



Lessons from Effective Offices of Violence Prevention

Hernán Flom, PhD
with Alfredo Malaret Baldo
January 2024



**PEACE
IN OUR CITIES**



Lessons from Effective Offices of Violence Prevention

Hernán Flom, PhD
with Alfredo Malaret Baldo
January 2024

**PEACE
IN OUR CITIES**



Contents

About	4
Introduction	4
Part 1: Key Findings and Messages	6
OVPs Can Achieve Effectiveness through a Broad Menu of Options	6
Civilian Leadership Is Crucial	6
Balance Specificity and Comprehensiveness	6
Ensure Sufficient Autonomy	7
Increase Political and Societal Buy-In to Ensure Sustainability	7
Coordinate a Whole-of-City Approach to Prevention	8
Ensure Resources Meet Ambition	8
There Are Good Practices That May Be Replicable	8
Part 2: Methodology	9
Sample and Subsample Selection	9
Definition and Rationale of Criteria	11
Differences between US OVPs and Non-US Offices	11
Part 3: Specific Findings, Tradeoffs, and Lessons	13
Criterion 1: Clear, Public Mandate	13
Criterion 2: Consultations and Community Partnerships	15
Criterion 3: Sound, Regularly Updated Diagnoses	15
Criterion 4: Well-Defined Population	16
Criterion 5: Comprehensive and Coherent Prevention Approach	17
Criterion 6: Appropriate and Sustainable Budget	18
Criterion 7: Sufficient, Qualified Staff	19
Criterion 8: Strong Political Buy-In	19
Criterion 9: Public Documentation of Activities, Results, and Impact	20
Part 4: Adapting Lessons to PiOC Members	22
Bristol's Momentum	22
Cali's Coordination	24
Edmonton's Leadership	27
Rosario's Opportunity	29
Part 5: Concluding Observations	32
About the Authors	33
Acknowledgments	33
Appendix	34
Endnotes	35

About

Peace in Our Cities (PiOC) is a unique global network of 24 cities and over 40 community-based and international partners with the ambitious goal to halve urban violence by 2030. The network represents over 25 million people in cities across the world and was established in 2019.

Peace in Our Cities is co-facilitated by three US-based independent institutions: the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies at New York University's Center on International Cooperation; the Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice at the University of San Diego; and the Stanley Center for Peace and Security. PiOC is funded by these three organizations, which draw limited funds from their own endowments as well as from governments and philanthropic organizations.

PiOC seeks to reduce and prevent urban violence worldwide—preserving lives and helping cities thrive. It does so by creating concrete, participatory, and evidence-based platform exchanges to reduce and prevent severe violence in member cities, while also building a global movement of

urban-violence-reduction advocates. The PiOC approach is based on three lines of action:

- *Amplify* policymaker awareness of the genuine scope and scale of urban violence and opportunities available to help cities address it.
- *Advance* evidence-informed, balanced policy solutions and peacebuilding approaches to reduce the most severe forms of violence in urban contexts.
- *Accompany* city leaders, community partners, and civil society through peer exchanges and information access to realize ambitious targets for violence reduction.

In line with PiOC's central mission, this research effort is a direct response to demands from network members seeking evidence and actionable analysis that could lead to significant reductions in urban violence. This research effort is one such initiative to advance evidence-informed policy solutions to address different forms of serious violence in urban settings.

Introduction

Violence is highly concentrated in cities. And in recent decades, cities have gained more political and fiscal autonomy from central governments, making local elected officials the main focus of societal demands to prevent and reduce violence. Consequently, many municipalities have created or supported Offices of Violence Prevention (OVPs), albeit with different institutional designs, denominations, resources, and challenges.¹ Hoping to help optimize their functioning, this report reviews components that could make these offices more effective and offers a tradeoff analysis of different decisions involved in designing violence prevention strategies.

This research report applies a broad definition of centralized OVPs, describing them as local-level governmental, civil-society-run, or public-private entities whose central mandate is to prevent different forms of violence through approaches that do not rely primarily on law enforcement.² While these

entities may have multiple names and institutional locations, this research looked for entities with sufficient institutional strength and resources to advance their own violence prevention agendas, in collaboration with community partners. This research effort also focused on entities with significant civilian leadership.

Numerous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and think tanks have produced comprehensive analyses and assessments of OVPs in US cities.³ This report is particularly indebted to efforts by the Vera Institute of Justice and the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform reports on the landscape of OVPs.⁴ Building on this research, this report provides an analysis that includes international entities.

Additionally, there is a large academic literature analyzing and evaluating the impact of urban-violence-prevention or -reduction programs. While again

the scholarly focus is predominantly on cities in the United States, such as in Chicago,⁵ Los Angeles,⁶ and Philadelphia,⁷ there are studies on violence prevention interventions in cities in Brazil⁸ and Colombia,⁹ among others. However, studies tend to focus on specific interventions as opposed to the impact of the OVPs themselves. While establishing a causal relationship between OVPs and violence prevention is beyond the scope of this report, it intends to outline common elements that could increase effectiveness of these entities and offer lessons for the violence prevention field more broadly.

One main takeaway is that **the menu of violence prevention options is large and varied**. The analyzed OVPs come in multiple shapes and sizes. Many are centralized under a mayor's office or have close relations with the city council/city manager, some are part of the local government structure such as public health departments, and others even operate outside of the political administration within civil society. Some focus their interventions on youth at high risk of perpetrating or suffering serious violence, while others develop comprehensive interventions that involve entire communities. Some hire multiple specialized professionals internally, while others outsource work to community partners.

As diverse as these offices are, some common components that influence effectiveness emerge. Most importantly, effective OVPs have clear, context-sensitive goals and sufficient capacity to meet their ambition. They also balance political leadership with sufficient autonomy to prevent politicization. They perform rigorous diagnostics and evaluations to make evidence-informed decisions and understand evaluative lessons. They also have mechanisms to get regular feedback from diverse social actors. Importantly, effective OVPs have earned trust and sustainability through transparency and accountability, and by fostering citywide buy-in.

This analysis uses a sample of 18 cities from 10 countries (see full list in appendix). While not globally representative, this sample possesses sufficient variation in context and policy alternatives to offer guidance to stakeholders in the form of a menu of options. Nine criteria were identified (clear, public mandate; consultation and community partnerships; diagnosis or baseline studies; population; prevention approach; budget sustainability; staffing composition; political buy-in; and documentation of activities, results, and impact) to analyze practices and gather lessons from these entities. Then, multiple sources were consulted to appreciate the design structure and implementation capabilities of each city in the sample. With this approach, the research analyzes different practices from the sample and offers a tradeoff analysis that is widely applicable, including lessons from and for cities in the sample, other offices, and violence prevention more generally.

The first section of this report summarizes key findings and messages derived from the analysis. The second section defines each criterion and explains the methodology used to select the cities. The third section describes the main findings in detail, unpacks caveats and tradeoffs for each criterion, and offers some positive examples. The fourth section analyzes the prospects for adapting these insights to the cities Bristol (England), Cali (Colombia), Edmonton (Canada), and Rosario (Argentina), focusing on current strengths and opportunities for more-effective violence prevention. The last section provides concluding observations.

We hope policymakers, stakeholders, and policy experts on urban violence prevention can derive multiple actionable ideas from this analysis, enabling them to set up effective OVPs or draw lessons to improve existing or forthcoming violence prevention structures and initiatives.

Part 1: Key Findings and Messages

OVPs Can Achieve Effectiveness through a Broad Menu of Options

The analyzed OVPs exhibit a high-level of heterogeneity in their institutional design and policy implementation, while hewing to their various social, political, and institutional contexts. On the one hand, this diversity may seem frustrating to policymakers and scholars in that there is no single solution to prevent violence. On the other hand, this means that multiple options are feasible and potentially effective to realize the objective of preventing violence, which can be adapted to a variety of different urban contexts. Nonetheless, this analysis did identify common notions (see below) that appear central to buttress effectiveness. Policymakers should thus be aware of the tradeoffs inherent in how OVPs and violence prevention strategies are designed and run.

Civilian Leadership Is Crucial

This analysis considers civilian leadership an indispensable condition for attaining effective OVPs. Civilian leadership has, traditionally, exhibited a higher likelihood of addressing violence through comprehensive, multidisciplinary approaches, rather than limiting itself to law enforcement strategies or repressive means. Members of the police or security forces, both active and retired, have technical and practical expertise that should be consulted when defining and implementing an OVP's mission, functions, and programs. Politicians will certainly rely on the police, at least in part, for the implementation of some prevention policies. However, security forces possess a *partial* outlook of a city's violence problems, while effective OVPs, by contrast, demand an *integral* understanding of such issues to formulate adequate solutions, such as an *intersectional* approach to violence prevention.

Furthermore, some communities have low levels of trust in the police given their histories of biased, discriminatory, and punitive enforcement, particularly in marginalized neighborhoods where violence is frequently concentrated. Putting police commanders in charge of an OVP may spark tensions with community partners, thereby potentially obstructing community

engagement and operational effectiveness. Of course, police might not be the only institution with low social prestige; communities may also distrust elected politicians and bureaucrats. Such issues of trust and institutional relationships must be factored into the design of any OVP.

Balance Specificity and Comprehensiveness

OVPs continuously find themselves in a tradeoff between specificity and comprehensiveness, and between the quality and quantity of their coverage. They work with limited resources in terms of budget, staff, time, and political capital, and face pressure to demonstrate quick results. Therefore, they should at least partially target those resources to address the circumstances, moments, groups, and/or individuals most likely to suffer from violence, as either victims and/or perpetrators.¹⁰ In other words, to reduce violence in the near term, OVPs should prioritize some programs built on secondary prevention, such as focused interventions to disrupt or interrupt cycles of retribution among high-risk individuals and address victims' immediate needs, and tertiary prevention approaches directed toward rehabilitation and managing the emotional trauma of violence involvement.¹¹

However, these types of programs can be difficult to implement and sustain. They require finding and supporting legitimate brokers to activate strategies to directly intervene in addressing cycles of violence, which is a highly stressful and potentially dangerous full-time occupation. Furthermore, focused secondary and tertiary initiatives might not promote the cultural and social changes that are necessary to prevent violence in the long term. Finally, these programs can risk further stigmatizing communities as "violent" or "dangerous" as other citizens perceive greater police presence in these areas.

Thus, it is important to balance focused programs directed at narrower populations where the short-term impact of violence prevention is greater, with, if possible, primary prevention programs directed at broader populations that seek to address the

underlying causes of violence and to change social norms to attain long-term impact.

Ensure Sufficient Autonomy

OVPs are not apolitical. They typically emerge from a political decision that makes preventing and reducing violence a government priority, which is often a direct response to constituents' demands. OVPs are usually part of the government and financed through public funding, which subjects them to electoral and societal accountability. However, their political character notwithstanding, OVPs require sufficient autonomy from political interference to be effective and sustainable.

The risks of political interference are profound. In many democracies, governmental agencies are subject to the short-term interests of political incumbents. For example, jobs might be used to reward party loyalists, as opposed to going to the most qualified professionals. Similarly, an office's programs might not be directed where they are most needed but where an incumbent wishes to strengthen their electoral advantage. Furthermore, many changes needed to prevent violence—such as breaking inter-generational cycles of violence, transforming power relations that legitimize gender-based aggressions, ensuring that individuals with criminal backgrounds find and remain in legal career paths, and improving relations between the community and the police—can take longer than one administration's term to materialize.¹² When an OVP's main priorities are changed because of short-term political exigencies, they are less likely to achieve systemic results. Offices that are perceived as politicized or partisan will also lose credibility among the institutional and community partners whose cooperation is required to achieve meaningful objectives. In addition, offices that are perceived as too close to an individual political leader may be affected (either through budget cuts, disinterest, or the creation of parallel structures) after that individual's political term ends.

Democratically elected politicians can legitimately set strategic priorities and orient agencies to implement them. In addition, political leadership can be fundamental to get OVPs off the ground, clear the roadblocks that obstruct program implementation, and pull levers to enhance their efforts. Nonetheless, strategies and priorities should be founded on

independent diagnostics, widespread community participation, continuous monitoring, and rigorous evaluations to enhance societal legitimacy, as opposed to being solely or primarily driven by political interests. In light of this reality, effective OVPs seem to strike a balance between sufficient autonomy from political actors and substantial buy-in from influential political players to support their work.

