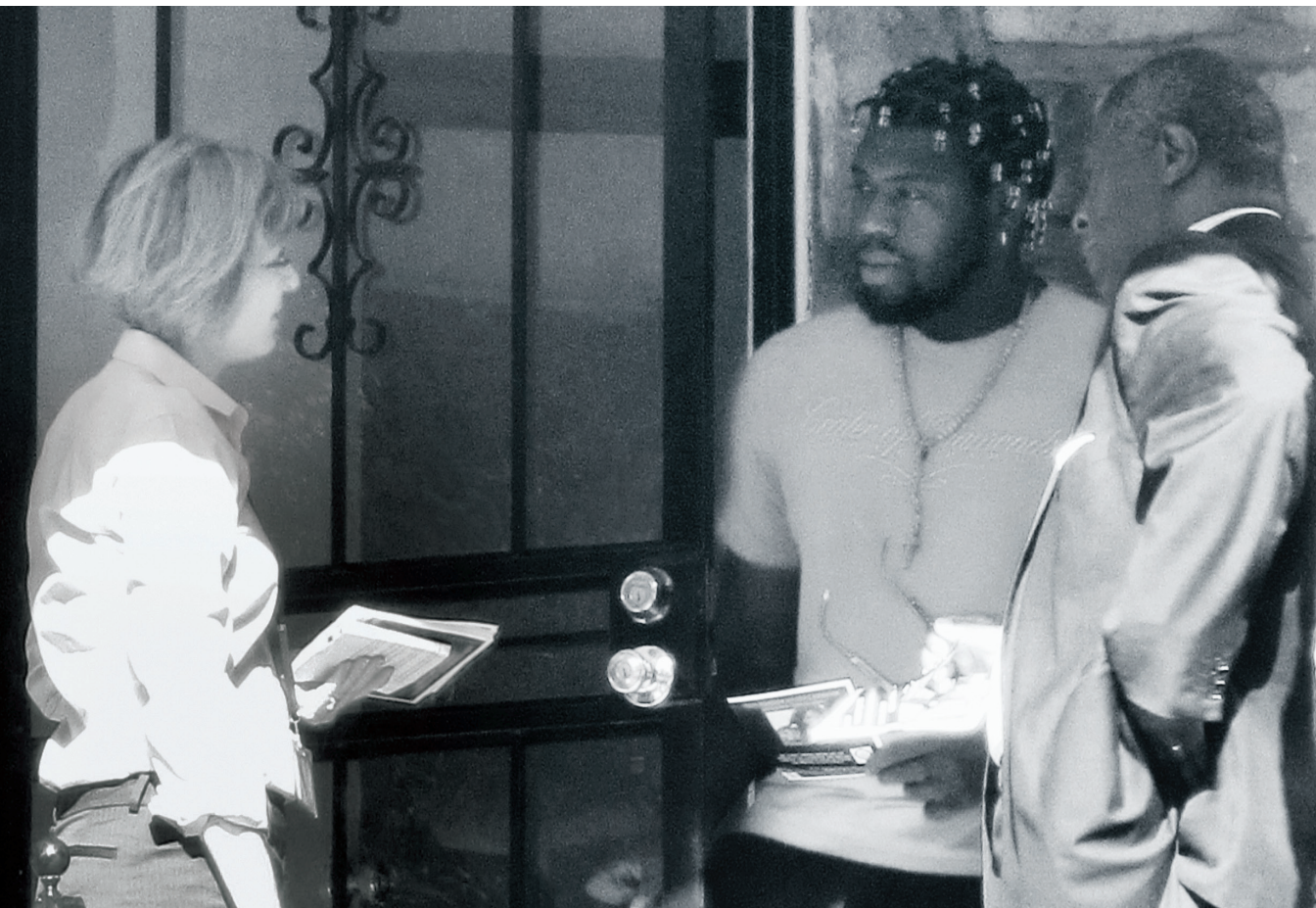




National Network For Safe Communities

Saving Lives, Saving Communities



Custom Notifications

Individualized Communication in the Group Violence Intervention

by David M. Kennedy and Michael A. Friedrich



COPS

Community Oriented Policing Services
U.S. Department of Justice

Custom Notifications

**Individualized Communication in the Group
Violence Intervention**

This project was supported by cooperative agreement number 2011-CK-WX-K030 awarded by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions contained herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. References to specific agencies, companies, products, or services should not be considered an endorsement by the author(s), the U.S. Department of Justice, the Boston Police Department, or the Newark Police Department. Rather, the references are illustrations to supplement discussion of the issues.

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Recommended citation:

Kennedy, David M., and Michael A. Friedrich. 2014. *Custom Notifications: Individualized Communication in the Group Violence Intervention*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.

Cover photo: Nisha Stephen

ISBN: 978-1-932582-93-2

Published 2014

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Letter from the Director

Dear colleagues,

An integral part of what we do here at the COPS Office is to encourage law enforcement to engage, communicate, and build relationships with the communities they serve.

This publication highlights one particularly effective method, custom notifications, in which law enforcement identifies and delivers an individualized message to street group members who are at the highest risk for exposure to violence, either as victims or as perpetrators. The technique of custom notifications has evolved as an important element in the National Network for Safe Communities' Group Violence Intervention strategy.

The National Network has demonstrated in cities across the country that providing a clear antiviolence message can be a powerful, even transformative experience in which offenders, community members, and law enforcement learn to see each other in new ways, build new relationships, and recognize crucial common ground. Furthermore, law enforcement enhances police legitimacy when it communicates directly with group members the central themes of the strategy: that affected communities want the violence to stop, that there is help available to group members who want it, and that meaningful legal consequences will follow where the violence does not stop.

I applaud the work of the National Network that has resulted in the significant reduction of homicide rates in many U.S. cities. The National Network's continuous efforts to explore more effective ways to reduce violence has led to the development of this publication, which explains the custom notification process, highlights its value within the broader strategy, details its use by several national practitioners, and encourages even further development.

This publication is part of a series by the National Network for Safe Communities about its two core crime reduction strategies: the Group Violence Intervention and the Drug Market Intervention. We hope you find this series helpful in your efforts to improve safety and build relationships within your community.

Sincerely,



Ronald L. Davis, Director
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

About This Series

The National Network for Safe Communities has assembled guides to support communities implementing two crime control strategies: the Group Violence Intervention (GVI) and the Drug Market Intervention (DMI). GVI reduces violent crime when community members join together with law enforcement and social service providers to deliver an anti-violence message to highly active street groups. DMI eliminates overt drug markets by bringing together community leaders, law enforcement, and service providers with street-level dealers and their families to make it clear that the dealing must stop, that law enforcement will behave differently, and that there is help for those who want it.

Both strategies combine the best of law enforcement and community-driven approaches to improve public safety, minimize arrests and incarceration, and foster police-community reconciliation. The purpose of these guides is to offer comprehensive tools to practitioners—whether they are community members, law enforcement, social service providers, or government officials—who seek to bring the strategies to their communities, build a partnership of stakeholders, operationalize the strategies, and sustain their results.

Each guide lays out the important elements of a strategy and recommends a general path along which communities should proceed. However, the particulars of the strategies are adaptable. The National Network recommends that practitioners use these guides to ensure that all the elements are in place, tailoring their execution to the local resources and personnel available. If communities stay close to the spirit of these approaches and remain faithful to the fundamental principles, they will see substantial improvements.

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Introduction



Photo: National Network for Safe Communities

In High Point, North Carolina, community members speak at a call-in.

