in gun crime hot spots, the police use of traffic enforcement, field interrogations, and arrests for the carrying of concealed weapons led to a substantial reduction in gun crime.*

— Sherman and Rogan, 1995

through an existing [ATF NIBIN](#) partner. To locate a NIBIN partner or for directions on submitting test fires or evidence to an ATF laboratory for entry into IBIS, contact one of the ATF Laboratories or the nearest [NIBIN branch](#).

- **Conduct Appropriate NCIC Transactions** – The FBI’s NCIC gun file should be queried for every firearm taken into custody. This practice ensures that if a law enforcement agency has previously entered a firearm into the system as lost, stolen, or having been used in a felony, that agency will be made aware of another department’s recovery of the gun. If there is no matching record for the gun, each firearm taken into custody should be entered as a “recovered gun.” These records can prove invaluable to law enforcement. For example, stolen guns often are recovered before the theft is discovered. Agencies receiving a report of a stolen firearm can check the recovered gun entries to learn whether the gun has already been recovered.
- **Trace All Firearms Obtained Through an Arrest/ Investigation** – By creating an ATF e-TRACE account at no cost through the National Tracing Center (NTC), a department can submit trace requests on every firearm taken into evidence. Some of the information that tracing can yield includes: retail sources, original purchasers, time period between initial retail sale and recovery, types of firearms being recovered, possessors, and recovery locations. Departments can examine their aggregate crime gun trace data in order to pull investigative leads on firearms trafficking patterns and operations and to direct patrol activities. Through a [1998 resolution](#), the IACP encourages every law enforcement agency to trace all seized or confiscated firearms (see [p. 8](#) and [ATF’s Police Officer’s Guide to Recovered Firearms, 2009](#)).
- **Debrief All Gun Offenders** – All suspects arrested with firearms should undergo a thorough debriefing at

the time of arrest, and all guns should be treated as evidence. Information captured by debriefing suspects can support predictive policing actions and enable local law enforcement to interdict crime guns and prevent the associated violence. Additionally, intelligence gathered and shared through fusion centers and with federal law enforcement partners can aide broader investigations into firearms trafficking operations. The ATF has developed model law enforcement procedures for processing defendants charged with gun crimes. These procedures ensure a standardized approach to gun crime that produces actionable intelligence likely to prevent future crimes including felonious assaults against law enforcement. (see: [Debriefing Crime Gun Suspects, p. 11](#))

### Advanced Action Steps

- **Engage in “Hot-Spot” or Problem-Oriented Policing** Through an examination of local crime incidents including an analysis of calls for service and investigation/intelligence/arrest reports, departments can identify patterns, trends, and hot-spots to proactively target with resources and enforcement efforts. Related types of criminal activity typically associated with gun violence, such as illegal drug sales, should be included in the analysis. Information resulting from the analysis should be communicated in real time to field personnel and incorporated into patrol, tactical, and investigative operations.
- **Establish a Firearms Offender Registry** – Similar to a sex offender registry, firearms offender registries are computerized listings of persons previously convicted of a felony firearms violation or a misdemeanor crime that involved a violent or threatening act with a firearm. To establish a firearms offender registry at the local level, legislative action may be necessary. Ideally such a database would include collaboration with the judiciary





and prosecutor's office. This electronic system should contain identifying information on offenders including address and vehicle make, model, and license plate number. Analysis of 15 years of FBI Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted data shows that more than a third of those who feloniously kill law enforcement officers have a prior weapons offense on their records (see 2011 [Law Enforcement Officer Safety Initiative](#), p. 14). By building the firearms offender registry into computer-aided dispatch systems as well as license plate reader systems, agencies can alert first responders with critical information that can be factored into decision making.

### Agency External Action Steps

- **Build a Relationship with Your Prosecutor's Office and the Judiciary** – Involve the prosecutor's office in efforts to address and reduce gun violence. Provide them with or include them in trainings and regular briefings on related departmental efforts. Seek opportunities to provide periodic briefings to the judiciary on agency initiatives related to gun violence including information learned through tracing and crime data analysis.
- **Establish and Maintain Positive Relationships with Firearms Retailers in Your Jurisdiction** – Good relationships and strong lines of communication with reputable firearms dealers (both retail stores and gun show dealers) are essential for an effective gun violence

reduction program. The Firearms Investigations Unit or department designee should develop these relationships and regularly visit retailers to identify issues in need of attention. The retailers can be helpful sources of information and will benefit from collaborating with the department on crime prevention efforts.

- **Involve the Community** – With the overarching goal of enhancing community safety, a department will need to design ways to engage the community in gun violence reduction and crime prevention strategies in order to be successful. Routinely working with allied organizations and stakeholders from the business, service, residential, religious, educational, and youth communities, to name a few, to advocate for needed change will maximize a department's impact. Collaborating on efforts such as public information and educational campaigns and press events relating to pending legislation will build investment among these groups and produce measurable benefits for all involved organizations.
- **Engage in Public Policy Formation** – Similar to effective communications, good public policy and advocacy efforts are critical components of a comprehensive gun violence reduction program. Because law enforcement is directly impacted by legislation, executives should contribute to discussions and efforts to advance legislation that has shown promise in reducing gun violence. Law enforcement leaders have an important role to play in providing their agency's perspective to legislators, commenting on proposed legislation, tracking pending legislation, and providing testimony as needed. Proactive and coordinated efforts in this arena by law enforcement executives can produce positive results.
- **Consider Forming A Regional Firearm/Gun Violence Task Force** – Because gun violence typically crosses jurisdictional boundaries, a regional task force approach involving local, county, campus, state, and federal entities can be an effective approach for coordination and information sharing while maximizing resources. In selecting or recruiting task force members, consideration should be given to personnel who have demonstrated an interest or concern in the problem and who may have skill sets valuable to the mission. Task force efforts should be linked to state fusion centers where applicable (see: [Federal Firearms Trafficking Task Forces](#), page 10) ❖

## Firearms Investigations Unit

Some police departments use a specialized "firearms unit" or "gun squad" to investigate violations of firearms laws. Departments have effectively deployed such units to ensure that all crime gun recoveries by frontline officers are fully investigated following standardized protocol. The creation of an effective internal communications strategy is an important initial step to explain to officers the expectations of the unit and provide assurances that the specialized squad will not be taking over cases. Rather, members of the unit can position themselves as subject matter experts who stand ready to assist officers in processing their scenes, conducting suspect debriefs, monitoring chain of custody issues, tracing firearms, and otherwise taking the patrol officer's case to the next level. Positive outcomes depend on all members of the department embracing the importance of comprehensive gun crime investigations. A similar approach to support case investigations of smaller police agencies can be undertaken on a regional basis through the coordination and sharing of resources.



# Gun Violence Reduction Programs: Origins of Success



To understand the varied approaches developed to combat gun violence, it is useful to have a working knowledge of the most notable gun violence reduction efforts launched during the past two decades. Three of these program - undertaken by coalitions of federal, state, and local authorities - Operation Ceasefire (Boston), Project Exile (Richmond), and Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) have received strong support from law enforcement, academics, and community leaders and served as the foundation for countless programs initiated at the local level across the country.

Although many of these efforts were initially launched in major

urban centers, best practices derived from these initiatives have been incorporated into subsequent programs and strategies responding to gun violence in midsize, suburban, and rural jurisdictions. The most successful elements of these programs have been replicated by communities across the United States and continue to support overall violent crime reduction and prevention efforts to this day. For example, programs that focus on mandatory minimum sentences for gun offenses are seen as offshoots of Project Exile. Initiatives that involve the community and researchers in law enforcement efforts give credit to Operation Ceasefire. PSN embraced the customized local response and has yielded numerous hybrid programs. Critical evaluations of these programs have recognized their meaningful contributions to reducing gun violence at the local level.