Increase Political and Societal Buy-In to Ensure Sustainability

Sustainability is essential for all state agencies to be effective, and OVPs are no exception. Frequent changes in political administrations can derail an OVP's effectiveness. A new administration can shut down, marginalize, or duplicate an OVP if it perceives it to be too closely identified with its predecessor. These changes impede engaging in positive working relations with the community and seeing through programs that require time to mature. By contrast, having at least a medium-term horizon can provide the office's staff with the support and autonomy required to plan and execute programs with medium-to-long-term effects.

Sustainability relies not only on reaching objectives but also communicating these results appropriately. This involves recognizing the different audiences of said communication and strategically shaping the conversation to highlight the OVP's results. OVPs whose strategies, diagnosis, and interventions are more inclusive are more likely to develop greater trust and ownership from the community. Involving other state actors—and even members from opposition parties—in relevant roles can make them more invested in the OVP's success and continuity. Similarly, having various sources of funding, both public and private, demonstrates a greater societal buy-in regarding the OVP, which might shield it from unexpected fiscal problems of the municipal government, thus increasing its sustainability. Finally, OVPs' strategies should be periodically evaluated to document their contribution or causal impact, whether this is positive, indiscernible, or even negative. Therefore, independent evaluations of the initiatives are essential so the OVP's stakeholders can make informed decisions that maintain or increase its effectiveness moving forward.

In short, OVPs need time and sustained support to be effective and should be thoroughly evaluated to determine the extent of that effectiveness to correct course if needed.

Coordinate a Whole-of-City Approach to Prevention

OVPs should also take the lead in coordinating a city's violence prevention ecosystem. Comprehensive violence prevention requires a whole-of-city approach, involving public entities, community-based organizations, academia, and the public at large (including those involved with justice systems). Such a role implies aligning stakeholders toward a unified vision, coordinating work in service of that vision, earning the communities' support, advancing evidence-based policies, filling service and funding gaps, and communicating impact. An intentional, comprehensive, and coordinated approach to violence prevention, led by a legitimate OVP, can make a significant difference in citywide violence prevention.

Ensure Resources Meet Ambition

While it may seem obvious, it is worth reiterating: for an office to be effective (i.e., to meet its ambition) it must be adequately resourced. As important as mandates and strategies are, appropriate implementation requires trained and well-suited staff who are paid competitive salaries and empowered with sufficient funding and autonomy to run their activities and core operations. Expecting immediate results from agencies without the appropriate resources is wishful thinking, not sound policy-making.

Too often, peacebuilding and violence prevention efforts are underfunded, reflecting a systemic underestimation of the cost of violence, sociopolitical inequalities that devalue certain lives, and a lack of appreciation for the peace dividend. While estimating the cost of violence in each city is beyond the scope of this paper, it is exceedingly clear that investing in prevention is much more cost-effective than addressing the direct and indirect costs of violence.¹³ For example, studies have estimated that each homicide can cost a city anywhere between \$1.5 million and \$3 million¹⁴ and result in long-lasting impacts on mental health, trauma, and community disintegration, among many other negative aftereffects. For this reason, it is clear that financing violence prevention is a sound long-term investment.

There Are Good Practices That May Be Replicable

While there are no universal templates for effectiveness, some specific guidelines stand out when analyzing the subsample of OVPs. These good practices are not without tradeoffs. In line with the objective of offering a broad menu of options, the practices outlined in the "Specific Findings, Tradeoffs, and Lessons" section of this paper are worth considering for replication or adaptation in contexts where they would seem relevant and/or appropriate.

Part 2: Methodology

This section includes the methodology used to select the subsample of city-based OVPs, defines the criteria used to evaluate notions that influence effectiveness, and identifies general differences between US and non-US offices (which is done for methodological reasons and cross-fertilization).

Sample and Subsample Selection

The mapping database was composed of the following four sections: (1) the world's most violent cities in 2021 according to the Mexican Seguridad, Justicia y Paz (Security, Justice, and Peace) ranking, (2) the world's most violent cities for the 2016–2020 period, according to this same ranking, (3) members of the Peace in Our Cities network,¹⁵ and (4) noteworthy cases cited by PiOC members or mentioned as seminal in the literature.

From a global mapping of agencies with a violence prevention mandate, a subsample of 18 cities was then selected to carry out a detailed analysis. This selection was guided by four criteria:

- **Civilian leadership:** Focus on offices that are under civilian control and have the autonomy to implement their strategy, as opposed to those entities under considerable influence from police or security forces.¹⁶
- **Stability:** Emphasis on cities with OVPs that were established at least five years ago. This allowed researchers to identify factors that potentially enabled these units to survive at least one electoral cycle.
- **Diverse contexts:** While most of the selected OVPs are from the Americas, where most of the world's most violent cities are, the subsample also includes cases from Western Europe, which operate in substantially different contexts. Nonetheless, it is worth highlighting that the selected countries are vastly different in terms of institutional, political, socioeconomic, and violence contexts.
- **Public information:** Most OVPs in the subsample have accessible public information that can be used to evaluate the criteria that influence effectiveness, which are described below. This

selection filter was important to conduct independent desk-based research.

Definition and Rationale of Criteria

This research used a typology of nine criteria with which to analyze the 18 cities in the subsample. These nine criteria were identified because of their influence in determining OVPs' effectiveness. These are not the only criteria that contribute to effectiveness. Other factors, particularly context-specific ones, should also be considered when completing a sensitivity analysis. These nine criteria, however, demonstrate considerable influence and wide applicability to different contexts. To define these nine criteria and then gather information about them, the authors conducted interviews with key stakeholders (such as the heads of different OVPs)¹⁷ and carried out discussions with research partners and several rounds of testing to determine the final set to be utilized throughout this report. This section (part 2) defines each criterion and explains why it is relevant for an OVP's effectiveness. In part 3, building from observing different practices from the 18 sampled cities against these nine research criteria, the authors offer a tradeoff analysis widely applicable to violence prevention efforts.

Criterion 1: Clear, public mandate

A mandate is a publicly available document that summarizes an OVP's strategic priorities, authority, scope and vision, and the principles underpinning its violence prevention approach. In other words, the mandate defines the OVP's purpose (it's *why*), *what* it will do, and *how* it will do it. A public mandate is relevant because it outlines the basic function of the OVP to its staff and stakeholders and is the basic tool by which others—from community partners to ordinary citizens—can hold the OVP accountable.

Criterion 2: Consultations and community partnerships

An effective OVP should establish mechanisms to achieve sustained, widespread, and relevant participation of nongovernmental partners, such as neighborhood associations, businesses, universities, and civil society organizations, in the design and/or implementation of its programs. Meaningful participation can increase societal buy-in of OVPs and, thus, their political sustainability. Incorporating social input and feedback ensures that the OVP's programs and activities are aligned with the needs of the population it serves. It can also help to build trust and ownership, especially from historically marginalized populations.

Criterion 3: Sound, regularly updated diagnoses

A sound diagnosis is the basis for a correct prescription. The OVP should be guided by a diagnostic analysis, elaborated before the start of its activities, that identifies the main violence problems it will address through an evidence-informed approach, delineates a strategy to deal with such problems, and sets out clear indicators to measure its progress. Without diagnoses, an OVP can become involved in too many activities that detract from its central obligations and/or provide ineffective responses to existing problems. Regularly updating the diagnosis is crucial because local conditions, problems, and social dynamics are constantly evolving. Like a mandate, a diagnosis should be a public document to serve as a baseline for the OVP's initiatives and hold it accountable for its actions.

Criterion 4: Well-Defined population

The mandate and/or diagnosis should provide guidelines that identify the populations that are the main priority for the OVP's programs. These could be broader (e.g., all school children between ages 10 and 16) or narrower (e.g., the most-at-risk, those in conflict with law enforcement, or particular areas) but should be clearly specified. Any government agency's fundamental purpose is to provide goods and services to a population. How that priority population is defined can, therefore, condition the effectiveness and efficiency with which an OVP can allocate its resources and achieve its goals.

Criterion 5: Comprehensive and coherent prevention approach

There are multiple ways to carry out violence prevention. For instance, interventions might occur at different points in time and focus on different populations: tackle root causes of violence among the general population (primary prevention); interrupt the immediate escalation of violence, particularly among groups with higher risk of exposure or perpetration (secondary prevention); or aid in the treatment, rehabilitation, and reintegration of individuals and communities affected by violence (tertiary prevention). Each approach will focus on different circumstances and populations and involve different strategies and resources. A clearly defined prevention approach (or a combination of approaches) underpins the strategy that guides the work of the OVP. The main type, or types, of prevention strategies that the OVP will apply should be summarized by its mandate, diagnosis, or other foundational documents and indicated by a list of coherent activities.

Criterion 6: Appropriate and sustainable budget

An OVP's budget is the basic element that enables it to operate. It is also a hard indicator of its political relevance and sustainability prospects. This criterion analyzes the OVP's budget in absolute and relative terms; its evolution over time; its main sources of finance (i.e., whether it is funded exclusively by the city as opposed to other public and/or private sources); and if its financing mechanisms ensure stability beyond political changes in the local administration.

Criterion 7: Sufficient, qualified staff

In addition to its budget, the OVP depends on individuals to implement its programs and carry out its functions. This is not just a question of the number of personnel but of having staff with adequate skills and motivation. This criterion considers the number of full-time staff in the OVP, their main professional backgrounds, and the support provided by the office to ensure retention and improve performance.

Criterion 8: Strong political buy-in

Beyond the OVP's formal statutes, and even its assigned budget, having the active support of the mayor or city council is fundamental to its effectiveness. Political players can promote the OVP domestically and internationally, which may be important to secure additional program funding or technical assistance for diagnostics and evaluation. An active political leadership can also facilitate the OVP's operations by untangling negotiations with other state agencies and convincing community actors to invest time and resources in the OVP.

Criterion 9: Public documentation of activities, results, and impact

As much as a diagnosis serves to set an initial course, OVPs also need periodic evaluations to assess whether they are on the right track, correct programs that are not showing the expected results, and allocate resources more efficiently. These reports should have multiple clear indicators for each program, ideally showing changes over time in relation to a baseline. As with mandates, this documentation, whether in the form of reports, data dashboards, or informational videos, should be public and communicated clearly so stakeholders and citizens can hold government officials accountable. Indeed, an intentional communications strategy to transmit key messages and results is crucial.

Differences between US OVPs and Non-US Offices

While this report examines offices from four US cities for comparison (Chicago, Los Angeles, Oakland, and Philadelphia), most cases sampled are outside the United States. There are significant differences between OVPs in the United States and the other countries of the sample. Moreover, there are crucial differences *among* OVPs in the United States in design and enforcement capacities. Still, as with many security policies, US approaches to violence prevention (and its perception by analysts and policymakers) often inform violence prevention efforts outside the United States. That is why this section distills key differences between US and non-US contexts. In doing so, the research aims to share lessons

from different settings for cross-fertilization of good policy and practice.

In general, OVPs in the United States centralize prevention efforts across the city and report to the mayor, city council, or city/county manager.¹⁸ In comparison, entities outside the United States usually have a less-clear mandate to coordinate the citywide violence prevention ecosystem and tend to be less directly under the mayor's purview, and, on occasions, even operate outside of the government. This is a significant difference. Defining the highest local government official as the institutional authority in charge of the OVP sends a clear signal about the extent to which violence prevention is an urgent political priority. For example, being under the mayor's office can enable the OVP to have greater flexibility in its operations, as it has more legal elements at its disposal, while also facing more pressure to demonstrate immediate impacts. On the other hand, offices that sit in a separate department, such as public health, tend to have more stability and face less short-term political pressure but perhaps enjoy fewer levers when it comes to coordinating and influencing actors in the city.