Serious violence is heavily concentrated by neighborhood, in places within “hot” neighborhoods, and especially by groups and group members within those neighborhoods. Nearly 20 years of research shows that a relatively small number of highly active groups, representing less than one half of one percent of a city’s population, will routinely be connected with up to three-quarters of all homicides in that city.

Within that small population of groups, an even smaller number of highly active “impact players” drives the action. Impact players typically represent only 10 to 20 percent of group members, yet they are responsible for a majority of group violence, whether by instigating conflict or committing violent offenses themselves. Both in theory and in practice, it follows that changing the behavior of these groups and impact players will have a powerful impact on violence.

The Group Violence Intervention (GVI), also often called Operation Ceasefire, is a proven strategy for producing that impact. A central element in GVI is the “call-in,” a way of communicating directly to group members the central messages of the strategy: that affected communities want the violence to stop, that there is help available to

group members who want it, and that meaningful legal consequences will follow where the violence does not stop. Call-ins can be dramatic, powerful, even transformative experiences in which group members, community members, and law enforcement see each other in new ways, build new relationships, and recognize crucial common ground. At their core, call-ins are a communication tool, a way to speak to group members and deliver critical information.

As such, call-ins have many strengths but also important weaknesses. They typically rely on probation and parole to bring group members to the meeting. However, most group members and impact players are not on probation or parole at any given time, so their appearance cannot be mandated. Because call-ins require a great deal of work to put together, most jurisdictions do not find it practical to hold them more than once every several months. Therefore, they are not *tactical*. For example, if a city knows a group is likely to carry out a retaliatory drive-by this afternoon, it is not feasible to organize a call-in to prevent it. And call-ins are of necessity somewhat general: messages must be tailored to all the group members in the meeting, not to each of them as individuals.

For all these reasons, individualized communication has been part of GVI from the outset. This is what the National Network now calls “custom notifications,” which address particular group members, at particular times, for particular reasons.

These custom notifications were part of the original Operation Ceasefire in Boston. The city used them after Boston’s first call-in in 1996, which was largely effective even though one group proved resistant to the message and remained violent. According to David Kennedy, one of the architects of Operation Ceasefire:

The Intervale Posse was . . . the worst crack crew in Boston. They owned their street in Roxbury: threw pregnant women out of their apartments and used them for stash houses, robbed kids who strayed in and threw their shoes into a huge “Adidas tree” on a vacant lot, ran extension cords and set up an area with couches, a barbeque, and a TV to deal from, had a target range back in the woods, were implicated in a long string of homicides. [Gang unit commander] Gary French went repeatedly to Intervale’s alpha, Sam “Sam Goody” Patrick, and warned him to stand down. He didn’t.

As a result, a joint local/federal task force took down the Intervale Posse, and then the Ceasefire team explained the action systematically to Boston’s gangs in more call-ins and individual meetings, a type of custom notifications. Most of the time, when the

Ceasefire team delivered these individualized warnings through custom notifications, group members heeded them, and no further action was necessary.

In fact, the first replication of Operation Ceasefire in Minneapolis in 1997 relied almost entirely on custom notifications for its core communication with the streets: rather than hold the big call-ins, teams of probation, parole, and police officers held home meetings with group-involved probationers and parolees, laying out the new understandings and rules. While that process continued, violence in the city dropped dramatically.¹

Another variation on Operation Ceasefire, Chicago's parole-based Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN), developed by Yale Law's Tracey Meares, relies heavily on individualized notifications to felons leaving prison that they are proscribed under federal law from possessing firearms. The notifications also explain the powerful federal sanctions for violations. Evaluations of PSN show strong impacts on violence and that those so notified reoffend at slower and lower rates.²

Likewise, NYPD's Juvenile Robbery Intervention Program (JRIP) has as its central technique home visits with recidivist robbers and their families, with apparently dramatic effect. The NYPD has found that juvenile group members are far less likely to remain group-involved and reoffend when officers engage directly with these juveniles at home and in their neighborhoods, give them information about potential legal consequences for future robberies, and offer them individually tailored help.³

Despite their history as part of the strategy, custom notifications have not, until recently, been singled out and highlighted as an independent and important operational element. Over the last several years, the National Network for Safe Communities has been working hard to develop techniques and test them in the field. This work has been driven by the recognition that custom notifications have many important advantages:

- ✦ They can be delivered to anybody, regardless of whether that person is on probation or parole.
- ✦ In particular, they can be delivered to the small number of impact players, who often are not under court supervision and cannot be mandated to attend a call-in.

1. David M. Kennedy and Anthony A. Braga, "Homicide in Minneapolis Research for Problem Solving," *Homicide Studies* 2, no. 3 (1998): 263–290.

2. Andrew V. Papachristos et al., "Attention Felons: Evaluating Project Safe Neighborhoods in Chicago," *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* 4, no. 2 (July 2007): 223–272.

3. Wendy Ruderman, "To Stem Juvenile Robbers, Police Trail Youth Before the Crime," *New York Times*, March 3, 2013.

- They are extremely flexible and can be implemented with short notice.
- They can be delivered by law enforcement alone, community figures alone, or a combination.
- They can incorporate “influentials”—those close to a group member, such as a parent, grandparent, pastor, or mentor, who represent consistent, positive influence.
- They can incorporate highly specific information meaningful to the person being notified, such as the help he personally may need or the legal risk he personally may face for continued offending.
- They are powerful tools for interrupting gang “beefs,” heading off retaliation after a violent incident, calming down outbreaks of violence, and bolstering the core GVI operation.

Experience with custom notifications in this newly elevated role is recent, partial, and preliminary, and the National Network encourages further research and development. However, the National Network now knows enough to sketch out how and why they can be employed and to believe they are a powerful and useful technique to reduce violence. In addition, new research shows that GVI communication creates spillover violence reduction effects on group members who are socially tied to those engaged directly;⁴ thus, the National Network is confident that custom notifications promise to reach more than just the group members notified.

4. Anthony A. Braga et al., “The Spillover Effects of Focused Deterrence on Gang Violence,” *Evaluation Review*, February 25, 2014.

Three Case Studies

Calming Avondale in Cincinnati

A longstanding and effective implementation of GVI, the Cincinnati Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV) has resulted in a 42 percent reduction in group member-involved homicides and a 22 percent reduction in firearm-related offenses in the city between 2008 and 2010.⁵ Responding to a recent spike in violence in the Avondale neighborhood, CIRV piloted a program of custom notifications through home and street visits to group members and influential people in their lives.

The CIRV law enforcement team assessed violence levels in the city and determined which areas were “hot,” finding that Avondale in particular contained locations where gun violence was pervasive. Command staff then met with frontline law enforcement, probation and parole, and officers from the Cincinnati Police Department’s Vortex Unit to identify the area’s groups from which law enforcement targeted 25 individuals for custom notification. These impact players were group members whom the officers indicated were driving violence in Avondale’s hot spots.

Because the community is integral to CIRV’s effort, law enforcement shared the names of the impact players with members of Cincinnati’s Community Police Partnering Center (CPPC), who narrowed the list to 12 individuals. CPPC enlisted the help of the Avondale community council, engaging clergy, business owners, and street outreach workers to deliver a unified antiviolence message to group members. Executive Director Dorothy Smoot convened this engagement team in community training sessions to guide them on custom notification messaging and tone. The community members led the notification process, visiting impact players at their homes or on the streets and delivering the CIRV message—that the community values human life and the lives of group members, but they must choose to stop the violence or face intense police attention.⁶

Police and community leaders also worked together to identify “influentials,” the people in the community known to have a positive influence on impact players. By reviewing

5. Samuel Peterson et al., *Cincinnati Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV): 2008–2011 Home Visits Report* (University of Cincinnati Institute of Crime Science, 2012).

