



Building Capacity for CBPS Organizations Working to Reduce Violence

*A Guide for Funders, Policymakers
and Practitioners*



“What is CBPS? Community Based Public Safety (CBPS) is a clearly defined strategy to create safety in communities. It is a multipronged, relationship-based model in which residents are employed and trained as public safety professionals to create safety in their own neighborhoods.”

*- Aqeela Sherrills, Executive Director
Community Based Public Safety Collective*

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we can
end gun
violence

Introduction

President Biden announced his Administration's goal to invest \$5 billion over eight years for community-based violence prevention. Already the federal team leading this work is looking at evidence-based programs that use a public health approach to public safety rather than solely relying on traditional law enforcement. Promising results are emerging from cities that have already made the shift to investing in community-based public safety as a complementary strategy to law enforcement. State and local governments are looking at creative ways to redirect funding to support this approach. New York City's Mayor Bill de Blasio has pledged \$10M to expand violence interruption programs in four high crime areas. Newark's Mayor Ras Baraka reallocated 5% of the city's police department budget, totaling almost \$11M, as the city is experiencing record lows in crime and major reforms in policing. This report was prepared with funders and policymakers in mind, as they begin to develop violence prevention strategies and make investments in local community efforts. Within, we seek to answer several questions, including:

- What is "Community Based Public Safety"?
- What is the roadmap to help grassroots organizations build capacity?
- How can funders and policymakers expand and deepen the field without perpetuating the structural inequality that exists in violence impacted communities?

“CBPS is a missing link to building out a new approach to safety.”

This report follows the Collective's national scan of CBPS initiatives across the country. We are leveraging that insight and feedback from leaders across the country to codify professional standards and best practices. We attempted to harness the intellectual capital of veteran violence prevention practitioners across the country. The Collective conducted one-on-one, in depth interviews with 25 experts in CBPS to inform a snapshot of the state of CBPS in America. The Collective then conducted two half-day retreats with additional expert contributors in order to develop the fundamentals discussed below. The findings are born out of their experiences, expertise and commitment to elevate and grow the profession. Together, we aim to protect the integrity of the work and the practitioners; to never lose sight that this work is as much about social justice as it is about fighting crime; and to reframe what it takes to make communities feel safe.

We hope that policymakers, elected officials, law enforcement and funders who would like to support innovative, cost effective public safety strategies, but are not entirely sure how, can learn from this report. We also hope that emerging CBPS organizations and community leaders interested in advancing new or enhancing existing CBPS can use this report as a frame of reference.



Who are we?

The CBPS Collective (“The Collective”) is the outgrowth of input from leaders across the country doing grassroots, community-based violence prevention work. The Collective is the first ever national umbrella network of CBPS organizations and experts in the field. Together, we work to (1) amplify the voices of practitioners of color who have long been doing this work while preserving their leadership role; (2) cultivate a funding community to seed, sustain and scale local CBPS work; and (3) provide local CBPS organizations with capacity building and organizational support that will enable them to make transformational changes in public safety.

The Collective is led by Aqeela Sherrills, a national leader in the violence prevention, and includes a team of professionals with experience in

grassroots community organizing, training and technical assistance, and policy advocacy. Sherrills co-founded the Amer-I-Can Program, at the age of 19, with Football Hall of Fame great Jim Brown. He was instrumental in forging a truce between the Los Angeles Crips and the Bloods in 1992. Sherrills was a Senior Advisor to The Alliance for Safety & Justice, co-founder of the Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice initiative, a national non-profit with many CBPS organizations in its membership. In 2014, at the request of Mayor Baraka, Aqeela founded the city’s community-based violence reduction initiative, the Newark Community Street Team (NCST). With NCST’s boots on the ground approach and collaboration with law enforcement, the City reversed a 50 year trend of increasing violent crime while seeing double digit reductions in homicides.







I. What is Community Based Public Safety?

Community Based Public Safety, or CBPS, is a set of relationship-based, violence prevention and intervention strategies in which community residents are employed and trained as public safety professionals to create safety in their neighborhoods. This “boots on the ground” approach is resident-driven, victim-centered and led by those most impacted by violence. CBPS creates safety in communities without an over-reliance on law enforcement, which traditionally offers one blunt instrument to reduce crime: arrest and incarceration. CBPS compliments traditional public safety without the collateral damage caused by the criminal justice system. In fact,

the criminal justice system and CBPS are most effective when they operate as parallel strategies, leveraging the strengths of both without insisting that they both be integrated. Because too close of a relationship with law enforcement can jeopardize the integrity of CBPS professionals in the eyes of those they serve, it is imperative that legislation and funding mechanisms recognize the independence of CBPS from local law enforcement. CBPS is a public health response to violence, and the community members doing the work on the ground are *public health workers*.