A centralized structure, although influential by design, can make the OVP susceptible to political turnover, as it can be perceived as a mayor's "project" and, subsequently, disempowered when a new administration takes over. In contrast, some international entities are more politically decentralized. For example, some "local prevention systems" are governed by an independent board and coordinate prevention actors through multiagency participation and community engagement, acting as convening "councils" rather than as top-down centralized offices. In spite of this decentralized institutional design, the two councils in the subsample had a great deal of informal power, credibility, and influence. This observation suggests that structures advancing prevention can be effective even if their institutional design does not necessarily centralize local violence prevention authority.

Another major difference lies in the relationship between the local government and the police. US cities tend to have their own police departments, paid directly from the municipal budget. By contrast,

in most of the Latin American and European countries analyzed, police forces are formally responsive to the national (e.g., Colombia, Chile, and Honduras) and/or state-level government (e.g., Argentina, Belgium, and Brazil). While safety and violence prevention are not the exclusive responsibility of police and security forces, their cooperation may be necessary for OVPs to implement various violence prevention programs. Therefore, where it does not have direct influence or mandate over the police force, the municipal government will need to negotiate for the police's availability and cooperation with political actors from other districts and levels of government, adding a layer of complexity.

A further difference is that most of the OVPs in the United States were founded to deal with the problem of local gun and group-related (or network-related, sometimes referred to as gang-related) violence.

In other countries, groups may still be a relevant criminal actor, but violence is also driven by other, more-organized criminal entities, such as transnational organized networks (including drug-trafficking ones) or paramilitary outfits. Nevertheless, there is a commonality between the United States and Latin America when, for example, it comes to the social and racial segmentation of violence, as most perpetrators—and victims—of violence are young men of underprivileged socioeconomic status and from marginalized groups.¹⁹

Notwithstanding these differences, the chosen criteria and ensuing findings described below are still relevant for OVPs in the United States and beyond. Furthermore, this analysis will show that there are multiple models for attaining more-effective OVPs.

Part 3: Specific Findings, Tradeoffs, and Lessons

Using the nine criteria to analyze the potential effectiveness of OVPs, this section will discuss the potential tradeoffs involved in their design and implementation, and suggest good practices drawn from the analyzed cases.

Criterion 1: Clear, Public Mandate

Most analyzed OVPs include on their website a statement specifying their mandate to prevent or reduce violence, with the majority noting “community violence” as the priority. These might be declared in the form of a mission statement or be included in the legal statutes (i.e., law, decree, municipal ordinance) establishing the institutional position of the OVP and its core functions. To increase the mandate’s legitimacy, it is also important that it be endorsed by local residents. In most of these cases, the OVP’s approach to violence prevention does not rely primarily on law enforcement but rather emphasize social strategies to prevent violence.²⁰

As with any mission statement, a mandate is only as good as the factors that enable it. To be effective, the mandate should align with the office’s institutional position in the government and its assigned resources, otherwise it is bound to generate disappointment. Most OVPs’ mandates are sufficiently general in that they enable multiple activities. However, this may diversify an OVP’s actions to the extent that it cannot engage in all of them with the same depth.

Public mandates should also specify the goals that OVPs set out to accomplish. These goals should be broad and ambitious, yet also achievable so as to not generate unfounded expectations on the OVP. These goals should be clearly measurable to hold the OVP accountable for its performance. A positive example of a clear mandate is **Oakland’s Department of Violence Prevention**, which specifies five clear goals: to reduce (1) levels of gun violence, (2) intimate partner violence, (3) commercial sexual exploitation, (4) family trauma associated with unsolved homicides, and (5) community trauma associated with violence.²¹ The work of Oakland’s OVP is explored in more detail in the section “A Closer Look” below.

Another case that exemplifies a noteworthy approach to violence prevention is the **Directorate for Prevention, Safety and Urban Mobility of San Pedro Sula (Honduras)**, whose mandate states that its “main objective [...] is to promote a culture of peace that plays a role in the building of values and virtues in the sectors of greatest social vulnerability, recovering the use of public spaces, promoting healthy lifestyles and a culture of peace and citizen coexistence,” placing a greater emphasis on preventive actions beyond the role of the police. This is notable since it takes place in a region that is experiencing a rise in popularity of *mano dura* (tough on crime and punitive) policies.

Key takeaways: Define a mandate following evidence-based principles.²² Make it public. Balance between different prevention approaches. Specify measurable and achievable goals.

OAKLAND

A Closer Look:

Oakland's Department of Violence Prevention

Oakland's Department of Violence Prevention (DVP) applies a public health approach to violence prevention and reduction. It is focused on community-led interventions to provide sustainable safety to those most impacted by violence.

The Oakland DVP is structured such that it focuses on gun/group violence, gender-based violence, and community healing and restoration to address the trauma caused by violence. The DVP was designed with five distinct mandates (mentioned above) that are addressed through these three strategic responses and the services that fall under them. This structure means that the DVP has active violent-incident and crisis-response teams who support survivors, interrupt cycles of violence (through mediations and credible messaging), and support families and communities following violent incidents. The DVP also has life coaches who provide longer-term support to those causing harm to help them transform their lives.

In addition to its internal direct service staff, to address violence-related harms equitably, the DVP funds and partners with local community-based organizations (CBOs). The DVP is able to enhance its responses to gun/group violence, gender-based violence (GBV), and community trauma through a network of funded CBOs, allowing those most affected by violence to be involved in the design and implementation of the interventions. This deep

level of engagement allows for the DVP's strategies to reflect the lived experience of local communities.

Furthermore, Oakland's DVP approach to violence prevention and reduction integrates a gender lens into its work. This is particularly noteworthy in the work of the crisis-response network. That is, DVP direct services staff (i.e., community crisis responders) respond to all homicides in the city, with CBOs direct services staff (i.e., violence interrupters) responding to all shootings; and, currently, DVP GBV specialists supporting responses to both shootings and homicides.

Such comprehensive response is designed to stop cycles of retaliation, which is fundamental in shootings and homicides involving network-affiliated individuals. What is a standout practice is that community crisis responders and violence interrupters are systematically partnered with a DVP GBV expert to examine the scene where the violence occurred and assess if the shooting or homicide was motivated by gender. This means their violent-incident-response work is systematically informed by a GBV expert so as to not miss the underlying drivers behind violence and have a clearer understanding of violence in the city. This highlights the department's deep understanding of the intersections of group/gun violence and GBV, and thus the necessity to incorporate all forms of violence in comprehensive responses to community violence.

Criterion 2: Consultations and Community Partnerships

Most OVPs studied in this report specify who their civil society partners are, usually either business associations or groups of community-based organizations and representatives. It is harder to infer the mechanisms through which these actors—or the community at large—participate in an OVP’s design and implementation. It is noteworthy that participation from civil society is more common in the implementation phase than in the design, although there are some cases, such as the Colombian examples, in which cities do formulate their Integral Security and Citizen Coexistence Plan with contributions from civil society actors, such as academia, businesses, and neighborhood associations (see further description of the Cali case below). Finally, it is difficult to establish the degree to which the community’s participation, however inclusive, is relevant in shaping the OVP’s programs and activities.

While widespread, inclusive participation is always positive, achieving consensus on what are often controversial issues is complicated and can potentially paralyze an OVP. There is also a risk of external actors having too much sway on the agenda, which can materialize when an OVP is highly dependent on private sector funding. It can also be hard to maintain sustained participation by different social groups, given socioeconomic hardships as well as personal and professional obligations, and even competing priorities from different partners.

REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities (Canada) is one of the strongest examples of broad and meaningful consultation. It is governed by a board and entirely run by a civil society council, and all its initiatives are co-designed with the community and implemented in partnership with other local civil society and community organizations. REACH assigns interventions to specific civil society organizations with whom it collaboratively designs an annual plan. In an interview with the director, it was noted that it currently has over 100 partnerships with local organizations and that, prior to the establishment of the office, over 1,000 interviews with individuals from the community were conducted, leading to the decision to create REACH and informing its initial diagnosis.

Its subsequent legitimacy demonstrates the importance of an inclusive consultative process with the community in establishing an OVP.

The strategic plan of **Cali’s Secretariat of Security and Justice (Colombia)** also displays how multiple actors can be involved in the design and implementation of violence prevention policies. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, which impeded in-person gatherings, the secretariat carried out remote meetings with four “technical groups” to formulate its Integral Security and Citizen Coexistence Plan. To gather a wide array of inputs, it held meetings with university representatives and official observatories, business associations, private security companies, and individuals gathered through the local integrated administration centers (i.e., delegations of the municipal government in each neighborhood). It also conducted a survey to establish whether citizens’ priorities in terms of safety were aligned with those of the plan.

Key takeaways: Inclusive, sustained participation from community partners must be fostered to improve policy design and delivery, as well as to increase the societal trust in and ownership of the OVP. OVPs should play a central role in coordinating a whole-of-city effort, which includes supporting community-based organizations.

Criterion 3: Sound, Regularly Updated Diagnoses

Most of the analyzed OVPs present one or multiple diagnoses that establish the scale, scope, types, and distribution of violence in their city and outline the interventions to address them. These documents are often comprehensive and detailed, listing multiple indicators that can then be used to monitor progress. However, in many of these cases, the diagnosis preceded the OVP’s founding and was elaborated after the office was established, which means that many of its initial decisions were carried out without these guidelines.

Comprehensive diagnoses employing quantitative and qualitative data are essential and require significant resources to be carried out. However, policy planners should not become obsessed with diagnostics or allow them to take up a large chunk of the

resources the office needs to address these problems.²³ Furthermore, policymakers should be aware of potential biases of those who elaborate the diagnosis and make sure that other problems are not being ignored. Finally, updating the diagnosis too frequently can risk political and social exhaustion, since many issues will not change in the short term.

In **Chihuahua (Mexico), the Council for Violence and Crime Prevention (COPREV)** produces two diagnoses: (1) a comprehensive diagnosis for a three-year period and (2) a short-term diagnosis for specific projects. This is a good guideline for how to regularly update the diagnosis. While governments can work with data almost in real time to calibrate their responses and either preempt or mitigate emergencies, a larger interval is needed to develop a detailed diagnostic that can inform long-term prevention strategies—first, because the problems specified initially take some time to resolve, and second, because drafting a proper diagnosis is time consuming (and often expensive). In addition, having program-specific diagnoses may be a good practice to attract funding from international donors and organizations, which is often short term and project based.

The **Directorate of Human Security in Peñalolén (Chile)** also has a detailed, comprehensive, and regularly updated diagnostic, which, importantly, is also connected to actionable plans. Peñalolén's central Municipal Ordinance,²⁴ which describes its strategic human security plan, refers to an annual diagnostic of security in the community, which includes a mapping of perception of insecurity, and a citizen security survey. This annual diagnostic effort is remarkable because it includes, among other factors, perceptions of insecurity in order to gauge inhabitants' fears and risk perceptions, which influence behaviors and life satisfaction. This points to a well-founded recognition that it is not enough to prevent violence, but it is also important to generate satisfactory security perceptions among citizens when designing safety and prevention policies.

A final noteworthy example is Edmonton (Canada), which, as mentioned above, conducted more than 1,000 interviews among community residents to gauge the main challenges of the city, which led to the creation of REACH and informed its original baseline

and safety strategy. Since its baseline strategy was developed, REACH has endeavored to complete regular check-ins with partners to ensure they continue to believe the office is on the right track. After engaging in dialogue, REACH has, when and where relevant, tailored the ways it approaches its work to honor the feedback received. Its current legitimacy shows the positive effects of thorough and continuously updated diagnoses. This example also highlights the importance of including qualitative data reflecting the lived experiences of individuals and organizations in the city, especially those from the most marginalized communities.

Key takeaways: From the start, develop a rigorous diagnosis to have a clear baseline,²⁵ formulate strategic priorities, and guide interventions. Regularly update diagnoses as conditions and problems change.

Criterion 4: Well-Defined Population

This is the criterion that varies the most among OVPs, as it depends on the local context and the OVP's mandate and strategic priorities. Most OVPs have at least some programs focused on at-risk youth,²⁶ which is usually the cohort that includes the lion's share of (often overlapping and intertwined) victims and perpetrators of violence. However, reaching youths and adolescents—both minors and adults—might be complicated since they might be more reticent, at least initially, to trust a government agency. The main takeaway is that it is crucial to have clear criteria to define the focus population and the resources to address their needs with tailored interventions.