6. R.S. Engel et al., *Implementation of the Cincinnati Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV): Year 2 Report* (University of Cincinnati Policing Institute, 2009), http://www.nnscommunities.org/pdf/CIRV_2NDYEAR_REPORT.pdf.

probation and parole hearing records and by speaking with knowledgeable community members, the CIRV partnership located influentials, and when the partnership could not reach the impact player, it often requested that the influential pass the message along to them.

The community engagement team reconvened with police and reported on the impact players with whom it had made contact. Police followed up by paying home and street visits to these impact players' influentials and explained the legal consequences of further violence. They provided "custom legal letters" from the police department, detailing the personal legal exposure of the impact player concerned and the opportunity for services. They asked that influentials pass along the letters and the message. These letters typically included the following information:

As a convicted felon, you can be prosecuted in federal court even if you possess only a gun or ammunition, and this typically results in a **five-year federal sentence**. Depending on the circumstances, you may also be prosecuted as an Armed Career Criminal, which carries a **15-year minimum federal sentence without hope of parole**.

CIRV also has an opportunity for services to assist you in a positive manner. You may call [phone number] at any time to be connected with a CIRV Outreach Street Advocate to assist you in any needed social services, education, counseling, or job training. By simply making that call, you are guaranteed personalized service by a street advocate. (For the full text of a custom legal letter from CIRV, see appendix B.)

Social service providers spent time in Avondale, canvassing the streets and talking to residents and group members to deliver an antiviolenence message and an offer of help. Street outreach workers—known in Cincinnati as street advocates—also made contact in Avondale. Often they were able to communicate directly with impact players whom the rest of the CIRV partnership was not, reinforcing the serious consequences of violence and urging them to rejoin the community in a legitimate way.

CIRV partners believed that performing notifications in Avondale's hot spots would have a ripple effect, stemming violence throughout the neighborhood. Through direct contact with group members and influentials, they were able to reach six of their initial target group members. Of these, none had contact with police for violent crime in the following six months. Even more important, Avondale saw its homicides drop

precipitously. After 10 homicides in 2009, seven in 2010, and 11 in 2011, Avondale recorded zero homicides in 2012. As Smoot said, “We don’t know if it’s 100 percent proof of our efforts, but it certainly indicates that people heard us.”⁷

Calming High Point’s East Side Boys and Goon Squad

High Point, North Carolina, a community that has been working with the National Network’s strategies for over 15 years, has made custom notification an operational tool for communicating with group members. A recent shooting in the city between two crews, East Side Boys and Goon Squad, shows how strikingly effective custom notifications can be as a tool to interrupt retaliatory violence.

Immediately after the shooting, High Point law enforcement partners performed an incident review, the process of debriefing frontline officers about the parties, the possible motives, and group involvement in a violent incident. This allowed the partners to identify impact players, those centrally involved in the shooting between East Side Boys and Goon Squad. Assistant Police Chief Larry Casterline and his team worked with probation officers to review the supervision status of those involved and mandated that impact players from each group visit the police station for an impromptu notification. There, Casterline and representatives from High Point Community Against Violence (HP-CAV), the city’s community organization, informed the impact players of exactly what they faced if shootings continued.

A criminal history review of the impact players allowed High Point Police Department (HPPD) to tailor its message to the legal exposure of each individual notified. The impact players received clear, factual letters signed by the chief of police, explaining their legal vulnerabilities. In one case, the letter from HPPD explained the following:

We have researched your individual record, Mr. Doe, and we have determined that if you continue to commit acts of violence, your case will be handled in superior court. We have a commitment from the U.S. Attorney’s Office and Guilford County District Attorney’s Office that they will prosecute you for that violation to the fullest. If convicted of a violent felony, such as possession of firearm by felon, you would fall into a presumptive

7. National Network for Safe Communities, “Talking Back to Violence: Custom Notifications of Impact Players” [Webinar], March 22, 2013, http://www.nnscommunities.org/Custom_Notification_WEBINAR_FINAL_3.pdf.

range where your minimum sentence could start anywhere from 15 years to life in federal prison. If convicted of a felony in state court, you would fall into a presumptive range where your minimum sentence could start anywhere from nine to 97 months. (For the full text of this custom legal letter, see appendix A.)

As in this example, many impact players' legal exposure included expedited federal prosecution and minimum sentences far greater than they may previously have understood. Other impact players faced increased probation sanctions, and all faced enhanced street-level enforcement aimed at their groups if the shootings continued.

Both Casterline and members of HP-CAV offered assistance and expressed genuine concern for the notified impact players, stressing that those involved in violent activity are as likely to be killed as to kill. The HPPD also took care to track the notified impact players so if they reoffended, the HPPD could act swiftly on its enforcement promise. By focusing swift and direct communication on the impact players involved, High Point partners ensured that the conflict between East Side Boys and Goon Squad resulted in no further violence.

Educating gun offenders in New York

A New York State initiative, run from the district attorney's office, conducts forums similar to GVI call-ins in the Harlem community of Manhattan. Forums address parolees and probationers with a history of gun violence as they enter into community supervision. In an effort to reduce recidivism by these high-risk offenders, a partnership of community members, law enforcement, and social service providers gives them a message about making good choices and information about consequences for committing violent or gun-related offenses.

As part of the forum, parolees receive a package that presenters instruct them to open during the proceedings. In addition to general information on social services and education, the package contains a custom card showing their photograph on one side and the sentencing information for future gun-crime convictions on the other. This tailored method of notification offers offenders information they may not previously have had about the legal sanctions they are personally exposed to and about the help available to them.

This New York initiative replicates the work of Chicago's Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN), which achieved striking violence reductions in selected districts through the delivery of individualized messages to parolees about legal exposure and services available. Chicago districts participating in PSN communication saw a 37 percent reduction in homicide and a 30 percent decrease in recidivism among notified offenders.⁸

8. A. Braga and D.L. Weisburd, *The Effects of "Pulling Levers" Focused Deterrence Strategies on Crime*, Campbell Systematic Reviews (2012), http://www.nnscommunities.org/Braga_Pulling_Levers_Review_CAMPBELL_RECORD.pdf.

The Core Elements of Custom Notifications

Identifying impact players

GVI partners can determine who to notify by identifying impact players, the group members who drive the majority of the violence. Typically, law enforcement captures this intelligence during incident reviews, as part of the core GVI strategy.⁹ By talking to frontline personnel—beat officers, special units, probation, parole, and corrections staff—law enforcement gathers information about recent violent incidents, the groups involved, and who the impact players are. Often, the law enforcement team will also debrief confidential informants and get input from street outreach workers and community members. With training and research support, some jurisdictions use social network analysis (SNA), a mathematical method for determining links between street group members. The links determined with SNA help law enforcement to focus its resources strategically on the impact players at highest risk for exposure to violence, as victims or as perpetrators.

Law enforcement can conduct incident reviews routinely, at regular intervals, to keep information current about the city's street scene, responding as needed. The team may also conduct this process tactically in response to heightened violence in a hot spot to help prevent immediate retaliations and further violence. For the latter, law enforcement typically convenes immediately to determine groups involved, key players, and instigating factors. Sometimes the cause of an incident—or even the fact that it is group-related—is not apparent until law enforcement has interviewed community members, informants, and suspects.