## Operation Ceasefire – Boston, Massachusetts

In 1995, the city of Boston was experiencing a crisis involving youths murdered as a result of gang violence. City officials directed police and academic researchers to partner in the development of a strategy that would create a truce and bring to an end the shocking level of violence and death. Constructed upon a foundation of solid research detailing the root causes of the killings, the program foreshadowed the intelligence-led policing efforts now familiar to law enforcement.

Launched in May of 1996, Operation Ceasefire consisted primarily of a two-step approach. First, police who were assigned to a gang unit and probation officers partnered with key members of the community, including clergy, to conduct focused meetings with known gang members. In these forums, youth were warned that the community had had enough of the violence and that police planned swift and certain action against any future violence. Although the warnings were initially ignored, the entire criminal justice system responded, as promised, culminating in highly visible federal indictments. The actions of police were applauded by community leaders, and word spread quickly among youth gang members that the rules of the game had changed.

At the same time, federal, state, and local police intelligence systems began to focus more purposefully on identifying the source of guns used in violent crime. Key indicators pointed to the existence of organized gun trafficking through concepts such



as the “time to crime”; the period of time it took from the date a gun was first purchased to the date it was used in a crime. Such indicators allowed police to sift through mountains of firearms data in order to develop leads on firearms trafficking patterns worthy of investigation. These proactive inquiries supported parallel investigations targeting individuals as well as groups responsible for supplying guns to youth gangs. Disrupting the routes by which firearms flowed unlawfully to gangs also contributed to an environment where it was more difficult for offenders to acquire guns to be used in criminal enterprises. As a result of these coordinated efforts, Operation Ceasefire contributed to an overall average reduction in gun violence of 68 percent.

In the 2001 evaluation of Operation Ceasefire, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) stated that main components of the Ceasefire program could be “replicated through a dedicated collaboration between local, state, and federal partners that is evidence-based, uses proven tactics and strategies, continually monitors progress, and adjusts to circumstances.” To learn more, read [NIJ’s 2001 Operation Ceasefire Report](#).

### Project Exile – Richmond, Virginia

In 1997, the city of Richmond had a homicide problem that far exceeded the rate of murders in similar-sized cities across the United States. State and local law enforcement officials noted a connection between guns, drug offenses, and offenders with prior felony convictions in the majority of homicides and targeted would-be killers through a new partnership with federal authorities. Project Exile established tough federal penalties for unlawful gun possession as the foundation of a zero-tolerance, “get tough” approach aimed at charging offenders in federal court. Project Exile was based on the principle that, “if police catch a criminal with a gun, the criminal has forfeited his or her right to remain in the community and, as such, will face immediate federal prosecution and stiff mandatory federal prison sentences.” Use of a firearm exposes individuals to minimum mandatory sentences of 5 years in a drug offense and 15 years for certain violent armed career criminals.

Project Exile soon saw success by targeting armed offenders and using federal prosecutors and special agents to help remove these violent offenders from the streets prior to a homicide. During the first 10 months of the program, Richmond realized a 41 percent decline in murders involving the use of a firearm. This remarkable decline has not necessarily been sustained over the long term.

As the program continued, program designers invested in a substantial public outreach campaign that educated citizens and criminals alike about the program and the promise of swift and certain punishment for unlawful possession of a firearm. The program has been repeatedly replicated and received widespread praise. Project Exile, known for its focus on tough and certain enforcement of existing laws, received the rare endorsement of the National Rifle Association ([National Rifle Association, April 11, 2000 press release](#)).

To learn more about Project Exile, read the [2004 Police Foundation report](#).

### Project Safe Neighborhoods – National Gun Violence Reduction Initiative

Project Safe Neighborhoods, a federally sponsored national gun violence reduction initiative drawing from Operation Ceasefire and Project Exile, was launched in 2001. During the program’s development, law enforcement leaders and academic researchers found that previously successful firearms violence reduction efforts had a number of common components. The Department of Justice was determined to solidify this hard-won knowledge by supporting programs at the state and local levels that retested the lessons learned and expanded upon the impact noted in Boston and Richmond. To that end, PSN established three key components as the foundation for new gun violence reduction efforts:

**Programs must be comprehensive:** Experts agree that targeted enforcement with a certainty of criminal sanctions are essential, however, the distinguishing factor that ensures program success is the simultaneous linkage of prevention with deterrence efforts.

**Programs must be well coordinated:** The effort to ensure that the functions of intervention, enforcement, and prevention work together, not in separate silos, is of central importance.

**Programs must be community based:** Gun crime is experienced locally. Flexibility in responding to specific problems in ways that reflect local resources and realities must be encouraged. Communities working together to develop their own solutions create a sense of investment.

To learn more about Project Safe Neighborhoods, PSN-sponsored gun violence reduction, and research evaluations, see the [Department of Justice 2009 report](#). ❖



# III.

## Firearms Diversion and Trafficking: Establishing Enforcement and Prevention Efforts



Individuals unable to acquire firearms legally may resort to illegal methods to arm themselves as they seek to defend turf, secure unlawful proceeds, and exercise authority over criminal enterprises. Firearms diversion refers to the purposeful movement of firearms from lawful commerce to criminal users. Firearms trafficking refers to the variety of unlawful methods by which prohibited persons obtain and sell guns. Identifying—and then disrupting—the routes that firearms move from lawful commerce into the hands of offenders is a fundamental challenge facing law enforcement organizations as they work to secure the safety of the community.

To successfully counter the methods criminals use to unlawfully obtain and distribute firearms, law enforcement must employ a variety of tactics. A strategic response to the threat posed by firearms trafficking must include an effort to share intelligence between local, state, tribal, and federal law enforcement partners. Since criminal firearms trafficking operations frequently cross jurisdictional boundaries, it is imperative that investigations be

thoroughly de-conflicted. Common practice for de-confliction is to seek the assistance of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) to brief all impacted jurisdictions on current investigations addressing criminal activity in their communities.

The following basic steps can support departments in developing a localized firearms trafficking enforcement and prevention effort.

➤ **Trace all crime guns recovered.**

Tracing all firearms provides a jurisdiction with a census of information regarding their recovered crime guns. The electronic tracing of firearms is made possible through [ATF's eTrace program](#) that allows any local law enforcement agency to establish a free, web-based electronic firearms tracing account. Departments can independently mine their own agency's firearms trace information to use in initiatives to reduce armed violence. Firearms trace information can assist investigators in identifying patterns of diversion and trafficking. In addition, electronic firearms tracing

information includes referral lists, which will point departments to other law enforcement agencies who have traced firearms to the same purchasers, possessors, retail firearms dealers, and recovery locations. This can lead to regional responses or cooperative efforts with ATF to develop localized strategies to stop the flow of illegal guns. The National Tracing Center can assist agencies in establishing an eTrace account.

- **Debrief all crime gun suspects to capture firearms source intelligence.**

As with defendants in drug cases, suspects arrested with firearms and/or known connections to gangs should be interrogated and fully debriefed as a matter of routine in order to gather intelligence on gun sources, customers, and any illegal gun trade

or trafficking. This activity should be coordinated with existing task forces and local ATF officials (see [Debriefing Crime Gun Suspects, p. 11](#))

- **Work with area federal/state/county prosecutors to make debriefing a condition of any plea agreement in all cases involving firearms.**

In every case involving a firearm, a plea agreement should be contingent on the defendant revealing the source of his or her firearm(s) and cooperating with a thorough firearms intelligence debriefing.

## One Chief's Aggressive Approach to Straw Purchases

For Milwaukee Police Chief Ed Flynn, firearm trace data revealed a clear picture of the source of gun violence in his community. Intelligence provided by ATF showed that one-third of all firearms seized by the department originated from a single licensed firearms dealer in the community, many with a short time to crime. The same source fueling violence on the street was also placing officers at risk. In less than two years, firearms sold by this dealer had been used in six shootings directed against police.