The city of **Palmira (Colombia)**, while running multiple violence prevention programs, focuses key interventions on high-risk youth (14 to 29 years of age), through its comprehensive Peace and Opportunity (PAZOS) strategy,²⁷ implemented by the city government in combination with civil society allies.²⁸ In 2021, the PAZOS strategy intervened in 37 neighborhoods in the city. That year, the program Forjar Oportunidades (Forge Opportunities), a specific component part of the PAZOS strategy, included 290 at-high-risk youth, providing them with skills for employment and entrepreneurship to improve their socioeconomic outlook in legal trades.²⁹

An OVP in a city with an entirely different reality, the **Department for Prevention and Public Safety in Mechelen (Belgium)**, also provides a good illustration of how its focus population—high-risk individuals with multiple problems who are presently excluded from social institutions—is selected and reached:

Our focus lies in the disadvantaged communities in Mechelen and vulnerable victims of discriminatory violence, but the main target group would be individuals with complex and interacting problems that are excluded from social institutions and causing a threat to urban security. The size of the group is estimated at 0.5% of the overall population. [Population selection is] done dynamically by being present in the field and listening to our clients and engaging with the target groups. Also, by presenting the Office's work and mission to local partner organizations, so they can refer to us when regular youth, social or educational organizations are confronted with issues that exceed or compromise their mission.³⁰

Ultimately, there is no “right” population, as it will depend on the specific challenges faced by the city and its chosen prevention approach. There is, however, a balance that must be struck to avoid selecting either a population that is too narrow, leaving out those who could benefit from the office's programs, or one that is too broad, making benefits to those reached insufficient.

Key takeaways: Clearly define and identify the focus population, whether it is broad or narrow, to have a more effective and efficient allocation of services. Also, conduct regular audits to understand if the office is reaching the most vulnerable populations, since marginalized and minority groups are often overlooked, sometimes because of societal prejudice.

Criterion 5: Comprehensive and Coherent Prevention Approach

The analyzed OVPs vary greatly in their prevention approaches, yet most combine multiple types. Most non-US offices include a primary prevention component, seeking to promote a culture of peaceful conflict resolution among youth, whereas most OVPs in the United States tend to pursue a combined primary and

secondary prevention approach. Both inside and outside of the United States, tertiary approaches seem to be less common but increasing in salience and deployment of “lived experience” expertise.³¹

The **Secretariat of Non-Violence of Medellín (Colombia)**, one of the city's two departments tasked with violence prevention, provides an example of a strong focus on a tertiary approach. It has among its core missions the “reincorporation, reintegration and reinsertion” of victims and former combatants of Colombia's civil war. While most of Colombia's armed conflict, which has been raging for more than 60 years, takes place outside of cities, millions have been displaced toward urban areas as their villages are affected by guerrillas or paramilitary groups. Demobilized combatants also tend to relocate to cities seeking better socioeconomic and safety conditions. Medellín's approach intends to instill a broader culture of peaceful coexistence in the city as well as to avoid these groups' stigmatization and marginalization, ensuring that their rights are fulfilled. Similarly, the **Secretariat for Peace and Citizen Culture in Cali (Colombia)** combines primary and tertiary approaches, seeking to sensitize schoolchildren on the dangers of violence and organized crime while also engaging with former or current members of criminal organizations through staff members who share those lived experiences.³²

Meanwhile, the prevention strategy for **Stuttgart (Germany)**, outlined in its Partnership for Safety and Security document,³³ includes initiatives of primary prevention such as social policies, sport activities, and safety for children; secondary prevention, such as addressing juvenile delinquency, crime prevention and urban development, and safety in the streets, public places, and public transport; and tertiary prevention, such as resocialization projects for youth offenders and assistance for victims and offenders of domestic violence.

Again, there is no single “right” approach, as it depends on the problems assessed and the focus population identified in the context-sensitive diagnostic. The OVP should consider its capability to implement the actions needed for each approach and the range of state and/or social actors it needs to coordinate with for such actions. For instance, offices may disengage

from secondary prevention, especially if it involves redirecting police actions. While some OVPs can have greater influence over the local police department, especially through the mayor's office, such control is significantly more complicated in situations in which local governments must deal with state or national-level police forces.³⁴ In other words, the greater the institutional distance between the OVP and the police, the greater the institutional incentive to engage in alternative prevention activities that do not involve the police, at least not as a main actor.

Key takeaways: Sustainable, long-term solutions emerge from comprehensive responses that take into consideration primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention. Where possible, combine multiple prevention approaches that address the interrelated drivers of violence.

Criterion 6: Appropriate and Sustainable Budget

Most of the analyzed OVPs are financed primarily through the municipal budget. Even in federal countries like Argentina, Brazil, the United States, and Canada, the municipal government is the main supporter of the OVP.³⁵ Meanwhile, other offices, such as those in Chihuahua (Mexico) and Palmira (Colombia), are partly or mostly financed with private funds, whether contributions from local business associations or international grants for specific programs.

Financial autonomy from a single government structure would protect an office from budgetary changes driven by exogenous factors such as political transitions or reductions in the tax base. On the other hand, while diverse funding sources may enhance its financial stability prospects, it would also mean that more actors have potential to influence the agenda or delay or obstruct decisions, and it makes fundraising more time consuming.

Particularly in Latin America, the municipal budget allocated to OVPs does seem to change significantly after political transitions. Consequently, many non-US OVPs obtain an important additional amount of funding from international development funds. International development aid can be a positive and transformative practice, but on occasions, local concerns may be overridden by donor priorities.

Additionally, some civil society organizations that partner with OVPs might not be fully equipped to either apply for or effectively manage these funds. International aid also tends to be project-based funding, which is short term, as opposed to multi-year, unrestricted funding for core operations, such as salaries for administrative staff, rent, equipment, and other non-project-based expenses.

This leads to another observation regarding staffing composition of some non-US offices: their staff tend to be hired through short-term contracts. This lack of tenure security can undermine the full-time dedication needed to engage in violence prevention interventions and disrupt the long-term relations required to bolster coordination with community actors. On the other hand, less-predictable funding can incentivize creativity in collaborating with the private sector to get it involved in violence prevention, leading to innovative public-private practices.

While data is hard to find, some OVPs stand out in terms of the mechanisms through which they have achieved budgetary sustainability. For instance, in **Pelotas (Brazil)**, the budget for parts of the **Gabinete de Gestão Integral Municipal** (GGIM or Office of Integrated Municipal Management), which oversees violence prevention plans, is set by municipal law.³⁶ In terms of budgetary evolution, the Department for Prevention and Public Safety in Mechelen (Belgium), which receives funds from the municipal, regional, and federal governments, has seen its budget increase by 30 percent over the last four years, according to its director. Meanwhile, in Chihuahua (Mexico), funding for the operations of the municipal COPREV—which comes from private actors (notably FICOSEC, a business association in Chihuahua) and international organizations, primarily the US Agency for International Development (USAID)—has also increased in recent years. According to its current president (the acting director of public security), this makes it harder for any politician to influence or unravel it.³⁷ The case of Oakland's Department of Violence Prevention in the United States is also particularly interesting as it receives funding for some programs directly via voter-approved tax measures for ten years, strongly enhancing the department's sustainability. This suggests strong ownership from

residents who are willing to tax themselves to advance violence prevention in their city. This voter-approved practice contributes to budget sustainability, as it also makes it harder for any politician to unilaterally unravel it in the short term.

Key takeaways: Aim for legal safeguards that stabilize (or expand) the OVP's budget. Diverse sources of funding can project greater societal buy-in and contribute to sustainability in the event of local fiscal problems, but they add coordination layers.

Criterion 7: Sufficient, Qualified Staff

Obtaining reliable information on staffing composition from the 18 sampled OVPs proved quite difficult, apart from the number of full-time employees in the United States. And, in the United States, these numbers varied considerably, for example, from about 10 in **Chicago's Office of Violence Reduction** to 58 in the Office of Violence Prevention and Behavioral Health in the same city.³⁸ While a trained and well-suited workforce is necessary for the OVP to function, it is not sufficient for it to be effective. On that note, we observe certain patterns as to how OVPs structure their staffing.

Some OVPs have a large internal staff that designs and implements programs itself, whereas others concentrate on administrative tasks and outsource frontline implementation to nongovernmental actors such as civil society organizations and/or community partners. Outsourcing can increase flexibility and effectiveness since government offices may not have the capacity to hire new individuals due to a public appointment system, and bureaucratic procedures may slow down implementation.³⁹ On the other hand, professionals are often hired on short-term contracts, which may undermine the stability needed for various programs to have an effect. Based on our research, a good balance could be to outsource implementation of some programs to community partners while focusing the efforts of administrative staff on providing training, support, and links with other state agencies, thus relieving community-based workers of the burdens of bureaucratic red tape.

Another tradeoff is between the types of professionals that the OVP hires. While some lean toward individuals specialized in particular disciplines,

such as social work, psychology, human rights, law, or types of violence (e.g., group/gang/network violence, gun violence, gender-based violence), others might seek to incorporate professionals with more generalist backgrounds, who can adapt more easily to changing environments and challenges. In one interview, an OVP director mentioned a preference for generalists, as these staffers can adapt to evolving violence dynamics and the changing nature of short-term funding, but this comes at the expense of some loss in specific expertise.

An example of the specialized, internal model is Stuttgart (Germany), whose office is equipped with multiple professionals with backgrounds in education and psychosocial science disciplines. **Godoy Cruz (Argentina)** also has a large staff of full-time employees, who were initially mostly dedicated to administrative tasks. As the directorate increased its legitimacy, it incorporated more individuals with backgrounds in human rights and violence prevention. An example of a successful mixed internal and external model is REACH in Edmonton (Canada), whose programs are overseen by a board of experts and advisers from civil society, the community, government, and universities, and implemented by a large group of generalist staffers who partner with specialized community organizations. Similarly, Oakland's Department of Violence Prevention (United States) designs and implements programs by specialists on their staff in coordination with community partners. Both REACH and Oakland seem to successfully manage the mixed internal and external model of staffing and implementation.

Key takeaways: OVPs can rely on their own staff or outsource their work to community partners, sometimes with OVP staff serving in coordinating roles, which may lead to more flexibility and community buy-in but less control over OVP actions. They may rely on specialists, generalists, or both. While all options can be sound choices, context specificity and awareness of trade-offs will determine the better practice.

Criterion 8: Strong Political Buy-In

Beyond the formal rules that structure its functioning, the OVP also relies on active political support to implement its programs effectively. Many of the

mayors of the analyzed OVPs are active promoters of these agencies, both domestically and internationally. Some, like the mayors of Mechelen (Belgium) and former mayor of Palmira (Colombia), have received international acknowledgment for their leadership efforts in this regard. In Godoy Cruz (Argentina), the current mayor (elected in 2015) was instrumental in starting the OVP and negotiating tense situations with other domestic actors, such as the state-level police department. The mayor of Pelotas (Brazil) has similarly been a driving force in the GGIM's functioning, as well as in the success of the city's Pact for Peace comprehensive violence reduction strategy and its growing international recognition.

The main challenge regarding political buy-in is reaching a point when an office becomes too dependent on the mayor's personal involvement and thus fails to institutionalize procedures and ensure its stability following political turnover. Such personalization may also undermine the work of other members of the administration and drive away community partners if they do not perceive that their opinions are relevant. In some non-US scenarios, successful violence prevention strategies are at risk when the mayor's term ends, given that the strategy was never fully owned by an autonomous agency but rather appropriated by the mayor's office. Even in more-stable institutional environments like the United States, OVPs are still subject to policy shifts. There have been recent discussions concerning the sustainability and financial situation of OVPs in some US cities, such as the Chicago or **Philadelphia Office of Violence Prevention**, following their respective local elections. In Chicago, the OVR was heavily tied to outgoing Mayor Lori Lightfoot's administration (2019–2023), potentially raising questions about the office's sustainability under the administration of the incoming mayor. Similarly, in Philadelphia, former Mayor Jim Kenney (2016–2023) played a key role in promoting the Office of Violence Prevention, while the new mayor, Cherelle Parker, has to date made little mention of prevention.⁴⁰

Key takeaways: Political leadership is vital to promote the OVP and facilitate its interaction with other actors. However, OVPs must guard against becoming too dependent on individual politicians, as this leaves

them vulnerable to disempowerment if there is a new administration or if the politician's popularity wanes.

