

# **A TIME FOR EXPANSION IN LA COUNTY'S COMMUNITY-BASED SAFETY INFRASTRUCTURE:**

**Community Virtual Dialogue Series Summary Report and  
Recommendations**

September 2021



## **Executive Summary:**

Community violence is a growing epidemic and public safety crisis, impacting the most underserved and under-resourced communities across LA County. Though there has been a long history of violence prevention and intervention work in the Los Angeles region led by community-based organizations and leaders, the recent surge in community violence necessitates a more robust strategy and infrastructure to facilitate a long-term, sustainable solution to community violence. According to reports from Chief Moore of the Los Angeles Police Department, “Los Angeles has experienced a 50% increase in shooting victims this year compared to the same period last year. A total of 651 people have been shot to date (July 2021) and the city is averaging 27 shooting victims per week. Overall, violent crime has increased by 4.3%.<sup>1</sup>” These numbers, though daunting, do not account for the additional surge in violence in Los Angeles County and unincorporated areas of Los Angeles.

Alongside the growing surge in community violence, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated the social, economic, and systemic disparities in low-income communities of color. People who live in areas with high rates of poverty have three times the rate of deaths for COVID-19: 16.9 per 100,000 people, compared with 5.5 per 100,000 in communities with low rates of poverty<sup>2</sup>. The need to prioritize public safety amidst the pandemic has removed vital violence prevention programs further exacerbating the public safety crisis. A recent LA Times article states, “Programs for kids like Summer Night Lights were canceled. Interventionists were blocked from going to the bedside of shooting victims. Recreational programs were curtailed. Programs aimed at getting people out of gangs, or resettled after stints in prison, were hampered. People who had relied on such programs were driven into a ‘spiral of despair’ by their collapse, which precipitated violence that will only stop once those programs are back in place.<sup>3</sup>”

Though the recent surge in violence and the COVID-19 pandemic are current conditions of crisis across Los Angeles County, low-income, underserved communities have often existed at the intersections of community violence and systems neglect; many of these communities have had to navigate community needs solely with the provision of community support and resources, leaving many of these communities under-resourced. Underserved communities are not just communities that lack public

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<sup>1</sup> <https://abc7.com/los-angeles-shootings-crime-la-lapd/10822184/>

<sup>2</sup> IMPLEMENTING THE OFFICE OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION'S STRATEGIC PLAN AND CREATING A COORDINATED COMMUNITY-BASED CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM (ITEM 11, BOARD AGENDA OF SEPTEMBER 29, 2020), LA County OVP, Dr. Barbara Ferrer, pg. 2

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-08-13/la-homicides-since-covid-take-mostly-black-latino-victims>

programs and resources, such as unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County. They are also marginalized communities that are unseen, inaccessible, and forgotten. These communities have navigated community violence, law enforcement violence, systemic racism, and poverty, often solely relying on the assistance and support of local community-based organizations and leaders. Credible messengers, those identified by community residents as trusted advocates and community leaders, have been integral in addressing the needs of low-income communities across Los Angeles County. Historically, many of these credible messengers have focused efforts on addressing the history of gang violence in low-income communities; however, with the recent COVID-19 pandemic, many have expanded their efforts to address the public health needs of their community as well. Their recent outreach and support, as well as on-going COVID-19 data collected at the city and county level, have highlighted the current need to provide services at the intersection of public health and public safety; this approach is a necessary and innovative pathway to addressing the growing concerns impacting Los Angeles low-income communities, so long as it continues to prioritize and uplift the role and leadership of credible messengers. “Community leaders, intervention workers and experts say they are dismayed by the violence and its impact on community members and blame the pandemic for much of it. They also said they want to see a balanced approach to addressing it that prioritizes the restoration of community-based support and safety programs rather than a return to outdated, aggressive policing.”<sup>4</sup>

The LA County Office of Violence Prevention was established by the Board of Supervisors in 2019 with the goal of strengthening collaboration and coordination to address the root causes of multiple forms of violence, through a public health lens. Through OVP’s Community Partnership Council, Regional Violence Prevention Coalitions, the Trauma Prevention Initiative, Community Action for Peace networks, credible messengers and CBOs have been uplifted as thought-leaders in developing a county-wide public safety strategy. Though effective, the time to expand this approach is now. The County must broaden its lens to see the crises facing low-income communities as both a public health and public safety issue that necessitate on-going and sustainable funding and support. LA County OVP has acknowledged this need, and in collaboration with Urban Peace Institute, have developed a plan to expand their violence prevention strategy and develop a county-wide infrastructure that prioritizes credible messengers and leaders across of the fields of both public safety and health in developing a system of care to combat community violence and public health disparities.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-08-13/la-homicides-since-covid-take-mostly-black-latino-victims>

Based on convenings and virtual dialogues, this report outlines recommendations provided by community leaders, CBOs, credible messengers, and funders to build out a more robust violence prevention infrastructure that is effective, innovative, sustainable, and expansive.