Undercover efforts by the department to document observable violations of the law committed by this dealer had previously failed, and the business continued to be the choice of criminals seeking guns for their criminal operations. Police then undertook an intensive surveillance operation focused on customers entering and exiting the gun store. Officers watched for behaviors indicative of the straw purchasing of firearms. An example of suspicious behaviors included a vehicle parked near the store with several men inside from which a woman exited, entered the store, and returned with firearms boxes. In another instance a person came from inside the store, spoke with people waiting outside in a car, returned to the store, and then exited with bags indicating a possible "straw purchase of a firearm. As the vehicles left the area, police conducted stops to question the vehicle's occupants as warranted. The 15-week operation resulted in numerous arrests of convicted felons found to be in possession of firearms. Most importantly guns were seized prior to being used in violent crime or against the police.

In overseeing the operation, the police chief thought it would be valuable to include a member of the media as an independent observer. When outrageous and inaccurate claims about the operation were made by the dealer, the reporter was able to publish the facts. In so doing, the importance of police actions directed at criminals acquiring firearms from this dealer were clearly communicated to the community.





*Firearms trafficking refers to the variety of unlawful methods by which prohibited persons obtain and sell guns.*

### Federal Firearms Trafficking Task Forces

Through participation in a federal trafficking task force at the regional level, local departments can access all the firearms information and systems maintained by the ATF. These sources, which include the federal firearms licensee theft information, firearms dealers licensing and inspection records, and firearms importation information, can support a department's efforts to develop focused enforcement strategies specific to the firearm-related crimes challenging its community. Local law enforcement agencies typically detail officer(s) to the task force for at least a year and sign a memorandum of understanding that lays out the goals of the task force. In addition to access to a range of informational sources, task force participation may enable a department to receive funding through asset forfeiture as a result of seizures. Additionally, agencies benefit from the task force experience because their officers return with greater expertise and a network to support future case collaborations.

### eTrace

Originally developed as a query tool through which investigators and analysts can look up completed firearm traces and multiple sales reports, Online LEAD was incorporated into eTrace and its

functionality made available to ATF personnel and ATF Task Force officers. This functionality helps in the development of focused enforcement strategies. It allows the ATF employee or task force officer to examine any unique field detailed in these reports. For example, if a community has a particular gang that is responsible for a significant number of firearms crimes or a particular neighborhood is experiencing high rates of firearms-related crime, eTrace can identify the sources of firearms connected to those specific problems in order to focus enforcement efforts for the maximum impact. The ATF National Tracing Center can be reached at 800-788-7133.

### Additional ATF Services

- Conduct local firearms trafficking studies to develop a picture of the nature and scope of the firearms trafficking market in a jurisdiction.
- Obtain information concerning firearms trafficking corridors or gateways that may exist in, or pass through, specific jurisdictions.
- Coordinate and link firearms trafficking intelligence gathered during suspect debriefings. ❖



## Debriefing Crime Gun Suspects

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives has devised model procedures for law enforcement when processing those arrested with firearms and defendants charged with gun crimes. The model law enforcement procedures ensure that a standardized approach to gun crime can yield actionable intelligence that is likely to prevent future crimes. Adherence to these standards increases the potential for prosecutors to pursue federal charges for serious gun offenders. The debrief should be undertaken in conjunction with entering ballistic evidence and test fires into NIBIN and conducting firearm traces using eTrace in order to identify possible links to other crimes.

### Procedures for Processing All Crime Gun Arrestees

ATF outlines the following suggested steps for officers who make an arrest involving firearm violations:

- Take suspect fingerprints upon arrest to ensure defendant identification at a later date. If circumstances dictate that a subject will not be transported to a booking facility, obtain a thumb print on a notice-to-appear form or field interview report, whenever possible. All other forensic examinations should be considered, such as DNA and trace evidence, based on the circumstances of the case.
- Obtain a written or taped statement from the defendant regarding his/her possession of the firearm, how the firearm was obtained, and information on any prior felony convictions. Ask the suspect the following questions as part of the debrief:
  - Where did you get the gun?
  - Who else bought guns from your supplier?
  - What other deals is your supplier into?
  - Does your supplier carry a gun?
  - Is your supplier violent?
  - Who else sells guns on the street?
  - Is this gun stolen?
  - Did you remove the serial number? Who did?
  - Did you cut down and/or alter the gun? Who did?
  - Can you get more guns?
  - If given money, where would you go to buy guns right now?
  - Can you introduce a friend to your supplier?
- Where drug involvement is suspected, notify a narcotics agent at the earliest possible point after an arrest to assist with interviews and evidence review.
- Interview and obtain statements from any witnesses, associates, and accomplices (e.g., other passengers in a car stop) of the defendant regarding the facts and circumstances of the offense. This assists in establishing the defendant's firearm possession and precludes false alibis by accomplices at a later date. Obtain the criminal history for each associate and accomplice.
- Prepare a detailed narrative report regarding the arrest and surrounding circumstances, including a complete description of the firearm (make, model, serial number, caliber, country of origin, and importer); vehicle information; witness and accomplice information; and a listing of all officers present at the arrest. If the arrest began with, or involved, a 9-1-1 call, obtain and preserve a copy of that 9-1-1 recording. If the arrest involved a videotaped traffic stop, obtain and preserve a copy of that tape.
- Obtain the defendant's criminal history (number and nature of prior felony convictions). Use the criminal history information coupled with the defendant's actions related to the current arrest to determine which law violations apply and which venue (federal or state) provides for the maximum possible sentence.
- Request that in all cases involving firearms the federal/state/county prosecutor or district attorney make full defendant debriefings concerning firearms source intelligence a condition of any plea agreement. Request that no plea agreement in any firearms case be accepted unless the defendant reveals the source of his or her firearm and cooperates with a thorough firearms intelligence debriefing.
- Agencies should look to share intelligence regarding firearms gathered through the interview with ATF.



# IV.

## Working with Federal Firearm Licensees



**F**ederal firearm laws distinguish between federally licensed firearm manufacturers, importers, gun dealers, and “private” sellers who occasionally sell firearms. Building cooperative and professional relationships with local businesses that sell firearms, known as Federal Firearms Licensees (FFLs) or Federal Firearms Dealers, is central to comprehensive law enforcement efforts to address and reduce gun violence. FFLs are capable of providing key data necessary for tracing a gun recovered in crime. Most valuable are the dealers who feel as though they are partners with local law enforcement and are willing to provide officers with real-time intelligence regarding attempts by individuals to unlawfully obtain and/or traffic guns. By regularly visiting local FFLs, departments can develop these valuable relationships and emphasize the dealer’s role in information sharing and community safety.

However, a corrupt firearms dealer can quickly do significant damage to a community by supplying the illegal market with

dangerous weapons to be used by violent offenders. Local law enforcement has a role to play and, in many states, the authority needed to take enforcement action with problem dealers. Local agencies can use the multiple handgun sales records and ATF crime gun trace information to identify patterns and develop monitoring and intervention programs to combat illegal gun sales and trafficking. Research has shown that enforcement of state regulations of gun dealers results in a decrease of firearms sold by gun stores being diverted to criminals soon after retail sale. Local law enforcement operations, specifically undercover stings targeting retail gun stores suspected of facilitating illegal firearm sales, have led to successful convictions and lawsuits. Research on the impact of these stings showed they were responsible for the decline in the flow of new guns into the illicit market over a three year period. (Daniel W. Webster et al., “Effects of Undercover Police Stings of Gun Dealers on the Supply of New Guns to Criminals,” *Injury Prevention* 12, no. 4 (August 2006): 225-230)





In cases of theft of firearms from businesses selling firearms or interstate operations to move firearms acquired through robbery, burglary, smash and grabs, or fraudulent theft reporting, the ATF can assist local law enforcement and may be able to connect incidents to regional or national patterns. Each U.S. Attorney's Office has been charged with drafting a gun violence reduction strategy and can be contacted to provide guidance and resources.

## Partnering with FFLs to Prevent Gun Violence

A number of established programs that link local law enforcement and firearms dealers can help improve public safety and encourage positive collaborative relationships. “**Don’t Lie for the Other Guy,**” a [campaign](#) developed by ATF in partnership with the National Shooting Sports Foundation, attempts to educate gun dealers on the problem of straw purchases. Through videos, displays, and other educational materials, FFLs and their employees learn to identify, prevent, and alert police to schemes where criminals solicit others to purchase firearms on their behalf.