The 6 Core Pillars of CBPS Work

<p>Pillar I</p> 	<p>CBPS redefines public safety.</p> <p>A new definition of public safety centers on community and healing, and promotes self-determination. Residents, in the community, must be a part of the public safety response to make and keep communities safe. The definition for public safety looks different in each community. What transcends place is the need for a deep examination of the root causes of violence and how we must shift how we respond. The criminal justice system alone cannot create public safety. The relationship between CBPS and law enforcement is symbiotic, not in deference to or a part of the other. To be effective both must operate in a coordinated, parallel strategy.</p>
<p>Pillar II</p> 	<p>CBPS is a profession with professional standards.</p> <p>CBPS is a growing field anchored by experts operating with procedures, processes, and protocols. As CBPS organizations grow, they will need standard operating procedures, accountability, ethical standards and ongoing professional development and training.</p>
<p>Pillar III</p> 	<p>CBPS believes violence is a public health issue that must employ community-based strategies.</p> <p>Violence is not an issue of morality that can be solved with punishment; it is a health crisis requiring a reasoned, multifaceted response. A public health response engages those in closest proximity to the issue and equips them with the skills and resources to intervene, prevent and treat issues of violence. Leaders in public health will need to more demonstrably recognize that those impacted by violence must be empowered to develop and implement their own solutions.</p>
<p>Pillar IV</p> 	<p>CBPS seeks to meet the holistic needs of those living in distressed communities.</p> <p>Both perpetrators and victims of violence at some point have been failed by multiple systems throughout their lives, resulting in complex needs. This work must be connected to a broader ecosystem of support services to meet the demands for healing and transformation for those connected to violence.</p>
<p>Pillar V</p> 	<p>CBPS requires meaningful and sustained investment.</p> <p>CBPS leaders are not volunteers, they are professionals. We must raise the profile for these front line, public health professionals and make equal investments in their pay, benefits, wellness, and professional development as with law enforcement professionals. At the same time, proportional levels of investment must be made in the broader ecosystem of support services.</p>
<p>Pillar VI</p> 	<p>CBPS is committed to investing in the healing of its frontline workers as the first step in breaking the cycle of violence in our communities.</p> <p>This work is people powered and people driven. As such, we need to see frontline workers' holistic wellness as a critical element of the work. The lived experiences of CBPS professionals includes exposure to incarceration and proximity to violence, which, in and of itself, produces lasting psychological and emotional wounds. These professionals relive their trauma daily as they share their story as testimonials. They are also likely to live and work in the same communities where they experienced harm. To treat this trauma, healing supports must be built into the organizational culture of CBPS organizations.</p>







II. What is the roadmap for helping grassroots organizations build capacity?

The 4 fundamentals of CBPS organizational capacity



Across the country CBPS work is being led by organizations that have been chronically underfunded, which has hamstrung their efforts to build capacity to deepen their impacts and to scale their efforts. Most CBPS organizations begin with no training in organizational development and have learned and adopted best practices along the way. The 4 fundamentals in this section lay out the foundation for effective CBPS. These elements are intended to serve as guideposts for organizations to assess where they are and set growth targets for where they want

to be. It is unreasonable to expect organizations to have attained these 4 levels of organizational capacity without adequate resources. However, from our national scan of CBPS initiatives across the country, we know that many aspire to achieve this level of operational effectiveness. These fundamentals are intentionally prescriptive in some places and broad in others to allow for program design to embed key practices yet still be adapted to the local community.