Recommendations were organized in the following tiers:

### **#1. County Funding, Contracts and Fiscal Sponsorships**

***Prioritize direct, discretionary funding to agencies that allow for organizations to grow their capacity and gain access to both systems and private sustainable funding.***

These recommendations highlight ways to reconstruct County contracts and funding in ways that are equitable.

### **#2. Capacity Building, Infrastructure and Technical Assistance**

***Prioritize programming that allow for organizations to grow their infrastructures and provide additional support to their workforce and communities.***

These recommendations highlight initiatives that will aid agencies in expanding their administrative functions and support services they provide to community.

### **#3. Professionalization and Workforce Development**

***Grow and invest in a workforce of systems-impacted service providers as thought leaders in the LA County's strategy to address community-based violence.***

These recommendations outline programs and models that build the professionalization of the industry, while expanding the job pipelines for individuals with lived experience into sectors administered by the County.

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## Introduction:

The crisis of community violence has been an epidemic in communities across LA County since the 1990's with the explosion of the War on Drugs. The War on Drugs was a political strategy centered on criminalizing poverty and addiction, primarily in low-income communities of color. This criminalization and over-policing heightened community tensions with law enforcement, exacerbated existing community violence and aided in the justification of removal of resources from the most marginalized and underserved communities in Los Angeles. To address the crisis of violence in their communities, a workforce of community-based intervention and prevention workers, many of whom were systems-impacted individuals, utilized their community networks to begin addressing the pressing issues of community violence. According to Miles Corwin, LA Times freelancer, violent crime decreased from “In both 1992 and 1993...more than a thousand homicides in the city, to 260 [in 2015].<sup>5</sup>” The community-based response to violent crime created the framework for the community-based violence reduction strategies currently being implemented in cities across America. The decrease in homicides, proved that the method worked; Community-based public safety is a viable and effective method to address community violence.

In 2020, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, communities across America began to see a rise in community violence due to increasing unemployment, poverty, tensions with law-enforcement and the death of George Floyd. According to Giffords Law Center, “During the past year, cities across the country have experienced a historic spike in gun homicides. In 2020, America suffered the largest single-year increase of homicides on record.<sup>6</sup>” For Los Angeles, the city and county experienced an unprecedented increase in homicides; “According to the Sheriff’s Department, homicides increased 67% in the first half of 2021 compared to 2019 (increasing from 76 to 127 homicides). Additionally, gun-related aggravated assaults increased 85% during these same time periods (increasing from 507 to 940).”

Amidst the increasing violence and protests, communities across America were demanding that politicians and systems provide a community-based alternative to law enforcement. In response to the growing epidemic of community gun violence, the Biden Administration, through American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding, “has encouraged states to draw on the \$350 billion in assistance included in the American Rescue Plan to address violent crime. A memo to state and local officials from the White House advised them to invest in ‘evidence-based community violence interventions’ and pointed to several cities that

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.zocalopublicsquare.org/2015/12/02/last-year-there-were-800-fewer-homicides-in-l-a-than-in-1992/chronicles/who-we-were/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://giffords.org/press-release/2021/03/biden-proposes-5-billion-for-community-violence-intervention-jobs-plan/>

have already earmarked some of their share of the aid for violence interruption programs, [including Los Angeles, Atlanta, and Chicago].<sup>7</sup>” This investment is unprecedented in its scope and directives for addressing gun violence; this memo places community violence within the parameters of a public health crisis, which opens additional avenues for funding and innovation from states, counties and cities in addressing the issue of community violence. According to a report by NBC correspondent, Jon Schuppe, “It pledges \$5 billion over eight years for “evidence based” community violence-prevention programs — or programs that treat gun violence as a public health crisis, rooted in economic insecurity and chronic trauma, rather than as a problem best solved by law enforcement. The projects would target economically distressed neighborhoods where Black and Latino people are disproportionately affected by gun violence.<sup>8</sup>”