Criterion 9: Public Documentation of Activities, Results, and Impact

OVPs analyzed in this study used a range of mechanisms through which to report results. Some develop more-extensive reports while others condense information into result dashboards.

Our analysis found at least three potential grounds for improvement. First, not all OVPs provide a baseline or benchmark against which to assess the result. This can make reported indicators hard to interpret. The benchmark could be either the yearly change in the indicator or a comparison against the intended outcome.

Second, *how* results are communicated is often as important as the information itself. As important as data is, a sustained communications strategy is key for the population to make sense of these data and thus gain a full appreciation for ongoing efforts and impact, as well as trends that may be outside of an OVP's control. COPREV in Chihuahua (Mexico) is a good example in terms of communication, as it produces short videos reporting yearly activities, which improves citizens' accessibility to the council's work.

Even if programs do not yield expected results immediately, evaluations should still be made public to maintain societal trust in the OVP. In this sense, administrations should also communicate the extent to which the OVP's target has been reached and, if it has fallen short, why they believe this has been the case. Even if certain details cannot be aired publicly, they should still be part of the OVP's internal documentation of its results.

Finally, OVPs should not only aspire to document and share information at the activity level but also to conduct high-quality impact evaluations. This is the most certain way to judge the difference that either a program championed by the OVP—or the OVP's establishment itself—has made, while controlling for other factors. However, impact evaluations can be costly and require a high degree of sophistication to design and implement, particularly when attempting to measure violence that *did not occur* due to a given intervention.⁴¹

The US offices have a rich cooperation with academics and/or consultants, which helps them formulate independent evaluations, including impact assessments. However, there are also examples beyond the United States. Pelotas (Brazil) has an impact evaluation of its Pact for Peace program, working with an independent consulting NGO. This evaluation found that a 38 percent reduction in homicides could be directly attributed to the “focused deterrence” intervention, underscoring the importance of an evidence-based deployment of law enforcement.⁴² Overall, it was documented that, by the five-year mark since its launch, from 2017 to 2022, the Pact for Peace was associated with a reduction in intentional lethal violent crimes of 81 percent and significant reductions in various types of robberies, ranging from 62 to 83 percent.⁴³

In Palmira (Colombia), according to an evaluation conducted with the support of the Open Society Foundations, for 25 homicides that were prevented in the city, at least four can be directly attributed to Forjar Oportunidades (Forging Opportunities), one of the signature interventions of the PAZOS strategy.⁴⁴ In addition, the program has just a 3 percent dropout rate⁴⁵ with 67 percent of the youths engaged having responded to job offers and more than half reporting that they settled differences through dialogue.⁴⁶ Furthermore, authorities have significantly improved relations with at-risk youths, which facilitates implementing a range of other interventions. Finally, and most importantly, under the current administration,

homicide levels in the city have dropped to the lowest levels in 17 years.

REACH Edmonton (Canada) has one of the better practices in terms of transparent and consistent reporting of the work and progress of the office, with brief, easily accessible yearly reports for the 2009–2022 period, including its vision, mission, ongoing initiatives, staff and board members, and even financial balances.⁴⁷ In addition, REACH also has published business plans for the 2019–2023 period.

Finally, Cali’s Secretariat for Peace and Citizen Culture (Colombia) has an open data portal reporting on its most relevant activities, including peace management, stories of social leaders, resolution of conflicts, and human trafficking victims who have been served.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the secretary reported that it is “complicated to measure impact of this work because of the lack of a baseline, which is hard to construct.”⁴⁹

Key takeaways: Conduct regular, independent evaluations. Establish a baseline. Communicate activities and results transparently and consistently, through the medium most accessible to the local communities. Aim to evaluate the OVP’s specific interventions as well as its overall impact. Donors should consider financing independent impact evaluations.

Part 4: Adapting Lessons to PiOC Members

Working with PiOC member cities, this research effort undertook a tailored approach to consider how the application of lessons from the analysis could support more effective prevention practices in selected cities. Researchers conducted this adaptation effort in Bristol (England), Cali (Colombia),

Edmonton (Canada), and Rosario (Argentina). This section that follows discusses the observations from these cities and the opportunities identified, based on the research, to advance prevention efforts in the selected local ecosystems.



Bristol's Momentum

National media coverage in England often depicts Bristol as one of the most violent places in the country.⁵⁰ Within Bristol, Easton and St. Pauls seem to be the two communities most affected by lethal and nonlethal violent incidents.⁵¹ Group-affiliated violence in Easton and St. Pauls seems to be characterized by the involvement of exceptionally young individuals and not exceptionally profitable. In Bristol, group identity is usually tied to territory, with, for example, groups like the “16s” and “24s” (named after their respective postal codes) seemingly growing in activity and notoriety. While active groups seem modestly organized, they do not pose a fundamental threat to state authority. Rather, these groups are mostly a threat to each other. The general perception from local residents is that serious incidents are escalating in frequency and severity.

Official statistics may not accurately capture this spike. There are reports of injuries among youths who refuse to seek professional medical care, presumably out of fear that authorities will call the police when they suspect an injury is knife- or gun-violence related. This situation offers reason to believe that official figures of nonlethal but serious incidents of violence are underestimated. This is also a possible indicator of undetected looming cycles of retaliation.

Despite challenges, Bristol has strong anchor institutions that are well positioned to interrupt cycles of violence. Further, Bristol has other valuable resilience factors such as a committed population of activists and community organizations advocating for measures to combat knife crime. They have encouraged the city to adopt harm-reducing measures, such as knife-deposit bins, bleed-control kits, and mental health support for underserved communities. When underpinned by a coordinated approach, this commitment from the community, together with the strength of anchor institutions, can be transformational to advance citywide prevention.

Leading the Bristol Violence Prevention Coalition

Empire Fighting Chance (EFC) is a local anchor institution with significant credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the communities most affected by violence. Hence, there is a demand from the city for EFC to take the lead in stopping retributory cycles of stabbings in the short term and coordinating a citywide ecosystem of prevention in the long term.

EFC is a gym (registered as a charity) that uses a combination of noncontact boxing and intensive personal support to challenge and inspire young people 8 to 25 to realize their potential. EFC delivers psychologically informed noncontact boxing

programs that reach over 5,000 young people every year.⁵² In many ways, EFC is already the de facto institution for conflict resolution and deescalation in the city, and it is often called on to interrupt violent cycles of retribution. On occasion, EFC staff are aware of looming cycles of violence. In other cases, community members alert EFC staff of ongoing and forthcoming disputes. As a response, EFC negotiates peaceful settlements and has hired its first lived-experience violence interrupter.

Seeking to scale its positive impact in violence prevention while de-emphasizing law enforcement responses, EFC has proposed to form and coordinate the Bristol Violence Prevention Coalition, working together with city partners and existing efforts. This coalition, a mixed entity with public agencies and civil society participating as equals, would build from the lessons of different OVPs, particularly the coordinating and central role. Drawing from the research analysis, the chart below outlines current strengths and opportunities for the city ecosystem of Bristol.

Bristol Violence Prevention Coalition (England)		
Criteria	Current strengths	Opportunities to enhance effectiveness
1. Clearly defined, public mandate	Currently unavailable as OVP is still not in place.	Developing a public mandate with the Bristol Violence Prevention Coalition as the lead agency coordinating an ecosystem of prevention and youth services in the city.
2. Consultations and community partnerships	There is a strong, autonomous civil society in Bristol advocating for harm-mitigation and violence reduction measures.	Developing systematic mechanisms for community involvement and consultations as part of the coalition. Acting as the city's central coordinating agency and supporting community-based organizations.
3. Diagnosis or baseline studies	There is widespread informal knowledge of baseline conditions in the city.	Conducting a rigorous diagnosis of violence in the city and making it public.
4. Population	Empire Fighting Chance (EFC) already services youths across Bristol.	Focusing on the highest-risk population in St. Pauls and Easton.
5. Prevention approach	Currently unavailable as OVP is still not in place.	For short-term impact, emphasizing secondary and tertiary prevention.
6. Budget sustainability	EFC is highly trusted by funders.	Securing funding from City Council.
7. Staffing composition	EFC has highly competent staff, both internal and in community partners eager to engage in a Bristol Violence Prevention Coalition.	Hiring permanent staff to include a coalition director, coordination officers, navigators, and communications experts, as well as technical experts.
8. Political buy-in	There is significant demand for leadership coordinating violence prevention in the city.	Securing support from City Council in the face of the political transition away from a mayoral system.
9. Impact documentation	EFC has documented impact at the individual level.	Designing citywide impact assessments to be carried out at yearly intervals after the coalition begins its work.

To build and manage the Bristol Violence Prevention Coalition, EFC would partner with public agencies, including Public Health Bristol (part of the National Health Service), the public-school systems (including the Pupil Referral Unit), the Avon and Somerset Police, as well as the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership initiative, and secure financing from the City Council, balancing support and autonomy (criterion 8). Representing other anchor institutions, the coalition would also include the Elim Bristol City Church and the Bristol Council of Mosques, given their deep-rooted legitimacy as faith leaders in the communities affected by violence (criterion 2).⁵³ Importantly, this coalition should start its work with a baseline study of current conditions (criterion 3) and design citywide impact assessments to be carried out at yearly intervals after the coalition begins its work (criterion 9). In observing its work, it is clear how impactful EFC is at the individual level, and having clear figures documenting its impact at the city level would be beneficial in securing funds for the coalition (criterion 6).

Seeking to start its work, the coalition must agree on specific roles and responsibilities, maximizing comparative advantages and mapping the extent of the services available, possibly emphasizing secondary prevention (criterion 5) and focusing on the highest-risk population in the two communities most affected by violence (criterion 4). The core of the strategy is to map which organizations have credibility and deliver youth services, and then leverage the coalition to maximize their collective impact. For those professional profiles not already available as part of the coalition, the leadership should hire experts, such as a coalition services navigator (criterion 7). Beyond the strategy specifics, one element stands out: the leadership of EFC standing up to the challenge and deciding to act as the backbone of the whole-of-city violence prevention effort. It is now time to formalize this leadership and receive a clear, public mandate (criterion 1) for doing so.



Cali's Coordination

Cali is the third-most-populous city in Colombia, with 2.3 million people. Like many locations in Colombia, it suffers from the intersection of the fallout of the civil war and the drug trade, which has made it one of the most violent cities in the world. In 2022, its homicide rate was at 43.1 per 100,000 people, and it consistently has over 1,000 homicides per year.⁵⁴

Despite—or perhaps because of—such challenges, Cali has a strong background in violence prevention. In the 1990s, as homicides ran rampant in the city because of drug trafficking and other illicit economies, Mayor Rodrigo Guerrero pioneered

an epidemiological approach to violence prevention through the program DESEPAZ (Development, Security, and Peace).⁵⁵ While the large and organized cartels that posed a direct challenge for control of the city no longer exist, the extreme fragmentation of criminal groups contributes to its persistent violence.⁵⁶ The challenge of illicit economies is further compounded by high levels of inequality, youth unemployment, and the difficulty of absorbing individuals displaced by the civil war, as well as asylum seekers and migrants from Venezuela.⁵⁷ As in other Latin American countries, the relationship between the police and the poorest, mostly black

communities where homicides are concentrated is (mostly) fraught with distrust.

Partly as a response to these ongoing challenges, in 2016, Cali’s municipal government created a Secretariat for Security and Justice (SSJ) and a Secretariat for Peace and Citizen Culture (SPCC). While the former is primarily responsible for formulating a citizen security strategy, implemented together with Colombia’s National Police, the latter was born out of the country’s peace agreement with the insurgent group Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (or FARC, in Spanish) and focuses on mediating conflict and strengthening alternative dispute resolution mechanisms among the population, with a stronger prevention mandate. These two secretariats, whose objectives and activities overlap, have a mixed record in terms of coordination.