The identification process unfolds in different ways depending on the circumstances that prompt the use of custom notifications. In Cincinnati, for example, the partnership was addressing a historically hot zone—the Avondale neighborhood. Law enforcement and community members made an effort to identify as many impact players as possible for the CIRV partnership to notify. By contrast, in High Point, North Carolina, law enforcement focused narrowly on identifying only the impact players driving violence in a particular conflict between two groups.

9. See National Network for Safe Communities, *Group Violence Intervention: An Implementation Guide* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2013), <http://ric-zai-inc.com/Publications/cops-p280-pub.pdf>.



Photo: Nisha Stephen

A prosecutor and mayor talk with a local community member.

For the purpose of custom notifications, the incident review identifies all group members whom law enforcement knows to be at the center of the violence, regardless of whether they are on probation or parole. Evidence law enforcement considers during this process does not have to meet the probable cause standard of an arrest because arrest is not the goal of custom notifications; they are a means of communicating with impact players to warn them against violent activity, to give them information about their legal exposure, and to offer them opportunities for help. As such, evidence can be based on a broad range of information that knowledgeable frontline officers and community members provide about impact players.

Key incident review steps for law enforcement include the following:

- ✦ Debrief frontline officers and special units.
- ✦ Debrief frontline probation, parole, and corrections officials.
- ✦ Talk to confidential informants.
- ✦ Review incident data.

- Crosscheck lists of groups and their members.
- Conduct criminal history reviews of active group members.
- Perform SNA, if resources allow (see section “Social Network Analysis” on page 31 for more information).
- Create a final list of impact players based on local selection criteria.

Custom legal assessments

For custom notifications to be effective, law enforcement must have detailed knowledge of group members’ criminal histories. This allows officers to approach group members with prevention messages tailored to their personal legal exposure and make a meaningful effort to inform them of specific sanctions they face for further violent crime. To develop that knowledge, law enforcement partners perform a custom legal assessment, the process of reviewing group members’ legal histories and vulnerabilities to produce information specific to them and deter further violence.

For example, High Point law enforcement representatives performed a custom legal assessment to provide the street group member mentioned in the “Calming High Point’s East Side Boys and Goon Squad” case study (see page 7) with information specific to his case—information such as “If convicted of a felony in state court . . . your minimum sentence could start anywhere from nine to 97 months,” of which he may not previously have been aware.

Compiling custom legal assessments of this sort requires a close working partnership between police and prosecutors at local, state, and federal levels. After police perform an incident review to identify the impact players they want to notify, they pass their names to the state prosecutor. The state prosecutor reviews the criminal records and determines potential sanctions for a range of violent offenses, consulting with the federal prosecutor to establish whether grounds exist for a federal case, as well.

Often, the assessment can be used to establish potential enhanced sanctions for future violence. These may also include stricter probation or parole conditions, such as tighter curfews and GPS or alcohol-monitoring bracelets. Some GVI partnerships communicate the findings of the custom legal assessment to an impact player by giving him a letter or summary, written in plain, easily understood language.

Key steps for custom legal assessments include the following:

- Review criminal history review of impact player(s).
- Review and compile with prosecutors the potential state and federal sanctions for further violent crimes, based on criminal history.
- Write a summary of findings in plain, easily understood language.

Identifying influentials

An “influential” is a person close to an impact player who has his respect and can help him make positive choices. This may be someone within his family or a person with moral standing and credibility within the community. Often, an influential can articulate the community moral voice—the collective standards of a community affected by violence—and encourage the impact player to listen to messages from law enforcement and social services.

GVI partnerships performing custom notifications often connect with influentials when an impact player cannot be located and addressed directly. When CIRV reached out to impact players in Avondale, delivering the message to influentials often appeared to be an effective substitute for speaking directly with impact players. Other partnerships involve influentials even in direct notifications. For example, in New York City, the Juvenile Robbery Intervention Program piloted through the NYPD Housing Department communicates with at-risk youth and their guardians during home visits in an effort to stem juvenile robberies.¹⁰

When choosing an influential, GVI partners usually focus their attention on the impact player’s closest personal connections, such as family, friends, or girlfriends. One tried-and-true method for identifying influentials is to ask the impact player himself who has influence in his life. When this fails, law enforcement partners have access to probation, incarceration and parole records, and bail and bond sheets, which give useful details about influentials: e.g., people who have posted bail or attended hearings.

Law enforcement can crosscheck findings from these records with information from community members, who are far more likely to know whether a person is, in fact, a positive influence on an impact player’s life. Family members and friends do not always make successful influentials. For instance, a friend who bailed an individual out of jail

10. Wendy Ruderman, “To Stem Juvenile Robbers, Police Trail Youth Before the Crime,” *New York Times*, March 3, 2013.

Custom Notifications in Chicago

In Chicago, the Violence Reduction Strategy (VRS) partnership conducts custom notifications to communicate with group members who seem to be involved in the street situations most productive of violence, such as running beefs or vendettas, and to prevent retaliation after homicides and shootings. The VRS also uses custom notifications when there has been a spike of gun violence in a neighborhood. The partnership began custom notifications in 2013 in the city's volatile West Side and has now expanded their use to many more districts.

In each district, the police commander and VRS staff (representing the community) identify high-risk group members and knock on their doors to deliver a joint message that the community cares about them but the violence must stop, informing them of their risk for prosecution based on criminal history, and explaining their opportunities for community help and support.

A key outcome of this method has been the VRS partners' ability to speak with group members' influentials, such as mothers and other family members. During many of the visits, influentials have been the VRS partners' initial points of contact. The partners anticipate that street groups will receive the antiviolence message when custom notifications use institutional, community, and personal networks to target violence and the people driving it. The response from the community and group members has been overwhelmingly positive.

Superintendent Garry McCarthy is making custom notifications one of the Chicago Police Department's first responses to violence. In early-2014 McCarthy said, "We had a murder last night, and today we're working up all the players from these two or three particular gangs that are involved. We'll be going to their residences and basically doing the same thing you do at the call-in—sitting down with their family members and saying, 'We don't want to see you in a body bag.'"¹⁶

¹⁶ Justin Fenton, "Star Criminologist Hopes to Make Difference in Return to Baltimore," *The Baltimore Sun*, February 15, 2014, http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2014-02-15/news/bs-md-ci-david-kennedy-ceasefire-returns-20140215_1_kennedy-gun-violence-schmoke/3.

may love him, but that friend may still be firmly committed to the street code, the set of norms that mandates violence as a response to disrespect, indifference to prison, and antagonism to police. Family members may also be too distrustful of police to help during custom notifications.

However, an influential can almost always be found. If none can be found among an impact player's closest personal circle, the partnership can explore other connections.

Potential influentials include the following:

- Family members, friends, coaches, barbers, school resource officers
- Street outreach workers
- Members of anti-violence or ex-offender organizations
- Community leaders with ties to the streets, including pastors and members of faith-based organizations
- Anyone the impact player identifies

Key steps for identifying influentials include the following:

- Focus on impact players' direct personal connections.
- Use community knowledge to establish connections.
- Review incarceration, probation, and parole records for details of relatives, girlfriends, friends, etc.
- Review bail or bond sheets for details of individuals who have posted impact players' bail.
- Connect with faith-based organizations, pastors, or other grassroots organizations for individuals with close ties to the streets.