Urban Peace Institute, in alignment with the Biden Administration memo, believes that community violence is not just a public safety crisis but also a public health crisis and it necessitates strategies, centered around community-based violence intervention, that employ the existing community ecosystem of safety alongside law enforcement. If community violence is a public safety crisis derived from 10 root causes, “1) Family Isolation and Lack of Access to Support Services 2) Lack of Community Cohesion to Improve Public Safety 3) Lack of Comprehensive Primary Prevention Structure 4) Early Academic Failure and Lack of School Attachment 5) Lack of Effective Reentry Strategies 6) Inadequate Government Coordination and Accountability 7) Poor Access to Health Care Services 8) Normalization of Violence 9) Lack of Community Policing Strategies that build Public Trust 10) Lack of Economic Investment,<sup>9</sup>” then the solution to decrease the violence must address the root causes. Though law enforcement is a component of the strategy, it is not the sole or primary solution. Community violence must be addressed by community solutions; For UPI, the solution to community based violence is a community ecosystem, including, “Gang Intervention Outreach, Prevention Services, Law Enforcement, Smart Justice, and Reentry and Transitional Services.<sup>10</sup>” Community Violence Intervention is an important and foundational component to a robust, county-wide community-based safety strategy and in order to address the growing epidemic of gun violence, LA County must target direct and sustainable investments into a community-based safety ecosystem that prioritizes intervention services and community members with lived experience. This ecosystem utilizes existing networks of community-

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<sup>7</sup> <https://wcti12.com/news/nation-world/biden-seeks-more-investment-in-community-based-violence-prevention-programs>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/biden-wants-give-anti-violence-groups-5-billion-here-s-n1263990>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.urbanpeaceinstitute.org/new-our-approach-page>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.urbanpeaceinstitute.org/new-our-approach-page>

based interventionists and organizations to assess, identify and distribute effective resources to community in an effort to mitigate the damaging effects of violence and COVID-19 on low-income communities of color.

ARP funds are an unprecedented direct federal investment into evidence-based solutions to community violence and LA County has the opportunity to earmark those funds to address the crisis creatively and sustainably in long-term solutions. Our capacity to respond to this moment with innovative, impactful, and community-based solutions will set the precedent across the country of what a system that prioritizes community well-being and community care looks like. A return to historical models of addressing community violence, namely increased investment in law enforcement, will simply repeat the mistakes and outcomes history has already shown us: communities continuing to be riddled with increased gun violence, increased law enforcement presence and tension, and under-resourced marginalized communities.

#### Background:

In 2018, the Board of Supervisors approved the motion, "Addressing the Epidemic of Gun Violence in Our Communities" (Supervisors Kuehl and Ridley-Thomas, March 13, 2018), to create an integrated Countywide Violence Prevention Initiative<sup>11</sup>. This motion called for the creation of the Office of Violence Prevention within the Department of Public Health with the mission of reducing community-based violence through collaboration with credible messengers, community members, CBOs, and law enforcement. The Board of Supervisors established OVP to assure a coordinated plan based on a public health approach to prevention of violence and promotion of healing<sup>12</sup>.

Collaborations between health systems and CBOs is an innovative and increasingly common method of addressing the gaps in public health services in high-risk underserved communities. OVP, in collaboration with many community-based organizations, County departments and other stakeholders, published its first Strategic Plan outlining the background, data, vision, and mission of the County's violence prevention work<sup>13</sup>; OVP's strategic plan prioritizes work around 6 areas: support of regional violence prevention leadership, increased access to data and supporting evaluation, implementing a

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<sup>11</sup> IMPLEMENTING THE OFFICE OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION'S STRATEGIC PLAN AND CREATING A COORDINATED COMMUNITY-BASED CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM (ITEM 11, BOARD AGENDA OF SEPTEMBER 29, 2020), LA County OVP, Dr. Barbara Ferrer, pg. 1

<sup>12</sup> IMPLEMENTING THE OFFICE OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION'S STRATEGIC PLAN AND CREATING A COORDINATED COMMUNITY-BASED CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM (ITEM 11, BOARD AGENDA OF SEPTEMBER 29, 2020), LA County OVP, Dr. Barbara Ferrer, pg. 2

<sup>13</sup> IMPLEMENTING THE OFFICE OF VIOLENCE PREVENTIONS STRATEGIC PLAN AND CREATING A COORDINATED COMMUNITY-BASED CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM

Crisis Response Violence Intervention Program, expanding the Trauma Prevention Initiative, building trauma-informed systems of care, and shifting the public narrative. Through assessments conducted at the community level, OVP identified areas of highest need in LA County for violence intervention and prevention services, including but not limited to Willowbrook, Unincorporated Compton, Westmont-West Athens, East LA, Pomona, Puente Valley and the Antelope Valley.

The Trauma Prevention Initiative (TPI) is a comprehensive, place-based approach to community violence. TPI invests in community safety solutions that center survivors, employ peer specialists, and engage community members in decision-making, and collaborates across county initiatives to align resources in communities. TPI began in 2016 to reduce the disproportionate impact of violence and trauma among Black and Latinx communities of South Los Angeles. Recognizing the need to invest in prevention and reduce the burden on the trauma hospital system, the county allocated ongoing Measure B funding in the amount of \$2M annually to Public Health to implement TPI. TPI invests in three key areas: 1) Intervention, using a peer approach to break the cycle of violence in hospital and community settings; 2) Prevention infrastructure, leveraging Parks After Dark (PAD) programming, facilitating community dialogue and decision making, and funding community identified strategies; and 3) Capacity building, providing technical assistance for grassroots organizations and multidisciplinary training opportunities.