Another campaign with potential to focus firearms dealers on maintaining ethical business practices is the [Responsible Firearms Retailer Partnership](#). This voluntary 10-point code, originally drafted by the Mayors Against Illegal Guns in cooperation with Wal-Mart, focuses on preventing prohibited persons from acquiring firearms. By bringing local law enforcement into partnership with firearms dealers, the code serves as a model for public and private sector collaborations on safety efforts.

## Helping Firearms Dealers Prevent Gun Theft

FFLs and gun stores are often targeted for theft and, typically, the stolen firearms are used in crime. Addressing with firearm dealers the ways they can protect their businesses and reduce the risk of theft are effective ways to build rapport while promoting public safety at the same time.

FFLs can take a range of measures to prevent burglary, robbery, and smash and grab operations. Law enforcement can conduct outreach with area FFLs or hold informational forums with local firearms dealers to provide them with practical tips and share information on crime patterns occurring regionally. ATF has provided the following guidance to be shared with all FFLs committed to enhancing their security measures:

## Safety Measures for FFLs

### Protocol

- Institute a background screening process for job applicants and periodic reviews for current employees.
- Keep display cases locked at all times.
- Show only one firearm at a time to customers.
- Do not leave a customer handling a firearm unattended.
- Secure firearm inventory by locking guns in place using a hardened cable or by storing them in a vault when store is closed.
- Secure inventory records for firearm identification in the event of a theft.
- Wipe down all countertops and doors each night to establish a clean environment on which to capture the latent fingerprints of a burglar.
- Avoid meeting with customers after posted business hours.
- Make written notes including a description of any suspicious persons or vehicles.
- Report all suspicious situations to law enforcement.
- Strictly control firearms security at gun shows.





## 2011 Law Enforcement Officer Safety Initiative

On March 22, 2011, Attorney General Eric Holder launched a Law Enforcement Officer Safety Initiative following a “dramatic rise” in the number of officers killed in the line of duty. The initiative aims to reverse the trend that made 2010 a more deadly year for police as compared to officer deaths in 2008 and 2009, which saw a two-year decline.

The focus of the initiative, as ordered by the Attorney General, is for every U.S. Attorney to meet with federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies and prosecutors to identify the “worst-of-the-worst” offenders within each district. These offenders will be targeted for prosecution in federal court as a means of subjecting these career criminals to stiffer federal sentences.

In addition to the goal of sharing information on federal programs that provide officer safety training and funding for bullet-resistant vests, the Law Enforcement Officer Safety Initiative aims to provide a framework for operational case deconfliction in order to prevent blue-on-blue shootings. Law enforcement partners are being asked to review operational security protocols to ensure that their facilities and procedures adequately respond to current threats facing police.

### Store Safety Features

- Ensure good outdoor lighting in the area surrounding the business and maintain landscaping.
- Place a measuring device next to all store doorways that can be used to gauge a robber’s height.
- Keep front windows unobstructed in order to see suspicious individuals or vehicles outside the store and individuals approaching the store and so passersby can see into the store to detect problems if they occur.

### Technology/Security

- Install driving barricades that prohibit vehicle access through store entrances and window displays.
- Install or upgrade interior and exterior CCTV monitoring to record break-ins and other criminal activity.

- Install or upgrade alarm systems, including roof access detection and silent panic buttons, and ensure direct connection to local law enforcement.
- Invest in a remotely activated electronic entrance to the store in order to screen customers and deter robbery.
- Install steel doorframes with steel long-throw dead bolts on store entrances to deter forced entry.
- Always use the security measures already in place.

### Targeting Those Dealing Firearms Without a License

Federal law does not prohibit the private sale of firearms; however, those in the business of selling firearms must obtain a Federal Firearms License. Gun shows, flea markets, newspaper ads, and Internet postings are means by which unlicensed individuals may sell firearms in violation of federal, state, or local laws. In most states, individual-to-individual sales are allowed, even though there is no background check or record keeping requirement. Local law enforcement can build their relationship with FFLs by demonstrating a commitment to aggressively enforce laws targeting unlicensed individuals. As a result, FFLs may provide information as they become aware of individuals illegally selling guns within environments such as gun shows and flea markets where it is more difficult for law enforcement to investigate openly.

### Identify and Develop Relationships with Businesses that Sell Ammunition

Many businesses, including local hardware stores and national wholesale chains, sell ammunition for which neither regulation nor record keeping is required at the federal, state, or local levels. While armed violent offenders may go to extremes to mask their acquisition of firearms, many see no risk in purchasing ammunition themselves. Local law enforcement should know which businesses in their jurisdiction sell ammunition and work to establish a relationship with them in order to encourage the sharing of information about suspicious persons and potential criminal activity. The employees of these businesses need training to identify suspicious ammunition sales and instruction on subsequent actions for notifying law enforcement. Some of the same safety precautions for FFLs, especially those on protocols, should be shared with businesses selling ammunition. ❖

# V.

## Gun Shows



purchase firearms from private sellers, including some licensed dealers selling from their private collections, even to individuals self-admitting their inability to pass a background check (City of New York, “[Gun Show Undercover: Arizona](#),” January 2011). Federal law makes it illegal to complete a sale if the seller knows or has reason to believe a purchaser is prohibited.



The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives reports that 27 percent of illegally trafficked guns are linked to private sellers and 30 percent are connected to gun shows. — ATF, *Following the Gun: Enforcing Federal Law Against Firearms Trafficking*, 2000



**G**un shows are popular events as well as sources of economic revenue for some communities. They present convenient opportunities for gun sales by both FFLs and private sellers. However, for individuals prohibited from possessing firearms or those looking to avoid the required background check, gun shows enable the acquisition of firearms with relative ease. Federal law does not require “private” sellers, those who occasionally sell firearms from their personal collection, to perform a background check on a sale or trade. The majority of states do not require background checks for guns sold at gun shows.

Law enforcement investigations and undercover operations have documented the ease with which buyers at many gun shows

Departments seeking to undertake a comprehensive gun violence reduction strategy need to address any location where there is known or suspected criminal activity, including gun shows. To deter criminal activity, local law enforcement should develop a positive working relationship with gun show organizers and establish a visible presence at shows in their jurisdiction. The ATF created a [brochure](#) to educate dealers (FFLs), private sellers, and the public about federal regulations regarding the sale and acquisition of firearms. The brochure includes a toll-free number for reporting suspected illegal firearm activities (800-ATF-GUNS). To promote compliance with the law, local law enforcement should distribute this brochure as well as information on safe storage strategies that can reduce risk in the home (*see [Gun Safety in the Home](#), p. 20*). ❖



# VI.

## Gang Violence Prevention

**B**ased on the 2009 *National Gang Threat Assessment*, neighborhood-based street gangs and crews represent the most significant gang threat to our communities and account for the largest number of gangs nationwide. This Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance-funded report, resulting from a collaborative effort among the members of the National Alliance of Gang Investigators' Associations (NAGIA), highlights the fact that criminal gangs commit as much as 80 percent of the crime in many communities, according to law enforcement officials throughout the nation. Crimes engaged in by gangs include: armed robbery, auto theft, extortion, fraud, home invasions, identity theft, murder, drug trafficking, alien smuggling, and weapons trafficking.

The 2005 DOJ report describes the prevailing trend of gangs towards a loose-knit organizational structure as follows: "New hybrid and homegrown gangs, with no apparent national affiliations, are blurring the traditional boundaries of alliances and rivalries. In some communities, colors, tattoos, and outward acknowledgement of gang affiliations are less visible as gangs try to hide from law enforcement. In other jurisdictions, gangs are uniting to strengthen and facilitate more extensive criminal activities." Today fewer gangs seem to be organized by a hierarchical structure, instead youth engaged in drug dealing seem to align themselves in groups with little allegiance or control.