Mobilizing community, social services, and street outreach workers

Custom notifications can employ community representatives, social service providers, and street outreach workers to deliver antiviolence messages on their own or alongside law enforcement. Regular meetings of the GVI partnership can help choose standout figures to deliver notifications. These meetings can also help gather information about impact players and street dynamics.

The community moral voice is central to custom notifications. Representatives from the community can accompany law enforcement as part of notification visits, delivering a

message against violence and offering help. In some cities, community moral voices may be able to deliver their message separately. For example, in Cincinnati, the strength of the Community Police Partnering Center allows community representatives to take the lead in the notification process, speaking to impact players on their own before police, social services, and street outreach workers visit.

Social service providers can join the partners delivering custom notifications to explain the help providers are making available to group members. Social services providers can also play a supporting role in the process by making themselves present in the neighborhood where GVI partners are conducting notifications, especially if that neighborhood is a hot spot for violence. For instance, as part of Cincinnati's home and street visits, providers spent time on the streets of Avondale, speaking to residents and handing out materials about their services.

Street outreach workers can also be a powerful part of custom notifications. Men who have been group-involved or incarcerated in the past occupy a unique position with respect to active group members. These men are frequently able to reach impact players who are not easily located by law enforcement, and their personal histories allow them to talk frankly with active group members about the falsehood of the street code. Often, these men have suffered great loss, have served prison time, and can speak authentically to the fundamental untruth of norms surrounding group violence.

Written products and support materials

Custom notifications often feature documents aimed at reinforcing the GVI message to impact players. Different written products and support materials are effective for different purposes and can include a combination of custom legal letters, federal sentencing guidelines, photos, or files.

A hand-delivered custom legal letter, typed on the police department's letterhead and bearing the police chief's signature, often accompanies a home or street visit, a call-in, or a parole forum. Given to an impact player and his influential, the letter can include personalized information about the impact player's group involvement. This is especially useful after recent violence or before potential retaliation. When drafting the letter, the GVI partnership can use a custom legal assessment to include details of the individual's legal exposure, tailoring a warning to his circumstances. (For examples of custom legal letters, see appendixes A and B.)

Cities also deliver letters to group members already mandated to attend call-ins or parole forums. For instance, High Point partners have experimented with giving call-in candidates a sealed letter as they arrive and telling them not to open it until after the call-in ends. The letter, written on police agency stationery and signed by the chief of police, contains the details of the group members' custom legal assessment. By personalizing the broader message of the call-in, custom notifications make the antiviolence demand more powerful.

Impact players whom a legal assessment has found eligible for federal prosecution on future gun and drug charges may be provided with a copy of the federal sentencing guidelines during the visit. Cincinnati has used this method to deliver legal information and underscore the seriousness of the sanctions an impact player faces.

Cities have also used materials such as photos and files during notifications to reinforce the message visually. For example, in addition to custom legal letters and federal sentencing guidelines, Cincinnati uses a mock "gang book" as part of its custom notification strategy. During a conversation with an impact player, a member of the CIRV law enforcement team displays a folder that includes photos of the targeted individual and associates of his group. This visual prop has proven effective in focusing group members' attention when they are reluctant to listen. Seeing photos of themselves and their associates not only alerts them to the laser-like attention law enforcement is focusing on them but also prompts group members to spread CIRV's message because the photos are concrete evidence that the members will likely share with their groups.

Regardless of which written products and support materials law enforcement delivers, custom notifications usually include information about the help available to group members as well. Whether or not community and social service partners are present, this ensures group members receiving custom notifications know that the GVI partnership is offering to help them connect with services.

Uses for Custom Notifications

Custom notifications serve a variety of purposes, including strengthening the message of the call-in meetings the GVI partnership continues to conduct within the core strategy and addressing issues that call-ins cannot.

Reinforcing call-ins

Custom notifications provide direct communication with hard-to-reach impact players before and after call-ins and sustain the GVI message between call-ins. They let partners visit known group members at home or in the streets and reinforce the community's antiviolence stance.

As part of the core GVI strategy, the partnership determines the group members most at risk of becoming shooters or victims. Whether or not these group members attend a call-in, they can be highlighted for notification to strengthen the GVI message.

Sometimes, impact players are not on probation or parole; thus, the GVI partnership cannot mandate that they attend a call-in. Custom notification is an important tool for circumventing such circumstances so that the partnership can still deliver the GVI message to these group members (or their influentials) and, through them, back to their associates.

In terms of frequency, most cities do not conduct call-ins more than once a quarter. Therefore, the partnership can deliver custom notifications between call-ins to keep the call-in message fresh among street group members on whom the partnership has new intelligence or whom it deems high risk.

Custom notifications are important because often group members lack basic information about their legal history and the potential consequences of violence, gun possession, etc. They have not heard their community directly tell them that the violence must stop. They are not aware of the services available to them. Thus, the GVI partnership can use custom notifications not only to help identify group members who need to hear the call-in message but also to bring the message directly to them, whether or not they attend a call-in.

Quelling beefs and interrupting retaliation

Because the traditional call-in, for all its strengths, is too logistically complicated to organize quickly, it cannot be mobilized in response to rapidly moving street dynamics. For example, when one group has directed violence at another, retaliation is common. Similarly, opposing groups often have longstanding tensions that flare up intermittently; these moments often involve multiple acts of reciprocal/retaliatory violence.

Conversely, custom notifications can be employed quickly and tactically. Because they focus on directly contacting the hard-to-reach group members driving violence, they are useful for defusing potentially violent conflicts between groups at crucial moments.

Responding to intelligence

As with beefs and retaliation scenarios, frontline law enforcement often gains intelligence from group members, community members, confidential informants, street outreach workers, or others who have reason to believe that violence is imminent. In these situations, law enforcement and community members can deliver a notification to either potential shooters or victims, communicating what they have heard and alerting high-risk group members not only of their legal exposure but also of the dangers to their safety. Custom notifications are a prime way to offer help to those who may face grave risks if their involvement in violence continues.

Calming hot spots

Violence frequently presents itself in a particular neighborhood or an even smaller hot spot. At times, serious violence is concentrated within one or a few blocks. Identifying the few impact players who usually drive such violence and addressing them directly with custom notifications can be an effective way to calm the hot spot and surrounding areas.

CIRV's strategy in Avondale illustrates the way custom notifications can work to calm a hot area. The partnership identified the key group members in Avondale and spoke directly with them or their influentials at home or in the streets. The partners demanded the violence stop, explained legal consequences for further violent acts, and discussed the social services available. By focusing their communication on those at a high risk for violent activity, CIRV helped to transmit the message throughout Avondale and quiet the neighborhood.

Likewise, Chicago piloted the use of custom notifications within the city's larger Violence Reduction Strategy (VRS). In the city's West Side, several districts face entrenched patterns of group-related shooting and homicide. The Chicago Police Department and VRS staff (representing the community) now systematically use home visits in the West Side to deliver the antiviolenace message and an offer of support to hot group members and their influentials and to head off "beefs" and retaliation when violence incidents occur.¹¹ The initial response from the community and group members has been overwhelmingly positive.¹²

11. Frank Main, "Cops Knocking on Doors of Potential Shooters, Victims," *Chicago Sun-Times*, July 18, 2013.

12. "Police Gang-Warning Tactic of 'Custom Notifications' is Working," *Chicago Sun-Times*, February 26, 2014.