With an initial earmark of \$6,000,000 in 2019, LA County OVP developed a strategic plan that supports community-based public safety strategy that will identify and support credible messengers and violence prevention leaders on the ground, create SPA-level Regional Violence Prevention Coalitions as community member hubs, and target capacity-building support to CBOs providing services in the most underserved communities. LA County OVP, to date, has built infrastructure in the County for community-driven safety strategy via TPI by funding CBOs, implemented a capacity-building and technical assistance program. TPI's Community Action for Peace Networks in Westmont West Athens and Willowbrook bring together residents to develop solutions for their community, with credible messengers serving in a leadership role. TPI works with county departments to align resources in TPI communities and build infrastructure to support community-driven public safety. This includes working with the Sheriff's Department and Parks and Recreation to develop protocols for incident response and safe passages in county's unincorporated communities and creating tables to problem solve community safety. In response to a February 2021 Board Motion to expand TPI to more communities countywide, OVP has hosted listening sessions and focus groups to gather community feedback and insight.

While the county has made initial investments into this work, there is often limited resources and evidence on how to sustain, develop and manage these partnerships. There have been limitations to expansion and implementation of OVP's strategic plan: limited funding, the COVID-19 pandemic, and surges in community violence. In response to the continued crisis of community violence and public health disparities, OVP has developed an on-going workplan to expand on the initial strategic plan and leverage community leaders to develop a robust county-wide public safety infrastructure. The goal of the infrastructure will be to further expand funding opportunities for CBOs, uplift Intervention leadership, grow capacity-building and technical assistance support for agencies and facilitate policy and systems changes that address community concerns and allow easier and more direct access to needed resources.

### Methodology:

UPI partnered with OVP as a consultant to develop recommendations for the expansion and enhancement of TPI community safety strategies in early 2021. UPI began this process by assembling a County Violence Intervention Steering Committee and hosting a series of Virtual Dialogue Convenings from March 2021 to June 2021. Using stakeholder engaged principles and the Virtual Dialogue Convening Assessment, we conducted focus group based, in-depth semi-structured interviews and brief qualitative surveys with 59 key experts from 53 key CBOs working with LA County OVP. The LA County Violence Intervention Steering Committee, consisting of 14 Intervention experts and agencies with expertise in community violence and gender based violence, was tasked with developing the Virtual Dialogue Convening series, creating the CBO participant list for the Virtual Dialogue series, facilitating the Virtual Dialogue Convenings breakout sessions, expanding community recommendations and developing a long-term strategic collaboration plan between LA County OVP and the Violence Intervention Steering Committee. With the support of LA County OVP, UPI hosted 3 Virtual Dialogue Convenings and 6 Steering Committee meetings that prioritized gathering qualitative data from community leaders, CBOs, Violence Intervention and Prevention, and funders on best practices, challenges, gaps, and recommendations for the LA County OVP Violence Prevention Strategy. The participants and organizations participating in the Los Angeles County Violence Intervention Steering Committee are as follows:

<b><u>NAME</u></b>	<b><u>ORGANIZATION</u></b>
Danny Zamora	Southern California Crossroads
Claudia Bracho	HELPER Foundation
Alfred Lomas	Inner City Visions
Reynaldo Reaser	Reclaiming America’s Communities Through Empowerment
Ben Owens	Detours Mentoring Group
Kevin Orange	Advocates for Peace and Urban Unity
Jerald Cavitt	Chapter TWO
Skipp Townsend	2 <sup>nd</sup> Call
LaNaisha Edwards	Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice
Kelli Dillon	Back to the Basics Community Empowerment
Andre Christian	Watts Life United
Johnny Torres	Soledad Enrichment Action
Karen Carter	Urban Peace Institute

Table 1: LA Violence Intervention Steering Committee Participation

The Virtual Dialogue Convenings were a series of focus group feedback sessions with CBOs, community leaders, Violence Intervention and Prevention agencies and funders to discuss and provide recommendations to LA County OVP on best practices, challenges, and gaps in accessing County contracts. The three topics were 1) County Funding, Contracts & Fiscal Sponsorships; 2) Capacity Building & Technical Assistance and; 3) Professionalization & Workforce Development. Steering committee members hosted breakout sessions with questions pertaining to each topic. Each Convening consisted of a presentation from LA County OVP highlighting their current on-going initiatives as well as presentations from CBOs and agencies, such as Urban Peace Institute and the Center for Non-Profit Management. At the conclusion of the presentations, attendees would participate in breakout sessions, facilitated by Steering Committee members, where dialogue is focused on identifying community feedback and recommendations. The data collected from the Virtual Dialogue Convenings is qualitative data, as it depends primarily on anecdotes, focus group feedback and surveys as collection tools. Each breakout session was recorded and note takers were present to ensure data was accurately captured. Convenings were conducted through Zoom Video Conferencing and all breakout rooms were held in English. A survey was provided at the end of each convening to all participants to provide additional feedback as needed.