Fundamentals	Why This Fundamental	Key Elements
<p>Organizational infrastructure and systems</p> 	<p>CBPS organizations often start as passion projects; however, to position the work for growth and sustainability, key organizational systems and practices must be in place.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational standing (e.g., 501c3, bank account, payroll) • Operating with a clear chain of command • Documented standard operating procedures • Carry liability insurance for the organization and team members • Sustainable funding streams and ongoing fundraising activity • Documented work
<p>Community leadership buy-in and support</p> 	<p>Legitimacy to do the work in the community is critical and serves as the organization's license to operate as a violence interruption organization.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Led and staffed by individuals indigenous to the neighborhood or region • Relationships and respect in the community • Formalized and equitable relationship with law enforcement • Collaboration with social service organizations and employers • Ability to hold themselves and others accountable for the work that is supposed to be happening in impacted communities
<p>Staffing and professional development</p> 	<p>CBPS organizations must commit themselves to continuous growth and improvement and provide ongoing professional development to build the capacity of frontline workers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear job descriptions and organizational chart • Onboarding process for new staff • Standards for staff conduct that are trauma-informed • Professional development or training calendar for all staff • Core set of trainings -- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict mediation • De-escalation training • Trauma-informed care • Community safety planning • Outreach and community engagement • Mentoring and case management • Uniforms for outreach staff to be easily identifiable • Succession planning
<p>Strategies and program implementation</p> 	<p>CBPS employs evidence-based strategies and programming, while piloting innovation to further inform the field.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment of evidence-based programming -- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management, using a mentoring model, for those at greatest risk of becoming a victim or a perpetrator of violence • High-risk intervention to mediate ongoing disputes and prevent retaliatory violence • Safe Passage to schools to reduce school violence and improve attendance • Support for survivors of community violence who are often overlooked by traditional victims services • Case management for intervention and mediation • Client confidentiality guidelines that are aligned with mandated reporting requirements • Familiarity with the basics of the criminal justice system and Know Your Rights • Use of technology solutions to support the work (e.g., record management system, Citizens App)

III. How can funders and policymakers invest in CBPS expansion without perpetuating the structural inequality that exists in violence impacted communities?



“Across the country CBPS work is being led by organizations that have been chronically underfunded...”



A. Recommendations for Evaluating CBPS Funding Requests

Funding CBPS is new for many state and local governments, foundations, and charitable organizations. The Collective recommends engaging local violence prevention leaders to help assess proposals. Their insights, as practitioners, can shed light on the potential for applicants and identify areas where funders can add even more value in building capacity in the field.

We further recommend that Requests for Proposals address the following:

- **Length of time doing CBPS work.** Does the organization have at least a 3-5 year track record of doing violence prevention work in the community.
- **Connections to the community the applicant is proposing to serve.** Are most of the staff leadership from the specific neighborhoods they serve? Being from the same city is not the same as being from the neighborhood. Is the organization rooted within the community? Public safety is created by investing in the people and organizations within the community. Funding should be prioritized for organizations who share this value and have demonstrated their efforts to build capacity within the impacted community.
- **License to operate.** Does this organization have credibility with those most likely to be a victim or perpetrator of violence? What are their staff’s lived experiences? When hiring, how do they ensure that staff have the credibility needed to engage those most likely to be infected by violence? Without credibility among those they serve, the program will not have the anticipated impact.
- **Support from the community.** Who is included, and not included, in their laundry list of support? Is there evidence that they have inroads with smaller, more grassroots organizations and groups within a community?



- **Work with impacted people.** Is the organization serving people connected to violence or the drug trade? How do they make contact with the people they serve? Do they offer flexibility, patience, and persistence when serving participants?
- **Training.** What training have they completed? What training are they seeking? See *minimum training suggestions listed in the Fundamentals section.*
- **Relationship with law enforcement.** While CBPS should not operate as part of a law enforcement agency or in deference to it, the relationship between CBPS and law enforcement should be defined. Do they have any coordination with law enforcement? Have they established guidelines for cooperation? Even if not successful, have they tried? What did they learn as a part of the process? Is there a plan for establishing an effective working relationship? (Note: Many law enforcement agencies are hostile to CBPS or insist on deference and CBPS organizations should not be penalized for not having a relationship with law enforcement if this is the case.)
- **Realistic and attainable casework goals.** Are the goals focused on immediate goals such as harm reduction and keeping participants from being connected to gun violence or experiencing overdose? Or, are the goals focused too many steps into the future such as proposing to enroll participants in college or achieve sobriety? Is the program requesting funds to address the holistic needs of participants?
- **Core roles for effective CBPS.** Below are the boots on the ground positions needed to do this work effectively. Are they represented in the staffing for groups that suggest they are doing CBPS? While these roles may have different names, community to community, these core roles are essentially performing the same functions.