Delivering Custom Notifications

Custom notifications are a flexible means of communication, and GVI partners can deliver them in a variety of ways that are appropriate to different situations and purposes.

Overall, custom notifications work best when personalized to the degree possible. The job of the custom notification is to address an impact player's current personal circumstances, family history, group involvement, and legal exposure for maximum effect to stop violence. The impact player's personal circumstances may include details such as criminal history, running conflicts with other people, and recent deaths of family members or friends.

Ultimately, direct communication with the group member is the aim, as notifications that avoid this seem not to work as well. For example, mailing a custom notification letter is not advisable because the addresses on record with law enforcement are often inaccurate or out of date, and a letter does not convey the same personal message as a face-to-face meeting.

Locations

GVI partners can use various practical locations when delivering custom notifications.

At call-ins

The GVI partnership can deliver custom notifications to a "captive audience" of group members at call-ins, where the partnership often accompanies the broader antiviolence message with custom legal letters to call-in candidates. This captive audience typically includes group members whose attendance the partnership has mandated through the channels of probation and parole.

In lockup

Notifying high-risk group members or impact players in correctional facilities is an effective way to let them know prior to release that the street scene has changed. For instance, Cincinnati's partnership recognized that 12 percent of the prison population (approximately 300 people) of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction will likely reenter into one of the three neighborhoods with the highest levels of gun

violence and group membership. For several years, Cincinnati's partnership has been delivering direct notifications and custom legal letters to inmates in the Lebanon Correctional Institution and other nearby prisons within six months before reentry.

At home

The partnership can deliver custom notifications with visits to group members at their homes or wherever they stay. Often, group members do not have stable addresses, staying instead with family members, friends, or girlfriends. GVI partners locate them by talking with frontline law enforcement and community members. Home visits are a powerful tool for demonstrating the partnership's interest in finding and speaking personally with an individual, its level of intelligence on the group member's legal circumstances, and its willingness to offer him help.

On street corners

The most reliable place to find group members for notification is often on street corners. If an impact player's residence cannot be located, he can often be found where he does business and spends time. Notifying group members on the streets not only gives them the information they need but also helps deliver a message to their associates and neighbors that the partnership is involved in the streets.

Delivery participants

GVI partners can conduct effective custom notifications with various combinations of participants.

Law enforcement with community partners

Many GVI partnerships make an effort to include both law enforcement and community representatives in their notifications. Typically, law enforcement works with the community to determine which group members to notify. During the notification, each partner takes a portion of the messaging, with law enforcement representatives speaking about potential sanctions and safety risks and with community representatives speaking about the damage violence has done and offering help. This method is useful when partners have time to prepare, and it fosters the greatest demonstration of solidarity around GVI.



Photo: Lisa Ventre/UC

Members of the Cincinnati Initiative to Reduce Violence.

Law enforcement-led

When urgent situations or inflammatory group dynamics arise, it may not be possible to assemble a combined community-law enforcement notification team. Thus, a law enforcement team prepares and delivers the custom notifications on its own, especially when a jurisdiction is responding to a recent incident or retaliation scenario.

Community-led

Community members can lead custom notifications on their own. With strong community organization, leaders may be able to approach group members and deliver a message, with law enforcement visiting separately. Cincinnati's advanced partnership allowed this arrangement. Community-led notifications may be particularly effective in emphasizing that the community itself demands that violence stop.

Influentials

GVI partnerships conduct custom notifications effectively with or without influentials, but influentials offer certain benefits. They may be able to set up a meeting with a group member who is hard to contact. Often it is helpful to have influentials present during a direct notification to an impact player because their solidarity with the GVI partnership

will help reinforce the message. Some cities have delivered notifications simply by communicating with an influential and leaving a letter, and often this alone is enough.

Street outreach workers

Street outreach workers often have special access to group members and provide a crucial bridge between them and the GVI partnership. Because of their past, outreach workers are often best situated to find impact players on the street and intervene quickly to prevent violent incidents. Outreach workers can often deliver custom notifications alone, but they can also do it in sequence with others.

Messaging for speakers

Those delivering custom notifications stress an overarching message that (1) they are part of a citywide effort to keep young men alive and out of prison and the community safe from violence; (2) the community and police care about keeping people alive and out of prison; (3) the community does not tolerate violence, and there will be enhanced consequences for further violence; and (4) support and services are available for those who want them. Each partner involved delivers a specific message.

Law enforcement messaging

Law enforcement delivers a focused legal warning to the group members at the highest risk of becoming shooters or victims of violence. An officer typically speaks about community standards, the details of a person's legal exposure, and the consequences of further violence. This shows impact players, on an individual level, that they are subjects of special law enforcement attention, and it explains why.

During the notification, officers deliver a custom legal letter from the chief of police and address recent violent incidents. If there has been a recent violent incident or intelligence about a conflict, they inform the impact player that law enforcement will not tolerate violent retaliation.

Officers also explain that law enforcement supports the community, often reminding the impact player of the community's antiviolence demands laid out at a prior call-in. They explain that further violence by the impact player will result in enhanced sanctions for his entire group, but officers detail the person's particular vulnerabilities, as determined during the custom legal assessment.

Law enforcement's message may include the following:

- Shooting and killing people is wrong.
- You are on our radar because you have been involved in violent activity.
- Here are the exact consequences if you do not stop immediately.
- We stand with the community and want to keep you safe and out of prison, but we will stop you if you make us.
- If an act of violence makes us come after your group, you will be particularly exposed.

Law enforcement officers deliver the notification impartially, as a “public service announcement.” Ideally, their tone is non-threatening, respectful, and matter of fact. Those receiving notifications will often be group members who are deeply distrustful of law enforcement. Showing them respect and providing useful information will help improve perceptions of police legitimacy for them and their community.

Community messaging

Community leaders underscore the neighborhood's standards against violence and their offer of help for group members who want to change their lives.

The community message relies on members of the community who can approach the impact players and insist that there is right and wrong, that killing is wrong, that the violence must stop, and that help is available to those group members who want it. Often these community members have first-hand experience with the results of violence and can tell impact players about the pain it has caused in their lives.

The community leaders' message may include the following:

- Shooting and killing people is wrong.
- This is how violence has affected my life and the lives of those I love.
- We need the violence to stop.
- We need you alive and out of prison, and we want you to succeed.
- We stand with law enforcement.
- We need this community to flourish, and we want you to be a part of this process, but right now you are standing in the way of it.
- We will support you, and services are available for you to change your life.

Street outreach worker messaging

Street outreach workers are uniquely positioned to engage those at greatest risk of causing or being victims of violence – impact players who have limited connections to traditional institutions such as schools, community centers, social service agencies, or legitimate employment. Outreach workers can be particularly effective at convincing active group members that violent retaliation is not acceptable.

Outreach workers can help debunk the street code that active group members live by. Often, the outreach workers have suffered great loss, have served prison time, and can speak to the fundamental untruth of norms surrounding group violence.

Outreach workers' message centers on shared experience and may include the following:

- + The community demands an end to violence.
- + I changed, so you can too.
- + As someone who has walked in your shoes, I can assure you that the following ideas are empty and untrue and will destroy you and your community:
 - Disrespect requires violence.
 - We're not afraid of death or prison.
 - We handle our own business; we don't involve the police.
 - We've got each other's back; the enemy of my friend is my enemy.
 - We're justified in what we do; history, racism, oppression, and neglect make it right.