<b>No.</b>	<b>Convenings in 2021</b>	<b>Participants</b>
1	County Funding, Contracts & Fiscal Sponsorships April 29, 2021	N=59
2	Capacity Building, Infrastructure & Technical Assistance, May 27, 2021	N=59
3	Professionalization & Workforce Development, June 24, 2021	N=51

Table 2: Virtual Dialogue Convening Participation

There were challenges to effectively collecting data and community feedback. Due to the Virtual Dialogue Convening Series being virtual, survey evaluations were sent to participants digitally after the convenings. The digital survey made it difficult to ensure that all participants were completing the surveys and returning them to us. Out of 59 participants, one-third completed the surveys. This skewed the results of the data collected through the surveys. Although the data included in this report is valuable and provides a framework within which it is possible to build out a more effective and supportive infrastructure for public safety and health, the data does not include the total experience and feedback from community leaders, agencies, and CBOs and is limited by convening participation and engagement.

(Attached in Appendix A are the Virtual Dialogue Questions for Convenings 1-3.)

**Virtual Dialogue Analysis:**

Over the duration of the Virtual Dialogue series and Steering Committee convenings, there were consistent themes and concerns that were presented in community feedback. Many community member recommendations centered around creating a county-wide infrastructure that prioritized community leaders and systems of support as the most viable and effective method of addressing community needs. Feedback centered around 6 major themes: 1. Sustainable systemic investment into community 2. LA County & LA city collaboration 3. County funded capacity building initiatives 4. County contracts restructuring 5. Robust and diverse funding structures 6. Violence Prevention and Intervention efforts that center systems impacted individuals with lived experience as leaders.

**1. Systemic investment into existing community organizations:**

Many participants highlighted the existing community networks and infrastructure in place to address community needs. In communities across LA County, there are non-profits organizations, agencies and individual community members currently providing services in the areas of Violence Intervention, Violence Prevention, Youth Development, Gender Specific Services, and Arts and Mental Health. These organizations are uniquely positioned to address the racial/ethnic, socio-economic, immigrant status, geographic, and other specific needs of their communities. Participants explained that many of these agencies operate out of personal budgets that are limited and make it difficult to provide the breadth of services necessary to fully address community needs. These organizations not only work to provide services to community, but many of these organizations serve as the only viable employment opportunities for systems-impacted individuals and those who were previously incarcerated. Due to the size of their budgets, they are often considered small organizations and lack the infrastructure to apply for larger grants or County contracts. These barriers to funding make it difficult for them to grow their agencies and develop the needed administrative functions necessary to manage larger grants properly. Direct investment into smaller on the ground CBOs will support the already robust community-based ecosystem and ensure that funds are not being used inefficiently and with those agencies most closely connected to communities.

*“We are here, and we are providing services, but we don’t have a county contract. We’ve tried to apply many times and there were always obstacles.”*

*-Community-Based Organization*

Participants stressed the need for the County to fully invest in existing community providers before issuing contracts with new agencies interested in providing services outside of or not based in that community.

## **2. LA County and LA City collaboration:**

*“We are working on contracts and not being paid. Right now, we are being paid on a GRYD contract and with the contract, we are fully funded by GRYD, and we cannot be on another contract. So, we don’t get paid in our work with the County. We work for free.”*

*-Community-Based Organization*

LA County is a large municipality that encompasses within its borders many cities with their own systems in place to support organizations and address community violence, the largest being LA city and

the Mayor's GRYD office. The breadth of strategies in place makes it difficult to streamline an effective and comprehensive approach to addressing community violence and can leave agencies struggling to manage fulfilling requirements for both city and county contracts. In addition to diverse strategies there are at times competing deliverables and contract requirements that exclude agencies from applying to multiple contracts, which can limit the amount of funding that they have access to. To keep their agencies operational, many leaders spoke of taking on contracts that allow for their workforce to be paid and for them to provide needed resources to their community, while they themselves were unpaid for managing the work of others. By coordinating systems to be complimentary, agencies can provide services and use flexible funding from both cities and counties to support their communities. This also allows the County to use their funding to bolster and support existing efforts in the most impactful, innovative, and effective way.