Under Mayor Maurice Armitage (2016–2019), the municipal agency Territories for Inclusion and Opportunities (TIOS) formulated a coordinated violence prevention strategy, referred to as the Social Prevention of Violence Model, with four main components: (1) violence interruption, (2) social inclusion, (3) violence prevention, and (4) peace enhancement through environmental transformations. TIOS coordinated the work of both secretariats, pooling resources from existing programs with prevention components.⁵⁸ Subsequently, it successfully implemented innovative prevention

efforts, such as Abriendo Caminos (Opening Paths), together with the local NGO Fundación Alvaralice, and the Tratamiento Integral de Pandillas (Integral Gang Treatment), in partnership with the local Universidad del Valle.

The Social Prevention of Violence Model represented the most concrete example of a joint, coordinated effort to prevent violence in the city by the municipal government. However, the decree that formalized this strategy was never signed, and the work was discontinued. While the subsequent administration did not change the organizational structure or eliminate violence prevention programs, these are currently fragmented and lack coordination under a formalized prevention strategy, let alone a centralized office.⁵⁹ Interviewed individuals in both secretariats stressed the need for more formal articulation than the present institutional structure.

Opportunities as a Result of the Recent Election in Cali

Cali is undergoing a political transition, as the city held mayoral and council elections in October 2023. At the time of the interviews, conducted prior to the election, respondents were hopeful that the leading candidates would be sympathetic to integral violence prevention policies, having worked on such areas in previous administrations. Drawing from the research analysis, the chart below outlines current strengths and opportunities

Cali (Colombia)		
Criteria	Current strengths	Opportunities to enhance effectiveness
1. Clearly defined, public mandate	Each secretariat has a defined but separate violence prevention/reduction mandate.	Avoiding overlap in objectives by designing a formal, centralized violence prevention strategy that could result in coordination disputes.
2. Consultations and community partnerships	Elaboration of diagnostics is inclusive, featuring multiple social sectors.	Further developing communities’ participation in program implementation. Creating a central coordinating agency or strategy.
3. Diagnosis or baseline studies	Both secretariats have continuously updated diagnostics that supply actionable information.	Integrating diagnostics into a coordinated, centralized strategy.

Criteria	Current strengths	Opportunities to enhance effectiveness
4. Population	Multiple agencies and programs serve different population groups.	Enhancing coordination could reach larger groups, have stronger effects, and offer more clarity to the focus population.
5. Prevention approach	The municipality has a strong commitment to primary and tertiary prevention.	Bolstering primary and tertiary prevention programs and advancing secondary prevention (involving police).
6. Budget sustainability	At least one secretariat seems appropriately funded.	Further insulating departmental budgets from political discretion.
7. Staffing composition	Highly motivated and competent personnel carry out prevention programs throughout the territory.	Finding alternative hiring strategies other than short-term contracts.
8. Political buy-in	Political leadership displays a consistent commitment to prevention programs.	Capitalizing on the incoming mayor's apparent support for coordinated prevention initiatives.
9. Impact documentation	Multiple forms of reporting activities and results.	Developing impact evaluation assessments, perhaps with local universities.

in Cali, hoping to provide a foundation for the incoming administration and the heads of both secretariats.

The good news is that Cali, seeking to capitalize on the incoming mayor's apparent support for coordinated prevention initiatives (criterion 8), should look no further than its own recent history for inspiration. The incoming administration could revive the centralized violence prevention strategy coordinated by TIOS, albeit with greater formalization and with a clearer coordinating mandate (criterion 1), to ensure it outlasts political transitions. In institutionalizing a violence prevention guiding strategy, Cali should bolster its advances in primary and tertiary prevention while pushing for new pathways of influence in secondary prevention (criterion 5). It should be noted that this proposal would not necessarily require merging the existing secretariats or creating new government entities but rather improving coordination among them to streamline efforts and provide more clarity to the populations they serve (criterion 4). While the leading political authorities will certainly change, it would be important to keep the staff in charge of implementing programs on the ground. This would

preserve the secretariats' institutional memory, as these individuals already know the territory, the people, and the different processes needed to get things done, and have developed longstanding formal and informal relations with community partners (criterion 7). Sustainable engagement from the secretariats will also facilitate CBOs participation in implementing different prevention activities (criterion 2).

Further, the city enjoys a strong academic presence that could be leveraged in developing impact evaluations (criterion 9) and integrating diagnostics into the centralized prevention strategy (criterion 3). Continued participation from local universities would enhance the design of a revamped TIOS and thus contribute to its effectiveness and sustainability prospects. In formalizing coordination, Cali could also use the opportunity to find creative ways to insulate departmental budgets from political discretion (criterion 6). Overall, in Cali, given the city's strong background on prevention and the vast territorial network it already has in place, there is cause for optimism.



Edmonton's Leadership

REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities was established in 2010, on the advice of a task force on community safety created by Mayor Stephen Mandel in 2008, informed by evidence-based approaches compiled by Dr. Irvin Waller, a criminologist. This task force carried out over 1,000 interviews, discussions, and focus groups with local stakeholders, including Indigenous communities, the business community, at-risk youth, and law enforcement. It formulated nine recommendations that still guide REACH's work, including "investing in youth and children; driving change in the coordination and delivery of programs to reduce crime; and, seeking out and developing community leaders who support and promote prevention."⁶⁰

Unlike most other OVPs in this study, REACH is independent from the municipal government. Although it is jointly financed by the local (Edmonton), regional (Alberta), and federal (Canada) governments, it is not part of any governmental structure and is accountable to an independent board of directors. Because of its independence, as well as its deliberate decision to not be a charitable organization, it does not compete for funding with other social programs, nor does it seek to duplicate existing government efforts but rather to coordinate with the city on how to best assign its resources. This independence has enabled it to take greater risks in its initiatives, cutting through bureaucratic red tape and being nimble in its staff hiring.

REACH's main strengths are its design of highly inclusive initiatives, aimed at the different social sectors in Edmonton, and its capacity to partner with and coordinate multiple public and private sector actors to implement them. Among the

beneficiaries of its various initiatives are schoolchildren and youth, unhoused populations, immigrant families, and Indigenous communities, the latter two constituting historically marginalized populations and those with a greater opportunity to benefit from and engage with its initiatives.

REACH is involved in over 30 projects with diverse approaches to prevention. For instance, its Bridging Together and Out of School Time (OST) programs fund after-school and summer initiatives serving primarily immigrant and refugee youths. These programs not only help prevent children from being exposed to negative influences, including group violence and violent behavior, but also aids their integration into the local and national communities. OST reported serving over 1,800 children and youth in 2019, allowing 84 percent of involved parents to find employment while their children are looked after, and returning \$3.30 for every \$1.00 invested.⁶¹ This example displays the comprehensive, transparent evaluation that characterizes REACH's violence prevention initiatives.⁶²

REACH utilizes a three-part approach to its programming streams:

1. **START UP:** employ a 90-day sprint for new ideas to test their relevancy and opportunity.
2. **SCALE UP:** if the program meets or exceeds initial indications of fertile opportunity, build community buy-in and capacity, along with evaluation.
3. **SHIFT OUT:** sunset REACH's efforts in the program or project by transitioning ownership fully to community partners, ideally including evidence of systemic community change.

REACH demonstrates how a central organization can be a resource to implementing partners by providing requested trainings, connecting individuals and initiatives, power brokering, and communicating to the community to signal approaches as well as specific programs available.

Enhancing Coordination in the Edmonton Ecosystem

REACH's coordination efforts are truly notable, bridging implementing partners with different objectives and value systems. Drawing from the research analysis, the chart below outlines current strengths and opportunities hoping to contribute to an even more effective REACH.

REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities (Canada)		
Criteria	Current strengths	Opportunities to enhance effectiveness
1. Clearly defined, public mandate	Clearly defined mandate guided by foundation principles.	Considering synergizing principles, when appropriate, to connect with the priorities of the current administration.
2. Consultations and community partnerships	Serves as a central organization that coordinates more than 100 community partners who implement violence prevention programs.	Developing even more formal coordination mechanisms with community partners, given the difficulty of sustaining partnerships and keeping its work relevant.
3. Diagnosis or baseline studies	Uses multiple types of data to build diagnostics.	Continue with current approach.
4. Population	Provides high-quality service to multiple, diverse populations.	Developing stronger connections with Indigenous and newcomer populations, and historically disenfranchised communities.
5. Prevention approach	Effectively promotes interventions of different prevention approaches.	Enhancing coordination with law enforcement in some of their prevention approaches.
6. Budget sustainability	Combines multiple sources of funding, particularly from different levels of government.	Exploring whether diversifying its funding sources and volume further would be desirable.
7. Staffing composition	REACH's staff have high technical knowledge and strong legitimacy within the community.	Increasing staff diversity and retention.
8. Political buy-in	Is widely recognized and supported by the local government.	Avoiding unnecessary duplication of some initiatives by the municipal government and continuously coordinating to maximize comparative advantages.
9. Impact documentation	REACH documents the results and social return of investment of its programs.	Continue with current approach.

The municipal government has developed a Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan (CSWP) that offers many opportunities to collaborate with REACH. To avoid any potential risk of unnecessary duplication, it is important to continuously explore ways of synergizing REACH's mandate with the appropriate priorities of the political administration (criterion 1). It is indeed crucial to maintain the current collaborative relation in order to maximize comparative advantages and sustain political buy-in (criterion 8). Similarly, it is important to continue to pay attention to the work required to maintain constructive relations and appropriate coordination with law enforcement and the criminal justice system in the various prevention efforts where these actors are relevant (criterion 5).

A challenge remains in REACH's ability to engage with Indigenous, newcomer migrant populations and, generally, with disenfranchised communities

of color (criterion 4). According to REACH's staff, these populations are sometimes hard to locate and require multiple professional brokers skilled in the language and culture, and capable of addressing diverse traumas. And, for REACH, finding and retaining staff with these skills has proven to be somewhat difficult (criterion 7).

The case of REACH Edmonton shows a strong, enduring central organization that has successfully adopted a whole-of-city approach, linking and supporting a wide gamut of community partners (criterion 2) and government actors, and coordinating its initiatives toward violence prevention and community safety. At the same time, it demonstrates how even the most positive example of OVP's coordination, inclusiveness, and sustainability can continuously work to enhance its effectiveness.



Rosario's Opportunity

Rosario is the most important city in the Argentine province of Santa Fe and the third largest in the country. The city sits at the heart of the most fertile agricultural region of Argentina and is one of the country's main export hubs. It also has a long history of progressive social policies in health and education. For the last 30 years, the Socialist Party has governed it, either by itself or as the leading member of a multiparty coalition.

Unfortunately, Rosario has recently gained notoriety for being one of the most violent cities in Argentina. In 2022, there were 287 homicides, the highest number on record, at a rate of 22.1 per 100,000 people, in the Rosario metropolitan area. Nine out of every 10 homicides were caused by

firearms, and over 7 of every 10 homicides were connected to retail-level drug trafficking and other illicit markets that operate in the city. Many of the drivers of drug-related violence are beyond the power of Rosario—or any municipal government—to resolve. However, this does not mean the local government is powerless to improve the situation.⁶³

In response to this growing violence, Rosario has carried out multiple violence prevention initiatives over the last decade, which involved coordination between the municipality, the provincial Ministry of Security, and the Public Ministry of Accusation. There is still a significant state presence in most of the city, including

in neighborhoods where violence concentrates, through health-attention centers, primary schools, and cultural and sporting facilities. The municipal government has also worked with conflict mediators and violence interrupters. However, its violence prevention initiatives are currently fragmented and underresourced, partly because of a political misalignment between the state and local governments.

Opportunities as a Result of the Recent Election in Rosario

Mayor Pablo Javkin was recently reelected and, working with other key stakeholders, such as Foro Regional Rosario, has a concrete opportunity to formulate a comprehensive violence prevention strategy or even to set up an OVP. Drawing from the research analysis, the chart below outlines current strengths and opportunities in Rosario, hoping to provide a foundation for the incoming administration.