As living examples of men who have left the street code behind, they can speak to the pain and destruction that violence has caused in their lives. They provide impact players a visible and vocal alternative to the narratives of respect and autonomy that justify group involvement and violence.

Tracking and documentation

Much as the GVI partnership tracks group members who have attended call-ins, it often organizes a database to track the information the partnership has gathered from delivering custom notifications. This will allow the partners to assess the impact of custom notifications, follow through with sanctions against impact players who are still active, and monitor uptake of social services. The database can include the following:

- + Name of impact player
- + Name of influential
- + Date(s) notified
- + Details of notification delivery participants
 - Law enforcement names
 - Community member names
 - Other parties present (e.g., influentials or street outreach workers)
- + Location of notification
- + Outcomes
 - Was the impact player present?
 - Impact player's response
 - Noteworthy details that will help with future contact
- + Social services uptake
 - What kind?
 - How often?
- + Reoffense
 - Violent
 - Nonviolent
- + Status of impact player's or influentials' continued contact with community members

In Development

Several National Network jurisdictions have developed strategies to operationalize custom notifications within their broader GVI efforts.

Special intelligence unit

The High Point Police Department has established a centralized special intelligence unit (SIU) to institutionalize focused deterrence policing, focusing especially on using intelligence for custom notifications. The High Point SIU places officers from vice, homicide, major crimes, narcotics, crime analysis, and Crime Stoppers—areas normally separated—in one room, allowing the department to speed up information sharing and take rapid action to notify hot group members.

SIU is designed so that High Point law enforcement can mobilize custom notifications quickly when it has intelligence on a particular impact player or a potential incident. The intent is to move from intelligence that a violent situation is brewing to rapid intervention. For example, the unit may get information on a gang beef from overnight intelligence and move to notify both sides the next day.

Social Network Analysis (SNA)

One tool Chicago and other jurisdictions have used to identify impact players is social network analysis (SNA). Yale sociologist Andrew Papachristos has developed a mathematical method to identify the structures of street groups using connections contained within police records of arrests, field stops, and similar data.

SNA recognizes that the overwhelming majority of suspects and victims in homicides and shootings know one another. In fact, as Papachristos has demonstrated, they are often part of a closely linked social network: i.e., shooters and victims tend to be closely linked to many other shooters and victims. Research on these social networks has found that individuals with links to street groups and those closely linked to homicide victims are at elevated risk of becoming shooters or victims themselves.¹³

13. Andrew V. Papachristos and Christopher Wildeman, "Network Exposure and Homicide Victimization in an African American Community," *American Journal of Public Health* 104, no. 1 (January 2014): 143–150.

In Chicago, Papachristos used SNA to help the Chicago Police Department identify group members to notify. Using co-arrest and field stop records, he created graphs of connections between street group members (for an example of an SNA graph, see appendix C). The Chicago Police Department used these graphs to identify “brokers”—people with a profusion of group-related connections—and people closely connected to homicide victims and suspects. The Chicago VRS partners delivered custom notifications to these high-risk group members to give the city’s antiviolence message the greatest reach and to disrupt street group networks.

Conclusion

Custom notifications have great potential to routinize individual communication with street group members within GVI. The method gives National Network jurisdictions a tool to reinforce the message between call-ins, to reach key players, to calm hot areas, to address standing disputes, to prevent retaliation—to respond tomorrow if a shooting happens today. Custom notifications also allow cities to focus on the small number of most active group members and deliver the core elements of GVI: prior warning about heightened consequences for violence, community standards and aspirations, and opportunities for help and support.

The National Network hopes that cities implementing GVI find custom notifications helpful within their broader approach and that cities share what they learn and innovate, contributing to the knowledge of dedicated practitioners around the United States.

Glossary

call-in. A key moment in the GVI process during which a partnership of law enforcement, community members, and social service providers delivers the antiviolence message and an offer of help to group members and, through them, back to their associates. The partnership usually holds a call-in at a place of civic importance, and it ideally lasts about one hour.

call-in candidate. A group member to whom the GVI partnership delivers the antiviolence message and an offer of help at a call-in.

community moral voice. (1) The collective standards of a community affected by violence that are articulated through individuals with moral standing and credibility in the eyes of group members. (2) The selected individuals who, by the virtue of their moral standing, have the community's permission to articulate its standards, aspirations, frustrations, and expectations and who, by the virtue of their life experiences, have the respect of group members.

custom notifications. Individualized, direct communication from the GVI partnership to particular group members, at particular times, for particular reasons, such as calming "beefs," preventing retaliation, and addressing spikes in violence. Custom notifications articulate that group members are important and valued members of the community, give them individualized information about their legal risk, and offer them opportunities for help.

group members. Individuals who participate in an active street group. This guide uses the term group rather than gang because all gangs are groups, but not all groups are gangs. In fact, many groups do not fit the statutory definition of a gang; they may not have a name, common symbols, signs or tags, an identifiable hierarchy, or other shared identifiers. Yet many high-rate offenders associate in groups; therefore, using the term gang limits the scope of GVI.

influential. A person known to have a positive influence in a group member's life.

impact players. A small subset of highly active group members who are particularly meaningful in the dynamics of group violence as shooters or instigators. Impact players typically represent only 10 to 20 percent of overall group members.

social service providers. Those able to offer education, job training and placement, life skills, counseling, mentoring, housing, emergency assistance, and substance abuse treatment.

street outreach workers. Men or women, almost always with their own history of crime-involvement, who can easily connect to the streets and establish relationships with those involved in overt drug markets. They aim to prevent violence, draw group members out of the street life, facilitate access to services, and disrupt norms and narratives that promote drug dealing and violence within their communities.

Appendixes

A. Sample High Point custom legal letter

March 1, 2013

Dear Mr. Doe,

Your previous behavior in gang-related activity has recently come under the scrutiny of the High Point Violent Crime Task Force. Our task force is taking a strong stance against those individuals who commit acts of violence, especially gang-related violence. The High Point Police Department and the High Point Community Against Violence and other partners are working closely to stop violence in any form.

We have researched your individual record, Mr. Doe, and we have determined that if you continue to commit acts of violence, your case will be handled in superior court. We have a commitment from the U.S. Attorney's Office and Guilford County District Attorney's Office that they will prosecute you for that violation to the fullest. If convicted of a violent felony, such as possession of firearm by felon, you would fall into a presumptive range where your minimum sentence could start anywhere from 15 years to life in federal prison. If convicted of a felony in state court, you would fall into a presumptive range where your minimum sentence could start anywhere from nine to 97 months.

Of course, we hope you will follow all the laws of North Carolina, and it is our hope that we will not have to charge you with any crimes. Please be forewarned, Mr. Doe, that you have come onto our radar, and we are watching for any crimes you may commit in the future with a new, particular interest. Gang violence will not be tolerated.

Sincerely,

Chief Marty A. Sumner

B. Sample CIRV custom legal letter

June 24, 2010

«FirstName» «LastName»:

A recent review of your criminal history indicates that you are at risk for federal prosecution should you become involved in any criminal offense involving weapons and/or violence. In addition, you are at risk for mandatory prison time under state law if you are arrested for weapons possession.

A review was recently conducted of **your name and criminal arrest and conviction history**. The Cincinnati Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV) involves a combination of law enforcement resources to reduce violence in our community. This includes the Cincinnati Police Department, Hamilton County Sheriff's Office, Hamilton County Prosecutor's Office, Hamilton County Probation Office, Ohio Adult Parole Authority, and federal law enforcement agencies including the FBI, DEA, ATF, U.S. Marshals Service, and U.S. Attorney's Office.