Roles for Effective CBPS

Position	Description	Other Names
Violence Interrupter	Professionally trained individual who responds to or intervenes in social group/gang crisis and aftermath. Possesses the capability to mediate conflicts, prevent retaliatory shootings and handle rumor control.	Community (Gang) Interventionist
High-risk Interventionist	Specially trained and certified person who provides high level crisis response to a variety of situations causing trauma in a community. Responds when immediate response is necessary.	Crisis Response Team
Outreach Worker	Connects to hard-to-reach members of the community and provides services outside the normal reach to individuals, liaisons between the field of work being represented and the community, ability to identify and target populations in need, linkage and short-term stabilization, bringing education and awareness to their service area, provide service referrals.	Case Manager Life Coach
Community Navigator	Practitioner trained in multiple disciplines who works in coordination with human services, public health and public safety providers.	Social Worker
Community Health Worker	Specially trained interventionist who responds to violence prone individuals in a hospital setting. Connects individuals with services and mentoring needed to prevent additional violence.	Hospital-based Violence Interventionist
License to Operate	Community leaders with connection and access needed for violence prevention and intervention, often referred to as LTOs. This person may be a freelancer, not formally connected to any organization but available to assist. CBPS organizations typically have relationships with numerous LTOs.	Credible Messengers





“...it would be an injustice to bypass the existing practitioners who have been doing this work without adequate compensation for decades.”

B. Recommendations on how to avoid perpetuating the structural inequality that exists in violence impacted communities

CBPS organizations often need start-up assistance with expenses that funders do not allow. The Collective recommends funders interested in supporting CBPS review their rules to ensure that they are allowing as much flexibility as possible to these organizations that have typically been prevented from accessing funding. The Collective also recommends that funders require MOUs that have clearly defined roles and that funders vet these MOUs for funding equity. For example, if a CBPS organization has an MOU with a hospital, is the CBPS organization receiving a fair and equitable portion of the funding?

As philanthropy and the public sector increase investment in CBPS, it would be an injustice to bypass the existing practitioners who have been doing this work without adequate compensation for decades. Equally important, however, is that if existing practitioners are bypassed, the work will be compromised because no one else has the expertise. Investments must have an intentional focus on including smaller organizations. Many smaller organizations have not been able to apply for funding because many grants operate on reimbursement or require that an organization has 3 months of operating expenses secured up front. These requirements perpetuate racial injustice as the smaller organizations of color are not able to apply and large institutions can, often by appropriating the ideas of the smaller organizations. Smaller CBPS organizations need access to up front cash such as no interest loans; letters committing to provide a cost share if the grant is awarded; and grants and contracts that provide the first quarter of funding up front.



Conclusion: What's next

CBPS practitioners have been doing the near impossible: reducing violence and meeting human needs of people engaged in violence with minimal resources. Interviews with leaders and practitioners in the field revealed that CBPS is significantly under-resourced, which is detrimental to both the potential of the work and to the practitioners themselves. Currently, the profession requires a level of selflessness not required in most occupations. It can also require a second source of income. Many organization directors have tremendous longevity in their roles at great personal sacrifice. They stay committed to the work because of the personal harm they have experienced (and often caused) and an irrepressible drive to prevent others from experiencing the same. However, under-resourcing undermines CBPS's potential to improve public safety. It is time to make a meaningful investment in CBPS to adequately finance the existing work, bringing successful models to scale. The Collective and other allies advocate for funding for CBPS that is on par with law enforcement.

Across the board, CBPS organizations share a dire need for basic organizational infrastructure. Without support, frontline leaders are so consumed in their work that they do not prioritize building capacity and administrative systems. There is always an external pressing need, and it is often a matter of life or death. This lack of organizational capacity has prevented CBPS organizations from moving up the continuum from emerging to scaling. Without an immediate investment to build capacity of CBPS organizations, others such as consultants, academics and government employees, who are more remote from the work but better resourced to respond to Requests for Proposals, will wind up perpetuating the structural inequality that exists in violence impacted communities.

The Collective is raising capital to provide grants to help CBPS organizations rapidly fill the organizational gaps in their internal systems today that will be needed to access the billions in new public funding being released over the next 8 years. Readyng CBPS organizations to successfully pursue this major infusion of funding creates a permanent seat for CBPS at the public safety table.



“It is time to make a meaningful investment in CBPS to adequately finance the existing work, bringing successful models to scale.”





The Collective plans to convene this national network regularly for peer learning exchanges, provide ongoing training and technical assistance, and provide resources for evaluation, data collection and other infrastructure building needs.

Finally, CBPS cannot flourish without dramatically building up the talent pool. Many CBPS organizational leaders are at retirement age and ready to transition into national training roles to pass on their expertise to the next generation. CBPS will engage these veteran practitioners as Training and Technical Assistance (TTA) providers. The Collective will also explore the feasibility of creating an accreditation program to build the next generation of CBPS leaders and organizations.

For a copy of the National Scan of CBPS Organizations report, please visit our website at cbpscollective.org.



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