Rosario (Argentina)		
Criteria	Current strengths	Opportunities to enhance effectiveness
1. Clearly defined, public mandate	Currently unavailable as OVP is still not in place.	Establishing a centralized office and/or a comprehensive violence prevention strategy, either in the municipal government, run by civil society, or mixed model.
2. Consultations and community partnerships	Strong, autonomous civil society with capacity to contribute to policy design and implementation.	Establishing formal partnerships and coordination mechanisms with civil society organizations.
3. Diagnosis or baseline studies	Multiple sources of actionable information are collected by the municipality and civil society.	Developing a formal diagnosis that not only pinpoints the main problems but formulates an action plan and guides for evaluating results.
4. Population	The municipality's programs service numerous marginalized neighborhoods, where violence concentrates.	Bolstering coordination of programs could increase coverage and impact of prevention initiatives for underserved populations.
5. Prevention approach	Municipality's runs multiple programs, mainly centered on primary prevention.	Seizing on coordination with the provincial government could increase institutional and political support for various violence prevention programs.
6. Budget sustainability	Municipality aligned council and mayor could increase the budget.	Embedding budget sustainability in the legal framework of the new OVP and/or partnering with private sector actors.
7. Staffing composition	Highly competent and experienced staff on prevention programs scattered across city.	Involving civil society organizations to provide human resources, especially when public sector unions might not be so cooperative.
8. Political buy-in	Reelected mayor has incentive to pursue development of OVP strategy.	Seizing on political alignment with the provincial (state) government to increase coordination of prevention efforts, especially involving the provincial police.
9. Impact documentation	Numerous, transparent assessments carried out by the government.	Further involving local universities to collect and analyze data for impact evaluation.

While the recently reelected mayor has the momentum to establish a centralized office and/or formalize a comprehensive violence prevention strategy (criterion 1), there are various challenges ahead. These include dealing with a provincial police force that struggles with societal legitimacy and negotiating with public sector unions. Javkin's small margin of victory—a difference of 3.5 percentage points, roughly 16,000 votes—might also diminish the clout needed to enact this change. However, the administration can seize the current alignment between the provincial (state) and municipal governments and secure the necessary political buy-in (criterion 8) to design a centralized, comprehensive, violence prevention mechanism. In addition, the city can immediately benefit from other resilience factors such as the state's extensive presence, strong institutional background in social prevention of violence (criterion 5), and a vibrant civil society currently demanding greater action to prevent violence and eager to take a leading role (criterion 2).

Given this context, the city of Rosario could benefit from a civil society-led or mixed OVP model, like that of REACH in Edmonton (Canada) or COPREV in Chihuahua (Mexico). In these models, NGOs and business organizations can provide the institutional structure and internal staff (criterion 7), codesign the prevention approach, manage community-wide partnerships, support and contribute to its financial

capacities (criterion 6), and carry out coordinated actions to complement and optimize interventions. Civil society organizations could fill in holes where the municipal government might have more-limited resources, such as in completing diagnoses through academic partners (criterion 3); credibly carrying out violence prevention activities with specific focus populations (criterion 4) through, for example, community members of different background or religious affiliations; and maintaining pressure on politicians to hold them accountable.

Rosario could also explore the precedent of Pelotas (Brazil), given that, as in Argentina, Brazilian municipalities do not have direct control over the police. While Pelotas has a smaller population than Rosario, it started from much higher homicide rates and managed to decrease them significantly and, importantly, document these reductions and the contributing factors through an impact evaluation (criterion 9). Pelotas advanced its local prevention agenda through its Pact for Peace, which offered a coordinating strategy with different lines of action for different actors but aligning all efforts under one centralized mechanism. Whether Rosario decides to draw inspiration from Pelotas, Edmonton, or Chihuahua, it is clear that the incoming administration has a noteworthy opportunity and strong civil society partners that can be the backbone of a centralized violence prevention mechanism.

Part 5: Concluding Observations

This analysis has shown some of the multiple decisions involved in designing violence prevention entities and optimizing their functioning. It has shown that there are multiple models of OVPs, each with their respective tradeoffs. In other words, OVPs can come in different shapes, sizes, institutional locations, and even names. However, following the analysis presented in this report, four key notions appear central to buttress OVP effectiveness.

First, **the office's resources must meet its ambitions.** Given the local context and the needs and challenges of the city's inhabitants, an OVP requires sufficient material, human, social, political, and symbolic capital to carry out its functions. Without such resources, the OVP will surely underperform in its effort to prevent and mitigate violence, increase citizens' disappointment, and fail to build political and social sustainability.

Second, to be effective and sustainable, **an OVP must ensure political buy-in from key authorities** (e.g., mayor, city manager, or council) **but also gather sufficient autonomy from political interference.** This combination will enable it to overcome roadblocks to implementation and ease coordination while also aligning its priorities with the city's needs—as opposed to serving only short-term political ambitions—and increasing chances of enduring past the end of an administration's term.

Third, **an office must have sustained engagement to establish and maintain credibility.** Participation from the community must be inclusive and meaningful at all times. The OVP must not only involve different social and political stakeholders during design and implementation phases but also establish mechanisms to obtain continuous feedback from various actors, including, fundamentally, the populations it serves.

Finally, **an OVP must coordinate a whole-of-city effort.** While it does not need to be the largest unit in the local government, its success depends on the alignment of city government agencies (including coordinating with law enforcement), as well as local businesses and civil society. All actors in a city must positively contribute to this effort if violence is to be significantly reduced. Reducing violence is an all-hands-on-deck effort, and having an agency act as the connecting tissue or backbone of this effort is key to enhancing the prevention of violence.

These principles are necessary, but not sufficient, conditions to establish effective violence prevention efforts in cities, a key challenge many governments face. This report, by illuminating key criteria through specific cases and unpacking their respective tradeoffs, tries to provide policymakers with knowledge tools to design and implement effective violence prevention initiatives, centrally coordinated by an Office of Violence Prevention.

About the Authors



Hernán Flom, PhD

Flom is a researcher and consultant on criminal violence, policing, illegal markets, and criminal justice policies, focusing primarily on Latin America. He has consulted for the

Inter-American Development Bank, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and Peace in Our Cities, among others. His first book, *The Informal Regulation of Criminal Markets in Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), analyzes how politicians and police respond to and shape drug markets and their associated violence in Latin American metropolitan areas. His work has also been published in journals such as *Comparative Politics*, *Latin American Politics and Society*, *Governance*, and the *Journal of Urban Affairs*, among others. Flom is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor of Political Science at Trinity College. He holds a PhD from the University of California, Berkeley. He has also been a Visiting Fellow at the Kellogg Institute at the University of Notre Dame and worked as a Coordinator in the National Ministry of Security in Argentina.



Alfredo Malaret Baldo

Baldo is the Urban Violence Program Officer at the Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice, University of San Diego. He is also one of the co-facilitators of the Peace in Our Cities network.

Before joining the Kroc Institute, he was a Researcher with the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), where he coordinated the Development and Urbanization of Violence research portfolios. Prior to UNIDIR, he worked at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute; the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean; and for retired US Ambassador Dennis Jett. To date, he has completed more than 20 field deployments. He holds a master's degree in public affairs from Brown University and a master's degree in international affairs from the Pennsylvania State University. He earned a bachelor's degree in political science and communication studies from Fairleigh Dickinson University.

Acknowledgments

This research report was written by Dr. Hernán Flom as the lead author and was co-authored by Alfredo Malaret Baldo for the Peace in Our Cities network.

The authors would like to thank city and OVP leaders and staff, community organizers, and authorities whose experiences, insights, ambitions, and recommendations informed the development of this research. In particular, the authors would like to thank the cities of Edmonton (Canada), Cali (Colombia), Rosario (Argentina), Bristol (England), and Oakland (United States) for their generosity in allowing researchers to visit and learn from their strengths and challenges.

The authors would also like to thank these experts for reviewing and sharing feedback on a draft of the report: Rachel Locke, Kelsey Paul Shantz, Jennifer Smyser, Juan Camilo Cock Misas, Sara Rose Serin-Christ, Jan Fox, Jason Tan de Bibiana, Kerry Mulligan, Daniela Gilbert, Martin Bisp, Jai-Ayla Sutherland, Bojan Francuz, Daniel Friedman, and Mark Seaman. Finally, the authors would like to thank Laura Vallejo for her work in the early stages of this research.

Appendix

Countries, cities, and other entities in the sample analyzed for this report.

Country	City	Office
Argentina	Godoy Cruz	Directorate of Prevention, Community Participation and Human Rights
Belgium	Mechelen	Department for Prevention and Public Safety
	Brussels	The Brussels Forward (Bravvo) Prevention Service
Brazil	Feira de Santana	Secretariat of Violence Prevention
	Pelotas	Municipal Integrated Management Office
Canada	Edmonton	REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities
Chile	Peñalolén	Unit for Human Security
Colombia	Cali	Secretariat for Peace and Citizen Culture Secretariat of Security and Justice
	Medellin	Ministry of Non-Violence Secretariat for Security and Coexistence
	Palmira	Secretariat for Security and Coexistence
Honduras	San Pedro Sula	Directorate for Prevention, Safety and Urban Mobility
Germany	Stuttgart	Crime Prevention Office (SOS-KKP)
Mexico	Chihuahua	Council for Violence and Crime Prevention in the Municipality of Chihuahua (COPREV)
	Leon	Secretariat for Security, Prevention and Citizen Protection
United States	Chicago	Office of Violence Prevention and Behavioral Health Office of Violence Reduction
	Los Angeles	Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD)
	Philadelphia	Office of Violence Prevention
	Oakland	Department of Violence Prevention

Endnotes

- 1 The analyzed OVPs are often denominated as “Secretariat,” “Department,” “Directorate,” “Unit,” or “Council.” In the US context, the designation “Office of Neighborhood Safety” is sometimes used.
- 2 In some cases, “Local Prevention Systems” were included in this subsample, expanding the traditional understanding of what an “office” represents.
- 3 A noteworthy example is the 2022 End Community Violence Report, which features a violence prevention index ranking of 50 US cities. Community Justice Action Fund, *2022 City Violence Prevention Index*, 2023, https://www.endcommunityviolence.com/report/#personImgRight-block_62d7ec07d13ab. Some of the leading organizations with expertise in community violence intervention, with a focus on local-level initiatives, are the [Health Alliance for Violence Intervention](#), the [National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform](#), the [Community-Based Public Safety Collective](#), and [Cities United](#).
- 4 National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform, *National Offices of Violence Prevention Network Report*, 2022, <https://nicjr.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/National-OVP-Landscape-Scan-April-2022.pdf>.
- 5 Andrew V. Papachristos, Tracey L. Meares, and Jeffrey Fagan, “Attention Felons: Evaluating Project Safe Neighborhoods in Chicago,” *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* 4, no. 2 (July 2007): 223–72; Wesley G. Skogan, Susan M. Hartnett, Natalie Bump, and Jill Dubois, *Evaluation of CeaseFire—Chicago* (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice, 2008).
- 6 P. Jeffrey Brantingham, George Tita, and Denise Herz, “The Impact of the City of Los Angeles Mayor’s Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD) Comprehensive Strategy on Crime in the City of Los Angeles,” *Justice Evaluation Journal* 4, no. 2 (2021): 217–236.
- 7 Caterina G. Roman, Nathan W. Link, Jordan M. Hyatt, Avinash Bhati, and Megan Forney, “Assessing the Gang-Level and Community-Level Effects of the Philadelphia Focused Deterrence Strategy,” *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 15, no. 4 (2019): 499–527.
- 8 Michelle Degli Esposti, Carolina V. N. Coll, Eduardo Viegas da Silva, Doriam Borges, Emiliano Rojido, Alisson Gomes Dos Santos, Ignacio Cano, and Joseph Murray, “Effects of the Pelotas (Brazil) Peace Pact on Violence and Crime: A Synthetic Control Analysis,” *Lancet Regional Health—Americas* 19 (March 2023).
- 9 Carlos Enrique Moreno León, María Isabel Irurita Muñoz, and Juan Carlos Gómez Benavides, “Informe Final de la Evaluación de Impacto del Programa Abriendo Caminos de la Fundación Alvaralce,” Universidad Icesi, Facultad de Derecho y Ciencias Sociales Centro de Estudios Interdisciplinarios Jurídicos, Sociales, y Humanistas Laboratorio de Medición de Impacto Social, Cali, Colombia, 2020.
- 10 There is a vast literature on the benefits of focused violence prevention interventions, as well as on how direct victims and perpetrators of lethal violence are often from the same subgroup of the population, usually young males from disenfranchised backgrounds.
- 11 Interventions classified as *primary prevention* “involve programs and strategies designed to reduce the factors that put people at risk for experiencing violence...or encourage the factors that protect or buffer people from violence.” *Secondary prevention* interventions manage the acute consequences and focus on the immediate needs of the victim “in the immediate aftermath of a violent event.” Primary and secondary prevention efforts can include focused interventions to disrupt or interrupt cycles of retribution among high-risk groups or individuals. *Tertiary prevention* is a long-term approach after a violent event has

taken place, including “rehabilitation of the perpetrator or social services to lessen emotional trauma to the victim. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Principles of Prevention Guide*, 6.