### **3. County funded Capacity building Initiatives:**

In current County contracts, agencies are paid based on deliverables, a series of outcomes that they are expected to fulfill by the end of the contract. As previously discussed, many agencies lack the administrative functions, training and technical assistance support, health and general liability insurance and benefits that will ensure organizational growth and sustainability. Participants discussed the difficulties with providing community resources, managing a workforce, and fulfilling contractual obligations without the administrative mechanisms in place to support sustainable organizational growth. Without additional funding and support, their efforts are focused solely on ensuring contract compliance with no additional resources available to ensure that the agencies are growing in their ability to provide additional resources to community. Also, without capacity-building, agencies are limited in the funding that they can gain access to, which limits the resources they can provide to their workforce and to community. Participants spoke of having employees who are overworked due to both low wages and an inability to hire additional workers. Deliverable-based pay does not account for necessary investment in growth and capacity building for agencies, and additional initiatives must be included in contracts that allow agencies to utilize county-funding to support their capacity building efforts.

*"I'm working on a budget right now for \$250,000. I didn't know how to create the budget, but OVP has been working with me; they've been helping me along the way. I don't really know how to fill out all of the paperwork for the grants, but OVP has been real helpful. This is the kind of help we need."*

*-Community-Based Organization*

Participants discussed a need for County funded capacity building programs; these programs can be separate initiatives as well as deliverables built into county contracts that allow for agencies to utilize portions of county funding to build organizational and professional capacity. According to the study *Strategies for Community-Based Organization Capacity Building: Planning on a Shoestring Budget*, “community-based organizations are stretched for time, staffing, and funding, and the added obligation of regularly performing management planning tools, such as strategic planning, needs assessments, program evaluations, or market demand forecasting, strain limited resources.<sup>14</sup>” Capacity-building initiatives enable them to be adaptable and responsive to the changing needs of their communities. These capacity building initiatives will also allow agencies to fulfill contracts and potentially qualify for larger contracts with the county and other funders in the future.

**4. Restructuring of County contracts:**

With current County contracts, there are many barriers to small CBOs gaining access to County funding, the most pressing being high insurance premium requirements, a lack of reimbursement-based advanced funding, extensive administrative requirements, involved application processes and a lack of clear payment schedules. Current County contracts have inherent bias in their processes that privilege organizations that have full administrative faculties and funding reserves; many CBOs do not have these supports in place and are therefore excluded from County funding long before engaging the contract application process.

*“I remember one contract we had with the County, they didn’t pay us for 8 months. We went 8 months without pay. I don’t know how we kept the lights on. That can’t happen again. We can’t afford to go that long without pay.”*

*-Community-Based Organization*

Many participants cited the County contract process as a difficult process to engage in due to their limited access to resources. Finding ways to build in processes that prioritize smaller CBOs in the county contract offerings will ensure that the most marginalized communities receive access to services and the

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<sup>14</sup>[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/8093672\\_Strategies\\_for\\_CommunityBased\\_Organization\\_Capacity\\_Building\\_Planning\\_on\\_a\\_Shoestring\\_Budget](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/8093672_Strategies_for_CommunityBased_Organization_Capacity_Building_Planning_on_a_Shoestring_Budget)

most under-resourced agencies are given sustainable and viable avenues to continue providing services to their communities.

#### **5. Robust and Diverse Funding Structures:**

One of the major themes that continued to resurface throughout the Virtual Dialogue series was the necessity of funding for on the ground CBOs. On-going, sustainable funding for small community-based organizations was highlighted as the primary need in developing a county-wide system for violence prevention and reduction. Currently, for many agencies, funding is often limited to small deliverables-based contracts with LA city, county, or state departments. This funding is often very restrictive in scope and function and many agencies are unable to provide the breadth of support that they would like to community. Participants cited needing multiple funding sources, one of which being discretionary, in order to effectively provide services to community. This might be an opportunity to explore private philanthropy and the appropriate technical assistance to supplement the needed and more flexible resources for smaller organizations.

*“We believe that the work we do is important to community and it keeps people safe. If more private funders knew about our work they would want to invest. Like the Los Angeles Rams, they built a stadium right in the middle of Inglewood. Some of our Intervention workers and Ambassadors helped build the stadium. If they knew what we were doing, how we’re making the community safe, I’m sure they would want to support us.”*

*-Community-Based Organization*

#### **6. Violence Prevention and Intervention efforts that center systems-impacted individuals with lived experience:**

*“No one can do this work but those of us from community. We know community. We live in community. We lose people everyday in these streets to violence. When I’m struggling, I want to talk to somebody who been through what I’ve been through, who understands these streets right here. Not somebody with just a degree but they ain’t never walked a mile in my shoes.”*

*-Community-Based Organization*

In community-based violence prevention and intervention, License to Operate (LTO) is a term that describes an individual's or organization's capacity to provide services to a particular community. LTO is community trust and authority endowed on an individual or agency that allows them to serve as a community leader, liaison, and representative to systems in an effort to communicate community needs and provide culturally and geographically tailored resources and services. According to CBO leaders, LTO should be prioritized in identifying agencies and organizations that provide services to community. LTO, or community trust, is not handed to any organization but is often earned through being an existing community member. Additionally, most individuals with LTO have the unique experience of being systems impacted and can identify, through personal experience, the unique needs of communities that continue to be marginalized, under-resourced and ignored. Prioritizing individuals and agencies with LTO ensures that resources for community violence prevention are getting to those who need it most.