Gangs are often identified as contributing to crime and other forms of community unrest. For community leaders to develop an effective approach to the problem, it is imperative that an assessment be conducted that clearly articulates the precise issues requiring action. Specific problems warrant specific response if desired outcomes, such as gun crime reduction, decreased truancy, and prevention of vandalism, are to be achieved. The National Youth Gang Center, a component of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, has developed a detailed [online Q&A resource](#) that could serve to launch discussions and educate those involved on common terms, challenges, and potential interventions.

### Who is a "Prohibited Person" Under Federal Law?

Federal law prohibits various categories of persons (see below) from possessing firearms and ammunition. The National Instant Check System (NICS) created in 1993 by the FBI is used to block prohibited persons from purchasing firearms.

The following classifications of persons are prohibited by federal law [18 U.S.C. § 922(g)] from possessing, receiving, shipping, or transporting firearms or ammunition:

- Those convicted of crimes punishable by imprisonment for over one year, except state misdemeanors punishable by two years or less
- Persons convicted in any court of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence
- Persons subject to a court order that restrains such persons from harassing, stalking, or threatening an intimate partner
- Persons adjudicated as mental defectives or previously involuntarily committed to a mental institution
- Unlawful users of certain depressant, narcotic, or stimulant drugs
- Illegal aliens
- Fugitives from justice
- Persons who have renounced their U.S. citizenship
- Persons dishonorably discharged from the U.S. Armed Forces
- Persons under 18 years of age for the purchase of a shotgun or rifle, no minimum age for possession
- Persons under 21 years of age for the purchase of a firearm that is other than a shotgun or rifle, possession prohibited those under 18
- Persons under indictment for a crime punishable by imprisonment for more than one year are prohibited to receive, transport, or ship any firearm or ammunition; Indictment does not prohibit possession of firearms or ammunition.

## Gang-on-Gang Violence

Drive-by shootings are frequently a retaliatory response by gangs following the killing of a gang member or a dramatic action meant to deter territorial incursions by rival groups. All too often these violent, armed attacks kill or injure innocent bystanders not connected to gang life. Law enforcement needs to engage in proactive efforts to intercede and prevent gang-on-gang violence and subsequent retaliatory assaults. Efforts to debrief gun offenders and gang members are critical for intelligence gathering and preventing retaliatory violence. Strategies to detain associates of shooting victims can provide needed protection as well as a cooling down period that can help deter retaliations.

The Center for Problem Oriented Policing has developed a summary of possible approaches to the drive-by problem that addresses the many contributing variables. The *Summary of Responses to Drive-by Shootings Guide* distinguishes between those gun violence reduction strategies that are likely to impact this specific problem and those that are less likely to produce the immediate impact required of such deadly incidents.

## Gang Prevention Programs and Resources

Communities need to approach any gang problem as a dangerous mix of readily available guns and disenfranchised youth on a power-seeking drive for economic status. Several partnerships to address gangs and gun violence developed at the local level have resulted in innovative and successful efforts to stop the violence specifically attributed to gang activity. The following summaries of various programs are offered as positive examples and not intended to be an exhaustive list. No endorsement is intended or implied by inclusion in this guide.

**The City of Lowell, MA** was experiencing gun-related violence at a rate above average for similarly sized cities in the U.S. (approx. 100,000). Although homicides with guns were rare, other violent gun crimes were not, and leaders wanted to aggressively combat the problem. Police characterized the gun violence as driven by small and loosely organized gangs, primarily localized in the Hispanic and Asian communities, with offenders and victims who typically have extensive prior criminal histories. Law enforcement and community leaders collaborated to get the message out that gangs were going to be targeted on all fronts. After it was determined that certain individuals in the Asian community with influence over the Asian gangs were involved with running fronts for gambling operations, police targeted them until the gangs were persuaded to ratchet back the violence. Following these and other coordinated interventions with similarly positive results, overall

## Data-Driven Approaches to Crime and Traffic Safety (DDACTS)

Through a joint venture between the United States Departments of Justice and Transportation, DDACTS integrates location-based crime and traffic data to establish effective and efficient methods for deploying law enforcement and other resources. Using geomapping to identify areas that have high incidences of crime and crashes, DDACTS uses traffic enforcement strategies to fight crime and reduce crashes and traffic violations.

DDACT uses data-driven, strategically directed traffic enforcement to realize traffic safety and residual crime control benefits. Indianapolis is among the law enforcement agencies that have implemented DDACTS and demonstrated reductions in criminal activity and traffic crashes. Research on the Indianapolis effort, highlighted in an article titled “Strategic and Tactical Approaches to Traffic Safety”, demonstrated some of the benefits of this approach:

- Highly visible traffic law enforcement can be an effective countermeasure for disrupting organized criminal enterprises, particularly when these groups market drugs and illegal firearms.
- Vehicle stops can be an effective tool for increasing law enforcement visibility, thus increasing the perceived risk of apprehension.
- Using vehicle stops as a countermeasure to interdict narcotics, guns, and contraband can be effective as a general crime control strategy.

A Kansas City, Kansas study corroborated these findings. The Kansas City Gun Experiment focused on gun detection through aggressive patrol operations, primarily traffic stops. Officers received training on how to search vehicles for illegal firearms. During the six-month experiment, gun seizures increased by 65 percent and gun crime decreased 49% in the target area, with no measureable displacement of gun crime to surrounding neighborhoods. The most effective method for locating guns, traffic stops averaged one gun found for every 28 traffic stops. When Indianapolis conducted a similar project, similar results were reported.

Review the [2009 DDACTS Operational Guidelines](#).



assaults with firearms dropped 28 percent. To learn details about the strategy employed by leaders in the City of Lowell review the [2007 report](#) published by the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs.

**High Point (NC) Police** film street-based drug activity conducted by youth and then offer them the choice of criminal indictments or mentoring and job training. Launched in 2003, the practice is believed to have contributed to a 57 percent drop in violent crime within targeted areas. Since its evaluation in 2006, the program has been replicated in 25 U.S. cities.

**Los Angeles (CA)** initiated the Summer Night Lights Program in an ongoing effort to turn on lights in parks and recreation areas where there has been a pattern of criminal incidents. Summer Night Lights was designed in 2008; at-risk youth are offered activities and work programs as an alternative to the recruitment efforts of gang leaders. In one targeted area, city officials believe the program has contributed to a 40 percent decline in gang violence.

**The National Network for Safe Communities** focuses on the problems of gangs and drugs at the community level. Headquartered at John Jay College, the National Network brings together jurisdictions from around the country that are currently implementing programs to prevent gang violence and/or eliminate drug markets in order for them to learn from one another, address common issues, provide a supportive community of practice for new jurisdictions, and work to make successful strategies standard practice across the United States.

Using a strategy developed by criminologist David Kennedy, Chicago Police Department set out to crack down on a whole gang if one member was accused of murder. At a meeting with the gangs in August 2010, the Department announced its plan and promised to bring all applicable charges for illegal activity, including possession of drugs and weapons. The strategy has begun in one district, and the police department intends to expand the strategy as results prove effective.

Over the National Network's 15 year effort, a substantial body of research and field experience has been amassed documenting successful strategies associated with large reductions in violent crime.

**G.R.I.P. (Gang Resistance is Paramount)** Gang Resistance Is Paramount is a successful, nationally recognized, and ongoing anti-gang program that discourages gang involvement by

sharing with children the potentially harmful consequences of gang life and providing gang resistance lessons. Started by the City of Paramount, California, in the 1980s, G.R.I.P. begins with neighborhood meetings held in both English and Spanish designed to inform and garner parental commitment. Information for parents focuses on the warning signs of gang involvement and strategies to steer at-risk youth towards meaningful activities and programs available in the community, including sports. The program, which has served over 50,000 students to date, consists of age-appropriate classroom lessons and counseling sessions for fifth graders (15-week course) and second graders (10-week course). It addresses core topics, including peer pressure and drug abuse, that are linked to local problems, such as graffiti and truancy. Several evaluations of the program have determined that children who receive the training leave with a changed attitude about gangs and avoid gang involvement later in life.