- 12 For more examples, see Peace in Our Cities/Hernan Flom, *Guiding Principles and Inspiring Actions: Operationalizing the Resolution to Reduce Urban Violence*, Stanley Center for Peace and Security, October 2022, <https://stanleycenter.org/publications/roadmap-reduce-urban-violence/>.
- 13 For example, see one study on the cost of violence, albeit at the national level, Richard Matzopoulos, Sarah Truen, and Ian Neethling, *Cost of Violence Study: South Africa*, NYU Center on International Cooperation, November 2023, <https://cic.nyu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Cost-of-Violence-Study-South-Africa-November-2023.pdf>.
- 14 For example, in DC, a study by the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform estimated each fatal shooting to cost the city more than \$1.5 million. National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform, Washington, DC, *The Cost of Gun Violence: The Direct Cost to Tax Payers*, <https://costofviolence.org/reports/washington-dc/>. Also, in 2018, the UK government estimated that each homicide cost £3,217,740. Matthew Heeks, Sasha Reed, Mariam Tafsiri, and Stuart Prince, *The Economic and Social Costs of Crime*, Home Office, 2nd ed., Research Report 99, July 2018, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/732110/the-economic-and-social-costs-of-crime-horr99.pdf.
- 15 These include Cali (Colombia), Edmonton (Canada), Godoy Cruz (Argentina), Mechelen (Belgium), Oakland (USA), Palmira (Colombia), and Pelotas (Brazil).
- 16 While the president of the Council of Violence Prevention in Chihuahua is an active police officer, a large number of technical posts and commissions are chaired by civilians, and decisions are taken by votes on the governing board.
- 17 Interviews were either conducted remotely, or the questionnaire was answered in writing by government officials. Representatives from Godoy Cruz, Mechelen, Pelotas, REACH, Cali, Chihuahua, and Stuttgart responded to the questionnaire.
- 18 According to figures from the Vera Institute of Justice, in the United States, 30 out of 42 OVPs report either to the mayor or country/city manager. See Jason Tan de Bibiana, Kerry Mulligan, Aaron Stagoff-Belfort, and Daniela Gilbert, *Coordinating Safety: Building and Sustaining Offices of Violence Prevention and Neighborhood Safety* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2023).
- 19 Curiously, budgetary ranges are not one of the key differences between US and non-US OVPs. In both cases, there is high variation, with US OVPs having budgets between \$500,000 and \$35 million, while some Colombian secretariats, such as Medellín or Cali, have budgets of \$48 million and \$19 million, respectively.
- 20 In the United States, Offices of Violence Prevention are typically not associated with law enforcement but parallel to it, offering a counterapproach to violence prevention/community support.
- 21 City of Oakland Department of Violence Prevention, *Strategic Spending Plan*, 2022, 3.
- 22 See Peace in Our Cities, *Guiding Principles and Inspiring Actions* for more examples.
- 23 The Community Violence Intervention ecosystem website suggests that cities estimate 15 percent of staffing costs for “Data and Evaluation Support,” which includes implementing both diagnoses and evaluations. The Coalition to Advance Public Safety, CVI Ecosystem, <https://www.cviecosystem.org/>.

- 24 Ordinance 1003/144 of 2018.
- 25 OVPs could consider adopting some targets from the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). That way, entities would have quantitative targets that allow for global comparisons and localize the effort to realize the SDGs.
- 26 The definition of “youth” varies depending on the context, and programs in this research have ranged considerably, serving populations 8 to 29.
- 27 Alcaldía de Palmira, *Indicators for the Monitoring, Follow-Up, and Result of the Strategy Aimed at the Reduction of Violence in Palmira*, Colombia, October 4, 2022, <https://palmira.gov.co/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Nota-de-prensa-Ingles.pdf>.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Alcaldía de Palmira, *La estrategia PAZOS, paz y oportunidades, sigue trabajando para fortalecer los territorios*, February 25, 2022, <https://palmira.gov.co/noticias/la-estrategia-pazos-paz-y-oportunidades-sigue-trabajando-para-fortalecer-los-territorios/>.
- 30 Questionnaire answer submitted in writing by Werner Van Herle, director of social prevention, Mechelen, Belgium, June 20, 2023.
- 31 “Lived experience” in this context refers to individuals with first-hand experience with the criminal justice system.
- 32 Interview with Cali’s secretary of peace and citizen culture, June 9, 2023.
- 33 See City of Stuttgart, Department for Law, Safety and Order and the Mayor’s Communication Department, *The Partnership for Safety and Security*, February 2009. <http://i-nse.org/wp-content/uploads/Stuttgart-The-Partnership-for-Safety-and-Security.pdf>.
- 34 In some contexts, working with law enforcement has an added complexity given that it may lack legitimacy in the eyes of the communities most affected by violence and it may be perceived as a harm-causing institution.
- 35 Belgium is a different case, as its OVPs in Brussels and Mechelen are partly funded through the regional and national governments.
- 36 Law 5828, art. 10. Interview with high-level staffer of the GGIM, June 13, 2023.
- 37 Interview with director of public security and president of COPREV, June 29, 2023.
- 38 The city of Chicago established the Office of Violence Prevention and Behavioral Health in 1994, one of the original OVPs. However, more than two decades later, it set up an additional office, which reported directly to the mayor.
- 39 In general, hiring formerly imprisoned individuals, who may have valuable skills to serve as violence interrupters and in other professional roles, is difficult because of bureaucratic restrictions.
- 40 It is worth noting that in the United States, decreases in local government funding have, at times, been compensated for with increased funding from the federal government.

- 41 Some statistical techniques are widely used to estimate counterfactuals, such as randomized controlled trials and statistically or logically created control groups, among others. These statistical techniques facilitate causal inference.
- 42 See Esposti et al., “Effects of the Pelotas (Brazil) Peace Pact.”
- 43 In communications with the authors, the special adviser to the Pacto Pelotas pela Paz shared the following figures: 68 percent reduction in pedestrian robberies; 62 percent reductions in robberies of commercial establishments; 82 percent reduction in vehicle robberies; 70 percent reductions in home robberies; and 83 percent reduction of robberies on public transport. See also Instituto Cidade Segura, “Pacto Pelotas pela Paz completa 4 anos com redução de quase 90 percent nos homicídios,” August 12, 2021, <https://institutocidadesegura.com.br/noticias/novidades/pacto-pelotas-pela-paz-completa-4-anos-com-reducao-de-quase-90-nos-homicidios/>.
- 44 See Alcaldía de Palmira, *Indicators*.
- 45 A similar program in Massachusetts (USA) reported dropout rates of upwards of 10 percent of participants. ROCA, *Change is Possible in Massachusetts*, 2021, <https://rocainc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Roca-2022-At-a-Glance-Massachusetts-Young-Men.pdf>.
- 46 See Alcaldía de Palmira, *Indicators*.
- 47 See REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities, *2022 REACH Annual Report*, 2023, <https://reachedmonton.ca/publications/>.
- 48 See open data portal, Alcaldía de Santiago de Cali, Secretaría de Paz y Cultura Ciudadana, Datos Abiertos, <https://datos.cali.gov.co/organization/secretaria-de-paz-y-cultura-ciudadana>.
- 49 Interview with secretary for peace and citizen culture of Cali, Colombia, August 2, 2023.
- 50 Media coverage of violence in Bristol often carries a racist undertone. For example, Mirror, “Forget the Home Office Crime Mapping Site, This REALLY Is Britain’s Worst Street,” Feb. 6, 2011.
- 51 Bristol seems distinctly fractured, likely a legacy of the vast wealth disparity and its history as one of the main port cities engaged in the transatlantic trade in enslaved people. Post-World War II Bristol was a main destination for the Empire Windrush migration, receiving many immigrants from Caribbean countries who were never given UK citizenship. Their unclear migratory status contributed to systemic disenfranchisement and the development of isolated communities. In addition, years of racially discriminatory practices from institutions have eroded confidence between communities and authorities, cementing intergenerational distrust. Further, austerity policies have reduced public sector investment in youth services and clubs, and those that remain are highly fractured with limited coverage.
- 52 See Empire Fighting Chance, “What We Do,” <https://empirefightingchance.org/>.
- 53 In addition, other anchor institutions have expressed interest in joining and advancing the work of the coalition, such as the main soccer, rugby, and cricket teams in the city, as well as community-based organizations that provide direct services to inhabitants.
- 54 Igarapé Institute, “Homicide Monitor,” <https://igarape.org.br/en/homicide-monitor/>.
- 55 World Bank Live, Dr. Rodrigo Guerrero, February 7, 2017, <https://live.worldbank.org/experts/dr-rodrigo-guerrero>.

- 56 Oficina de las Naciones Unidas Contra la Droga y el Delito (UNODC), Colombia Área de Prevención del Delito y Fortalecimiento a la Justicia, “Informe final del proceso de implementación de la metodología de Auditorías de Seguridad en Santiago de Cali Documento Técnico de Soporte para la Política Pública de Seguridad y Convivencia de Santiago de Cali,” Bogotá, Colombia, 2019, 38.
- 57 Cali has over 120,000 of the 2.5 million Venezuelan migrants in Colombia. See Alcaldía de Santiago de Cali, Cali, *ciudad de acogida y protección para población migrante*, November 21, 2022, <https://www.cali.gov.co/bienestar/publicaciones/172865/cali-ciudad-de-acogida-y-proteccion-para-poblacion-migrante/>. At one of the meetings attended, project leaders described how some schools now played the Venezuelan anthem as well as the Colombian one at events, given that the majority of children came from that country.
- 58 Interview with Juan Camilo Cock, former TIOS undersecretary and current executive director of Fundación Alvarallice, August 4, 2023.
- 59 Public policies are approved by the City Council and projected for 10 years. Two interviewees contrasted Cali’s lack of a formal violence prevention policy with that existing in neighboring Palmira.
- 60 Edmonton City Government, “REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities,” List of Agencies, Boards, Committees, and Commissions, https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/city_organization/reach-edmonton-council-for-safe-communities.
- 61 REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities, “Initiatives: Bridging Together,” <https://reachedmonton.ca/initiatives/bridging-together/>.
- 62 Other significant initiatives are the 24/7 Crisis Diversion Team, which provides responses to non-emergency crises, relieving the police and aiding in the decriminalization of poverty, mental health disorders, and addictions, REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities, “Initiatives: 24/7 Crisis Diversion,” <https://reachedmonton.ca/initiatives/24-7-crisis-diversion/>; the WrapED program, which focuses on driving at-risk youth away from gangs, REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities, “Initiatives: WrapED,” <https://reachedmonton.ca/initiatives/wraped/>; and the Immigrant and Refugee Initiative, geared toward the support and integration of newcomer families, REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities, “Initiatives: REACH Immigrant and Refugee Initiative,” <https://reachedmonton.ca/initiatives/reach-immigrant-and-refugee-initiative/>.
- 63 See Ministerio Público de la Acusación (Public Prosecutors Office), *Informes Institucionales: Informe de Gestión de la Fiscalía General 2022*, March 2023, <https://mpa.santafe.gov.ar/institucional/content/38>.