## Recommendations:

The Virtual Dialogue series was organized around 3 subject areas: 1. County Funding, Contracts and Fiscal Sponsorships, 2. Capacity Building, Infrastructure and Technical Assistance, and 3.

Professionalization and Workforce Development. Feedback highlighted systems changes and collaborative efforts between LA County, private funders and other stakeholders that would support ongoing community efforts to address the crisis of community violence. Participant feedback informed the following recommendations.

### 1. Virtual Dialogue #1: County Funding, Contracts and Fiscal Sponsorships

***Fund prioritized, direct, discretionary` funding to agencies that allow for organizations to grow their capacity and gain access to both systems and private sustainable funding.***

#### Equity Fund Model

Participants suggested an Equity Fund Model provided through collaboration between LA County and private funders. This fund model is a fundraising investment tool that allows for private funders to invest directly into community organizations as partners. LA County would create a fund, 10% of their annual contracting budget, that would be distributed to a private fiscal administrator. Private funders would match County investment and distribute their funds to the private fiscal administrator. The investment would allot monies in a 3-year contract model centered around the programmatic goals of agencies.

With this model, investments would be based on organizational growth in addition to contract deliverables. This model allows agencies to use funding to support expansion and investment in administrative functions and the development of their workforce, programs, and trainings. The benefits of this model are that it allows for direct investment in organizations to fuel capacity-building efforts and allows LA County to be an active funding partner in the work of community-based safety efforts and infrastructural development.

Tiered County Contracts

Participants discussed the necessity of county contracts and funding that are made available to CBOs of different sizes and capacities; a tiered contracting process was uplifted as means of creating an equitable contracting process that allows for a diverse body of organizations to gain access to county contracts. The tiered process would not just provide funding, but also technical assistance and capacity-building to agencies based on organizational needs. These tiers are not prescriptive but are instead a framework that outlines the tier process as a viable approach to ensure an equitable distribution of County funding; the outline can be amended to the address the capacity of the County. County contracts could be organized in the following 3 tiers:

Tier 1 Organizations

<p>Organizational Budget:          &lt;\$249,999/year          Organizational Size:          &lt;15 employees          % of County contract offering: 45%          Capacity-building requirement: 30%          Technical Assistance requirement: 10%</p>
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Tier 2 Organizations

<p>Organizational Budget:          \$250,000-\$499,999/year          Organizational Size:          15-45 employees          % of County contract offering: 35%          Capacity-building requirement: 20%          Technical Assistance requirement: 10%</p>
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Tier 3 Organizations

<p>Organizational Budget:          &lt;\$500,000/year          Organizational Size:          &gt;46 employees          % of County contract offering: 20%          Capacity-building requirement: 5%          Technical Assistance requirement: 10%</p>
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With the tiered contracting system, each organization will have a percentage of their county contracts allocated for capacity-building and technical assistance. Capacity-building initiatives include, but are not limited to strategic planning, board development, marketing, staff development, Accounting/HR/Payroll processing, and website and technological enhancements. For capacity-building initiatives, the County would provide a lead TA agency that would be contracted to provide capacity-building strategies and plans with the agencies over the duration of their contract with the County. Technical Assistance initiatives include, but are not limited to onboarding training, ambassador trainings, therapy sessions,

workforce trainings, formal education and certificate programs. This equitable system allows for smaller CBOs to grow their capacity and provide trainings and professional development opportunities for employees, which allows agencies to potentially move up tiers in their access to county contracts.

### Mini Grants

With current County contracts, funding is deliverable based and has stipulations on how funds can be allocated within organizational programming. Many agencies described the need for discretionary funding outside of county contracts to support agency events and programming as well as provide services to community members that may not fit contract requirements due to age, background or circumstance. Discretionary grants would be grants awarded to agencies in the amounts of \$500-\$5,000 for additional services and programs. Mini-grant protocols, such as application requirements and distribution, would be developed by the County in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Violence Intervention Steering Committee. Participants recommended an application process, one-page descriptions of program/event goals, and direct to organization distribution of funds. Examples of grant usage are community food distributions, funeral services cost assistance, relocation expenses, therapy appointment support, utility support, extra-curricular activity support, rent assistance, etc.

