

TEN ESSENTIAL ACTIONS CITIES CAN TAKE TO REDUCE VIOLENCE NOW

Executive Summary

The Challenge

As 2022 begins, America's cities face a surge in violent crime, particularly homicide. The Council on Criminal Justice (CCJ) documented a 30% rise in murders nationwide in 2020, while police data from large cities reveal another 7% increase in 2021. Policymakers and practitioners need solutions now. In response to the crisis, CCJ launched a Violent Crime Working Group in July 2021. Group members have identified **Ten Essential Actions** cities can immediately take to reduce gun violence in their streets.

1 **Set a clear goal: commit to saving lives by stopping violence.**

City leaders should commit to concrete reductions in homicides and shootings. A 10% annual reduction is an impactful yet realistic goal.

2 **Identify the key people and places driving the violence.**

In every city, violence concentrates among small sets of individuals, groups, and locations. Cities should complete a rigorous problem analysis to identify these people and places.

3 **Create a citywide plan for engaging key people and places.**

Addressing violence requires a strategic plan to effectively organize a multi-disciplinary response. Plans should spell out concrete assignments: for key people and places, who will do what?

4 **Engage key people with empathy and accountability.**

High-risk individuals and groups must be placed on notice that they are in danger of being injured, killed, arrested, and/or incarcerated. Supports and services must be offered while law enforcement makes clear that further violence will not be tolerated.

5 **Engage key locations using place-based policing and investment.**

A combination of place-based policing and investment can cool violent hot spots. Police are needed to disrupt cycles of violence, but must be supplemented and replaced by cleaning-and-greening and other targeted enhancements to change the nature of violent micro-locations.

State and Federal Support

States and the federal government can support the outlined actions through messaging and convening, grantmaking and fiscal incentives, regulation and legislation, and through the direct work of certain agencies.

Among other actions, states and the federal government should:

- + Encourage cities to set the right goals
- + Support evidence-informed local strategies, but also invest in innovation
- + Help cities by building anti-violence "infrastructure"
- + Align state and federal actions with local anti-violence priorities.

Violent Crime Working Group Members

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To read the full Working Group report, visit counciloncj.org.

6 Place responsibility for violence reduction at the top. Every city suffering from high rates of violent crime should have a permanent unit dedicated to violence reduction housed in the mayor's office, with senior leadership reporting directly to the mayor.

7 Emphasize healing with trauma-informed approaches. Agencies working with victims and survivors of violent crime should use a trauma-informed approach. The same holds true for law enforcement officers, who also experience trauma.

8 Invest in anti-violence workforce development. Investing in a professional, sustainable anti-violence workforce means providing adequate salaries, benefits, and prospects for upward mobility through effective training and education. Law enforcement, facing recruitment and retention challenges, also needs additional support.

9 Set aside funding for new stakeholders and strategies. While most funding should be reserved for strategies with demonstrated track records of success, some portion of anti-violence dollars should be set aside to promote innovation.

10 Commit to continuous improvement based on data, evidence, and peer-to-peer learning. Leaders should embrace a learning culture that can recognize when strategies are not working and shift course. Research partners should be engaged early to assess performance. Stakeholders can be brought together through information-sharing networks.

Begin Today

Violent crime is a deadly serious challenge, but also a solvable one. Policymakers and practitioners need to put polarized, "us versus them" politics aside and focus on solutions that strengthen community and enforcement-based approaches. By taking the ten essential actions above, leaders can restore peace and safety to our communities. As the famous Chinese proverb says, "The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second-best time is now."

About the Council

The Council on Criminal Justice is a nonpartisan criminal justice think tank and national invitational membership organization. Its mission is to advance understanding of the criminal justice policy choices facing the nation and build consensus for solutions based on facts, evidence, and fundamental principles of justice. For more information, visit counciloncj.org.