**G.R.E.A.T. Program (Gang Resistance Education and Training)**, a law enforcement officer-instructed elementary and middle school curriculum, has violence prevention as its primary objective. Intended to "immunize" kids against delinquency, youth violence, and gang involvement, this Department of Justice-sponsored program positively engages law enforcement with schools and the children they serve. DOJ provides free student workbooks and officer certification training as well as follow-up conferences and regional training. Since 2004, \$58 million in federal funds have been distributed through a competitive grant program to local law enforcement agencies to bring G.R.E.A.T. to communities. Five departments are participating in a five-year evaluation study.

To learn more about other strategies to prevent gang violence and review additional components of DOJ's Comprehensive Anti-Gang Initiative, visit the Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention at [www.ojjdp.gov/programs/antigang/index.html](http://www.ojjdp.gov/programs/antigang/index.html). ❖

# VII.

## Youth Safety and Violence Prevention



To be effective, youth safety efforts must address a range of gun violence realities including accidental shootings, suicide, and violence in schools and the community.

- Homicide by firearm ranks second only to traffic crashes as the leading cause of death due to injury for youth.
- In 2007, 7,146 people age 10 to 24 were killed with guns as reported by the National Center for Health Statistics ([http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/mortrate10\\_sy.html](http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/mortrate10_sy.html)).
- Research on the nearly 24,000 children under 19 years of age who were killed with guns between 1999 and 2006 found a slightly higher risk of homicide by firearm for children in urban environments; the likelihood of accidental shootings and suicide with a firearm was a greater risk for kids in rural communities (*Pediatrics*, 125, no. 6, June 1, 2010, 1112–1118).

Although some variations in gun violence are experienced across the country, there are commonalities that can serve as

the foundation for efforts to enhance youth safety and prevent violence. Because a majority of youth spends a significant portion of their days at school, traveling to and from school, and engaged in school-related activities, a fundamental component to any viable youth violence prevention program must address school safety.

### School Safety

Bearing in mind that school shootings are extremely rare and that for many children school may be the safest place they experience, local law enforcement must work with school administrators to establish a zero tolerance for guns in school and at school-related events and develop methods to identify any student possessing a firearm. Success in determining which youth have firearms and what their intentions may be requires a strong, trusting relationship among school administrators, teachers, parents, law enforcement, and students. From exhaustive evaluations of notable incidents of school violence, it is clear that fellow students were often aware that would-be school shooters had talked about guns and their plans for violence. In many cases,



witnesses had become concerned after viewing evidence of these intentions via social media postings. Creating safe mechanisms through which students can alert law enforcement and school administrators to potential threats or concerns is critical to the prevention of violence.

Police in Memphis, TN have partnered with school officials and Crime Stoppers to expand upon an already effective strategy for generating anonymous reports of crime in order to encourage school children to report guns in school. For the Weapon Watch hotline program, Crime Stoppers functions as an independent third party accepting reports so school children do not have to provide information about fellow students or crimes that have occurred directly to police or school officials. Crime Stoppers then contacts the Memphis Police Department or Shelby County Sheriff's Office, and a first responder is dispatched to the school. Although students who provide information are eligible for a cash reward, they seem driven to partner with adults in order to have safety in their school environment.

### Responding to Threats

Local law enforcement should work with school administrators to design and implement a clear plan of action that supports immediate response upon the detection of warning signs for violence. It is imperative that all stakeholders know their roles and responsibilities under the plan in advance of an incident and that training is provided to faculty, parents, and students regularly. Systems for communication must be established and tested as part of the plan. To learn about past incidents of school violence and how common factors could be addressed by communities to mitigate the risks, review the United States Secret Service threat assessment work conducted as part of the Safe School Initiative at [www.secretservice.gov/ntac\\_ssi.shtml](http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac_ssi.shtml).

A key component of community and youth safety is to identify the sources of the firearms youth acquire. When youth obtain firearms from home or family, the need for safe, responsible storage practices is highlighted. In cases where youth found to be unlawfully possessing a handgun and where the person is under 18 years of age, it must be considered likely that the firearm was acquired illegally and that other persons may have abetted the violation of law. If a firearms trafficking scheme is involved, one that is supplying youth and/or criminals with guns, such operations will continue and flourish until law enforcement takes action and apprehends offenders. Through partnerships with ATF to trace recovered firearms, an investigation may be able to reveal the original source of the firearm, the path of the gun, and how the weapon was acquired by the youthful offender. Such intelligence can be built into outreach and subsequent investigations in order to prevent gun violence (see *Firearms Tracing*).

### Gun Safety in the Home

During a typical year, over 600 Americans are accidentally killed with firearms and more than 18,000 are injured. Data for 2007 released by the Centers for Disease Control reveal that 138 of those killed and 4,165 of those injured were children under 20 years of age.

**Project ChildSafe**, a nationwide program developed to address this public safety threat, represents an important component of the Department of Justice's Project Safe Neighborhoods effort and is endorsed by the National Shooting Sports Foundation. By making free gun locking devices easily available to members of the public through local law enforcement agencies, the program educates gun owners about responsible practices for safe storage of firearms in the home. Using the ChildSafe framework, communities can establish partnerships to launch a local public safety effort.







*During a typical year, over 600 Americans are accidentally killed with firearms and more than 18,000 are injured.*

**Common Sense about Kids and Guns** is a public education organization dedicated to educating the public about the risks of unsupervised access to guns by children and encouraging safe gun storage practices. Founded in 1999, this grassroots effort to highlight the risks inherent in unsecured firearms offers free safety tips, posters, conversation starters for parents, and a map of state-specific statistics and resources.

### Youth and School Violence Prevention Programs and Resources

The risks and the associated pathways to criminality and violence for youth have been well studied and experienced firsthand by communities across the country. Among those who have faced the challenges, there is complete agreement that the time to positively influence children is before criminal involvement and contact with gangs. The following summaries of various programs are offered as positive examples and not intended to be an exhaustive list. No endorsement is intended or implied by inclusion in this guide.

**ASK Campaign (Asking Saves Lives)** created by the American Academy of Pediatrics to encourage parents to ask other parents whether they have firearms in the home before sending their children over to play. This public awareness campaign, developed in partnership with the Center to Prevent Youth Violence (formerly known as PAX), is designed to link public safety discussions with good parenting in order to prevent gun violence.

**The Center to Prevent Youth Violence** (formerly known as PAX), based in New York City, has established the PAX Speak Up Hotline. This first-ever national hotline is aimed at preventing youth violence by providing kids with a third-party hotline to report a weapons threat. For more information, call 1-866-SPEAK-UP (1-866-773-2587).

**The Blueprints for Violence Prevention Project**, located at the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence in the Institute of Behavioral Science at the University of Colorado, has performed an exhaustive examination of more than 900 community violence and drug prevention programs, many specifically addressing the issue of youth violence. As a result, 11 model and 19 local promising

programs have been recognized in part for their potential to be replicated.

**STRYVE (Striving to Reduce Youth Violence Everywhere)** is a national initiative, led by the Centers for Disease Control, to use a public health approach at the local level for preventing youth violence. STRYVE, which operates through a significant online presence, offers training modules, educational tools, and best practices to combat violence. Additionally, STRYVE accepts requests for technical assistance.

**The Guide for Preventing and Responding to School Violence**, second edition, was published in 2009 by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) in partnership with the Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). The guide builds upon years of efforts undertaken by schools to systematically implement critical findings. IACP's publication updates lessons learned and clearly defines the roles of all partners in approaching school violence.