As a convicted felon, you can be prosecuted in federal court even if you only possess a gun or ammunition, which typically results in a **five-year federal sentence**. Depending on the circumstances, you may also be prosecuted as an armed career criminal, which carries a **15-year minimum federal sentence without hope of parole**.

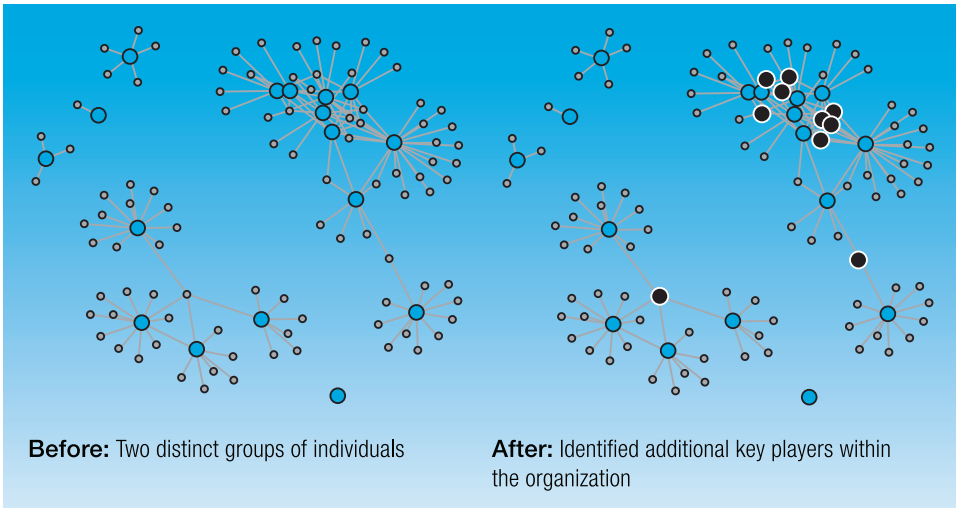
CIRV also has an opportunity for services to assist you in a positive manner. You may call [phone number] at any time to be connected with a CIRV Outreach Street Advocate to assist you in any needed social services, education, counseling, or job training. By simply making that call, you are guaranteed personalized service by a street advocate. Street advocates are not law enforcement employees and function independent of law enforcement under this initiative.

«FirstName» «LastName», this letter is not notification of an impending arrest or investigation. It is intended as notice to you that, because of your criminal history, you are vulnerable to incur significant prison time should you engage in any activity connected to weapons or violence.

Sincerely,

Colonel Thomas H. Streicher, Jr.
Police Chief

C. Sample social network analysis graph



- Individuals identified as Black Souls by CPD officers
- Individuals who appear to have a strong connection in the network

Source: Andrew Papachristos

About the National Network for Safe Communities

The National Network for Safe Communities represents and supports jurisdictions around the country and internationally to apply and advance proven strategies to reduce serious violent crime and to close overt drug markets.

The National Network recognizes that both law enforcement and the community must play a critical role in addressing these problems—but that neither can do it alone. Therefore, its strategies combine the best of law enforcement and community crime prevention approaches to improve public safety dramatically.

Launched as a project of the Center for Crime Prevention and Control at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York in 2009, the National Network currently comprises more than 60 jurisdictions actively implementing and advancing two specific strategies: the Group Violence Intervention (GVI), first implemented as Operation Ceasefire in Boston in the mid-1990s, and the Drug Market Intervention (DMI), also known as the “High Point Model,” after the North Carolina city that pioneered it. These strategies are carefully designed to produce specific results:

- ♦ Reduce serious violence
- ♦ Shut down overt drug markets
- ♦ Reduce arrests and imprisonment
- ♦ Strengthen disadvantaged communities
- ♦ Operate entirely or largely within existing resources

Different jurisdictions use the National Network’s approach under different titles, and yet each is applying GVI principles, contributing to its effectiveness and innovation. Some current marquee efforts that use the GVI framework with technical assistance from National Network include the Chicago Violence Reduction Strategy; Newark Violence Reduction Initiative in New Jersey; Project Longevity, which includes New Haven, Hartford, and Bridgeport, Connecticut; NOLA for Life in New Orleans, Louisiana; and Don’t Shoot Peoria in Illinois.

The National Network is committed to saving lives and saving communities by taking its strategies to a national scale and serving the nation’s most vulnerable areas. The National Network is designed to represent and support its members, offering them technical assistance, recognizing and helping others learn from their work

and innovations, supporting peer exchange and education, conducting research and evaluations, and raising the visibility of their work.

Please visit www.nnscommunities.org for detailed information on the National Network's mission, strategies, research findings, media coverage, events, and membership.

About the COPS Office

The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territory, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing is a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques, to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime.

Rather than simply responding to crimes once they have been committed, community policing concentrates on preventing crime and eliminating the atmosphere of fear it creates. Earning the trust of the community and making those individuals stakeholders in their own safety enables law enforcement to better understand and address both the needs of the community and the factors that contribute to crime.

The COPS Office awards grants to state, local, territory, and tribal law enforcement agencies to hire and train community policing professionals, acquire and deploy cutting-edge crime fighting technologies, and develop and test innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders and all levels of law enforcement. The COPS Office has produced and compiled a broad range of information resources that can help law enforcement better address specific crime and operational issues, and help community leaders better understand how to work cooperatively with their law enforcement agency to reduce crime.

- Since 1994, the COPS Office has invested more than \$14 billion to add community policing officers to the nation's streets, enhance crime fighting technology, support crime prevention initiatives, and provide training and technical assistance to help advance community policing.
- To date, the COPS Office has funded approximately 125,000 additional officers to more than 13,000 of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies across the country in small and large jurisdictions alike.
- Nearly 700,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office-funded training organizations.
- To date, the COPS Office has distributed more than 8.57 million topic-specific publications, training curricula, white papers, and resource CDs.

COPS Office resources, covering a wide breadth of community policing topics—from school and campus safety to gang violence—are available, at no cost, through its online Resource Center at www.cops.usdoj.gov. This easy-to-navigate website is also the grant application portal, providing access to online application forms.

The National Network for Safe Communities' Group Violence Intervention (GVI) has repeatedly demonstrated that serious violence can be reduced when law enforcement, community members, and social service providers join together to engage directly with violent street groups and clearly communicate (1) a credible, moral message against violence; (2) a credible law enforcement message about the group consequences of further violence; and (3) a genuine offer of help for those who want it.

Custom Notifications: Individualized Communication in the Group Violence Intervention provides practical information about "custom notifications," an independent element of GVI that enables quick, tactical, direct communication to particular group members. Custom notifications articulate that group members are valued members of the community, give individualized information about their legal risk, and offer opportunities for help. They effectively interrupt group "beefs," avoid retaliation after incidents, calm outbreaks of violence, and reinforce the GVI message. This publication presents the custom notification process, explains its value within the broader strategy, details its use by several national practitioners, and encourages further development.

This publication is part of an ongoing series by the National Network for Safe Communities about its two core crime reduction strategies: Group Violence Intervention and Drug Market Intervention.



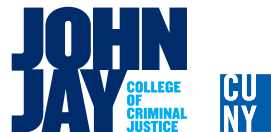
COPS

Community Oriented Policing Services
U.S. Department of Justice

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ISBN: 978-1-932582-93-2
e021411630
Published 2014