**Digital Imaging for Safe Schools**, a publication developed by the IACP in partnership with the Department of Justice, promotes the use of digital photography in conjunction with widely available software to create a virtual 360-degree visual tour of building interiors. These images can be used by law enforcement tactical responders in the event of a critical incident such as an assault involving an active shooter. Since the original publication, advances in technology have made the production of a photographic blueprint of public buildings such as schools more cost effective and easy. ❖



# VIII.

## Promoting Community Safety and Gun Violence Prevention



**W**ith the central goal of enhancing community safety, agencies need a communications plan to share timely crime information, local statistics, and prevention strategies with the general public through a variety of outlets including the department website and news media. The department can highlight its gun violence prevention strategies as well as enforcement tactics while educating and involving the community in proactive measures to reduce gun violence. In order to implement an effective, comprehensive communications function relating to the reduction of gun violence, the following action points should be considered:

- Statistics on gun violence crime, as well as departmental initiatives to reduce gun violence, should be kept current and made available to the public on the department's website.
- Department public information officers (PIOs) should be prepared with current crime statistics and updates on gun violence reduction efforts for regular release to highlight the agency's ongoing commitment to the problem.
- Both traditional and electronic forms of media, such as podcasts, Facebook, and Twitter, should be established for communicating about matters of public safety and department prevention as well as crime response efforts.
- Press releases addressing incidents of gun violence should always include information on prevention and community safety programs. Efforts to inform the public

regarding "where the gun came from" should be included when such information will not compromise active trafficking investigations.

- Press events and interviews should be regularly conducted by the chief executive of the agency and include representatives from allied agencies and community stakeholders.

A focused, proactive and data-driven communications plan is an essential component to effective policing and a critical means by which to engage the community in the fight to reduce gun violence.

### Text Message Tip Lines

Increasingly, law enforcement agencies are instituting anonymous text message tip lines for members of the public to report crime-related activity or tips. A department's text message tip line, operated through an Internet-based system which routes messages through a server that encrypts phone numbers, can enable the public to text information without being traced. The system can allow the department to exchange messages with the tipster in order to seek clarification and additional information. Through an arrangement with a local bank, departments can reward text tipsters who are given a code to collect their cash rewards. Text messaging systems for law enforcement application can cost from \$6,000 to \$15,000 per year. Use of this technology can yield critical information related to gun violence, including information on gang activity, suspicious persons, and locations of community guns.

### Gun Buy-Back Programs

Gun buy-back programs conducted by law enforcement agencies are intended to involve the community in removing unwanted firearms from circulation and reducing the risk posed by guns in the home (such as children accessing guns or having them stolen) by creating financial incentives for people to turn guns over to law enforcement. The basic theory behind the gun buy-back effort is that reducing the number of guns on the street will reduce crime. Those surrendering firearms are offered cash or gift cards to businesses such as grocery or drug stores. One community sought to reach teens with firearms by offering them new sneakers. Whereas gun buy-back programs in the 90s were



supported with federal resources, today law enforcement agencies need to collaborate with sponsors from local businesses or community organizations in order to raise necessary funds.

Typically those turning in guns are not required to identify themselves or show proof of ownership, however, geographic parameters on the eligibility of people providing guns for money will help maintain the focus and benefit of the gun buy-back on the sponsoring community. Compensation is usually structured on a graduated scale with non-operational weapons warranting the lowest amount of reward and assault weapons the most. All recovered firearms should undergo tracing to determine if any were previously used in crime. In keeping with a resolution passed by the membership of the IACP, agencies should ensure the destruction of all firearms collected (see IACP Firearms Committee, “Mandatory Destruction of Firearms Resolution.”).

Despite their popularity, research has shown no evidence that buy-back programs are getting crime guns off the street. Provisions that are believed to make the programs more meaningful include imposing geographic limitations on the eligibility of people providing guns for money and restricting the number of weapons accepted per person. Such parameters deter dealers and collectors from unloading junk or cheap guns at a profit. One meaningful benefit of a well-publicized program is that it can focus the community on gun violence and by working together with law enforcement to make their communities safer.

### The Reporting of Lost or Stolen Firearms

Despite efforts to encourage citizens to properly secure firearms, it is estimated that thousands of firearms are stolen each year. In response, some states and local communities have enacted ordinances that require gun owners to report lost or stolen firearms. One example is in the communities of Pennsylvania. Such laws can help deter firearms trafficking and straw purchases while making recovery of the weapons more likely. However, one of the most significant obstacles for law enforcement when it comes to investigating stolen firearms is the fact that owners typically do not possess complete descriptions of their firearms. This means that police will not have the critical information necessary to aggressively investigate the crime.

As a remedy, local law enforcement agencies, working in partnership with gun shops in their communities, can promote the use of ATF’s *Personal Firearms Record* on which gun owners can document complete descriptions of their firearm inventories to include the manufacturer, model, and serial number as well as other identifiers. This free pamphlet is a simple approach to

improving the likelihood that future cases of gun thefts will be more readily solved. This record should be stored electronically or within a fire-proof safe in the home or at an outside location such as a safe deposit box. ❖



### License Plate Readers: Linking Technology and Intelligence to Fight Crime

License plate reader technology should be employed proactively by law enforcement at gun shows and other gun trading locations and as part of hot spot policing. Gun shows are seen by individuals, particularly those prohibited to possess firearms such as convicted felons, as the means by which firearms they cannot purchase legally can be acquired. Therefore, law enforcement can and should have a presence at such events and other locations with known criminal activity. Technology, such as Automatic License Plate Readers (LPRs), can be used by local law enforcement as an investigatory tool to solve crimes including those that are gun related.

Through mobile and/or fixed applications, LPRs can match vehicle license plates with information on established “hot list” registries, such as those for firearms offenders or known drug dealers or gang members. When read, license plates listed on a “hot list” will sound an alarm to notify the officer of a “hit” and enable an interdiction of the individual operating the vehicle, as warranted, and possibly prevent further criminal activity. Not only does this technology identify criminal and/or traffic violations, but it reads every plate and creates a database of vehicle locations at specific times. Through geomapping, the locations of persons of interest can be tracked as well as vehicles that should be monitored and/or stopped for further enforcement action. Data from LPR systems can produce timely intelligence that can be used to enforce the law and prevent gun violence.



# IX.

## Domestic Violence and Firearms: Addressing the Danger



**T**he deadly connection between firearms and domestic violence cannot be overestimated, and police have a crucial role to play in protecting victims through consistent attention to this crime.

Access to firearms has been revealed to increase the risk of intimate partner homicide more than five times over situations where weapons were not present, according to a 2003 study.<sup>1</sup>

It is essential to note that in addition to being used in homicides, guns are frequently used as a tool to terrorize and assert control over victims in abusive relationships.<sup>2</sup> A 2005 analysis of domestic violence victims served by Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department found that "40 percent of the batterers who kept a firearm at home were reported to have threatened the victim with it in the past."<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the country, the lack of clear and detailed law enforcement procedures for the seizure, surrender, and return of firearms in situations of domestic violence enhances risk to victims as well as first responders. The reality of domestic violence circumstances reveals that all too often

- ▶ victims have been killed with firearms that could have been seized or forfeited (either for safekeeping or under legal statute);
- ▶ federal laws that prohibit possession of firearms by persons subject to qualifying orders of protection are underutilized and inconsistently enforced;
- ▶ officers have been killed in responding to calls, or lives have been endangered through the felonious use of firearms; and
- ▶ law enforcement training is often insufficient.

Whether due to exigent circumstance or for safekeeping, local law enforcement must be prepared to act aggressively to remove firearms from the scene of a domestic violence incident, in accordance with state law. Effective firearms removal must begin with a clear message from department leadership that this action is a priority and that officers will be expected to facilitate temporary removal during a call for service. Removal may be based upon one of the following:

- ▶ For the safety of the victim as well as third parties
- ▶ Enforcement of the terms and conditions of a court-issued order of protection
- ▶ Mandatory confiscation of illegal contraband under federal statute or state law
- ▶ Mandatory confiscation of firearm(s) used in the commission of a crime (domestic assault and/or threatened abuse)

### Protection Orders and Firearms

Federal firearms laws, and those similarly enacted in many states, prohibit access to firearms by individuals convicted of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence *and* by those who have orders of protection issued against them by the courts for threatening, attempting, or using physical force against an intimate partner (18 *U.S.C.* § 922 (g) 8–9). At the time an order

of protection is issued by a court, the presiding judge should, as a matter of routine, make inquiries of both the respondent and petitioner about the presence and location of firearms in the home and all firearms the respondent possesses, and, in accordance with state law, either instruct the respondent to surrender the firearms to law enforcement within a specified timeframe or order local law enforcement to seize the firearms immediately.

For circumstances of surrender, law enforcement agencies should provide the court with written protocols to be given in hardcopy at the time the order of protection is issued to those being required to surrender firearms along with a deadline by which surrender should take place. A common problem is the absence of a system for the timely sharing of information between the court and local

law enforcement, specifically regarding the issuance of orders to surrender firearms and the designated timeframe. To prevent a situation of heightened risk to the victim and law enforcement, a commitment to clear procedures for alerting law enforcement about ordered surrenders and tracking compliance is essential.

An offender's decision not to comply with a court order, whether it is the surrender of firearms or other provisions in the order of protection, is an indicator of enhanced risk for lethality. Such circumstances create a situation requiring officers to plan and proceed with weapons seizure. Coordination with and assistance from the local ATF field office is advised to maximize the safety of the victim as well as the officers.

## Undercover Firearms Operations: Law Enforcement Successes

Recent headlines have highlighted two successful East Coast initiatives to address the illegal trade and trafficking of firearms through undercover law enforcement storefront operations. In 2010, Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Washington Police Department concluded a seven-month sting having collected 123 guns along with drugs, money, and stolen electronics. Forty-four people were arrested and charged; thirty-three face federal charges. The purpose of the phony auto body storefront operation was to determine how guns and drugs were moving around the city. Members of the department's Major Case Unit, working with agents from both the FBI and ATF, were able to identify over a dozen states from which guns were brought into the District of Columbia and document the illegal weapons trafficking business.

The Atlanta, GA, Police Department also ran a seven-month undercover sting operation that, in 2011, netted 373 firearms. Using a smoke shop as the storefront, they put out the word that they were interested in buying guns, drugs, and stolen property. This collaboration with ATF resulted in 49 people being charged with federal and state offenses ranging from illegal firearms possession and illegal drug sales to conspiracy and armed robbery. Most of the weapons were from home burglaries or stolen from cars. Police Chief George Turner said of the \$400,000 operation that the city's "streets are safer today."





## Transfer and Return of Firearms in Domestic Violence Situations

Executives should ensure that department policy specifically forbids officers from facilitating the transfer of firearms from an alleged batterer to a third party when responding to a domestic violence call for service. The risk to public safety and the potential for agency liability in the event of subsequent acts of gun violence necessitates this prohibition. For third-party transfer of a firearm held by a local law enforcement agency, a notarized statement and/or court order authorizing the transfer should be required by department policy. To deter individuals from knowingly transferring a firearm to a prohibited person in violation of federal law, departments should post or provide a copy of the statute [18 U.S.C. § 922(d)(9)] that makes it “unlawful for any person to sell or otherwise dispose of any firearm or ammunition to any person knowing or having reasonable cause to believe that such person has been convicted in any court of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence.”

Prior to a local law enforcement agency transferring or returning a firearm (held due to surrender, forfeiture, or seizure), a background and records check should be conducted to ensure the individual seeking possession is not prohibited under federal or state law. Determining whether the person is the subject of a current, qualifying order of protection (and therefore prohibited under federal and possibly state law) should be part of this effort. In the case of a domestic violence situation, efforts should be made by the department to notify the victim when the abusive party is seeking to have a firearm(s) returned. This information should be shared in order to fully address the safety needs and options available to the victim.

## Domestic Violence and Firearms Resources

The following documents and links to them are offered as resources and not intended to be an exhaustive list. No endorsement is intended or implied by inclusion in this guide.

Wilkinson, John, and Toolsi Gowin Meisner. March 2011. “[Domestic Violence and Firearms: A Deadly Combination](#).” *Strategies: the Prosecutor’s Newsletter on Violence Against Women*.

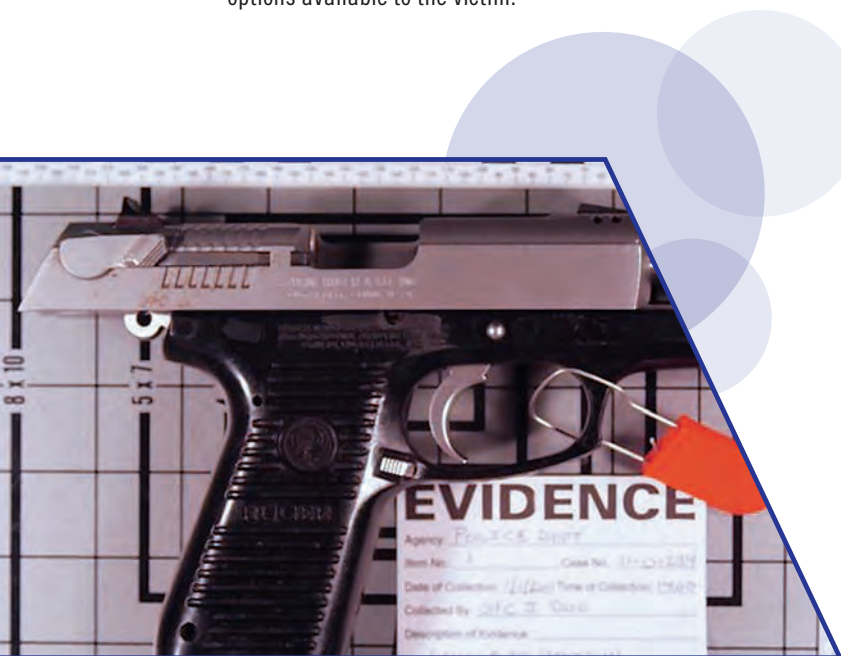
Klein, Andrew R. September 2006. *Enforcing Domestic Violence Firearms Prohibitions: A Report on Promising Practices*, edited by Mary B. Malefyt Seighman. National Center on Full Faith and Credit.

Seighman, Mary Malefyt, and David R. Thomas. October 2005. *Model Law Enforcement Policy: Serving and Enforcing Protection Orders & Seizing Firearms in Domestic Violence Cases*. National Center on Full Faith and Credit.

[Protecting Victims of Domestic Violence: A Law Enforcement Officers’ Guide to Enforcing Orders of Protection Nationwide](#). Battered Women’s Justice Project, 2006.

Frattaroli, Shannon. October 2009. *Removing Guns from Domestic Violence Offenders: An Analysis of State Level Policies to Prevent Future Abuse*. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

- <sup>1</sup> J. C. Campbell et al., “Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results from a Multi-Site Case Control Study,” *American Journal of Public Health* 93, no.7 (July 2003): 1089-97.
- <sup>2</sup> Susan Sorenson and Douglas Wiebe, “Weapons in the Lives of Battered Women,” *American Journal of Public Health* 94, no.8 (August 2004): 1412-1417.
- <sup>3</sup> Richard A. Berk, Yan He, and Susan B. Sorenson, “Developing a practical forecasting screener for domestic violence incidents for the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department. *Evaluation Review* 29, no. 4(August 2005): 358-383. ❖



# X.

## Conclusion: Moving Forward



To effectively reduce gun violence, a well-planned, comprehensive approach that entails both prevention and policing strategies is necessary. The strategies highlighted in this guide are intended to provide departments with resources, leads to contact, and ideas to adapt and customize to individual agencies and communities. Supplementing current agency efforts with the recommendations in this guide can create a multifaceted approach that addresses the problem of gun violence from a variety of angles. To achieve long-term positive impact, relentless follow-up and ongoing evaluation of overall efforts must also be performed. Because elements of successful gun violence reduction programs can inspire efforts in other communities, we encourage you to share your law enforcement strategies by contacting the IACP. ❖



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