### County Contracts Restructuring

As previously highlighted, many CBOs are smaller agencies with limited funding that is used exclusively to provide resources to community. The current structure of county RFPs as fee for service creates a contracting structure that necessitates that agencies operate and provide services for an initial period of time without county funding before receiving payment. Agencies recommended county contracts shift to a cost reimbursement model with 15% start-up costs added to the contract to ensure that agencies have the initial funding necessary to implement programs in community. Additionally, participants recommended that county contracts are allotted for no less than 3-5 years; this time frame allows for agencies to implement programs in community, build longer term capacity, track successes, adapt to shifting community needs and ensure long-term sustainability of contract compliance and community resources.

### County Recommendations for Private Grant Funding

Many participant CBOs, when acquiring contracts, receive contracts solely from public sources such city, county, and federal offices. These contracts are limited in the scope of services that organizations can provide; however, due to capacity and infrastructure issues, many CBOs do not qualify to receive

funding from private donors and investors. To assist agencies in growing and diversifying their funding base, participants suggested that the county provide private funding recommendations for agencies who have successfully fulfilled their contract deliverables and are looking for private funding. At the completion of each contract, the county would provide a letter of recommendation that outlines contract amount, deliverables, agency successes and highlights, capacity building initiative participation as well as technical assistance and trainings. These recommendations will allow agencies to acquire additional funding and will serve as an official record of contract compliance and agency growth for future public and private contract applications.

#### Incentivization of Collaboration between CBOs

In order to ensure a robust community-based violence reduction strategy, participants recommended that county contracts prioritize collaboration between CBOs by rewarding organizations that collaborate with partner CBOs to provide community services. By supporting collaboration, LA County supports organizations who are niche in their service offerings and clientele and allows them to receive equitable access to funding while maintaining their unique programming. Bonuses provided to agencies, such as additional county funding, percentage point increases for access to county master list, and prioritization of contract acquisition can be offered to incentivize collaboration and to ensure that a breadth of services are being provided to community members. Collaboration should be classified as working with agencies that provide additional services such as Intervention agencies partnering with mental health agencies or domestic violence agencies partnering with youth development agencies. This type of collaboration across sectors ensures that community is receiving the most impactful resources available, and it ensures that the ecosystem of community-based violence reduction is coordinated, equitable and direct in its support of CBOs who provide on-the-ground services.

## 2. Virtual Dialogue #2: Capacity Building, Infrastructure and Technical Assistance

***Prioritize programming that allow for organizations to grow their infrastructures and provide additional support to their workforce and communities.***

#### Incubation Academy

The Department of Mental Health developed an Incubation Academy to serve as a hub to provide capacity-building and technical assistance training to small CBOs. The Incubation Academy is a model where agencies receive a stipend for 1 year of program participation. Organizational leadership is placed in structured training and workshops to discuss the role & importance of administrative functions,

payroll and accounting, hiring and team management, contract compliance and organizational budgeting. Agencies are also provided grant writers and administrators to help them apply for additional funding. Participants discussed the model of an incubator academy being used to support small CBOs in acquiring County contracts. In addition to the aforementioned workshops, participants would receive additional trainings on community outreach, technology and social media as well as application workshops for County contract grant applications. At the conclusion of the program, participants would qualify to receive Tier 1 County contracts and points toward access to the LA County Master List.

### Healing Circles/Restorative Justice Spaces

Violence Reduction is a field of work that necessitates individuals address deep areas of trauma for their communities. Many people in this industry speak of sitting with grieving family members and victims of crimes after having been targets of violence. They also speak of the larger community ramifications of violence, loss of resources, increased law enforcement presence and overall community despair. According to the American Counseling Association, “The term vicarious trauma, sometimes also called compassion fatigue, is the latest term that describes the phenomenon generally associated with the “cost of caring” for others. It is believed that counselors working with trauma survivors experience vicarious trauma because of the work they do. Vicarious trauma is the emotional residue of exposure that counselors have from working with people as they are hearing their trauma stories and become witnesses to the pain, fear, and terror that trauma survivors have endured.<sup>15</sup>” Navigating community traumas has long-term impacts on the mental health of providers and long-term impacts on the sustainability of violence reduction strategies. Participants and mental health providers cited healing circles and restorative justice hubs as spaces devoted to navigating the community traumas around violence. By providing professional mental health and trauma services, CBO employees can direct community members and colleagues to the proper channels to receive mental health and trauma support. Additionally, participants discussed the necessity of healing circles for violence reduction employees who provide on-the-ground services to victims and their families. Healing Circles provide a designated space for employees to discuss the vicarious traumas that they experience in their daily work as well as space to share mental health best practice tips for longevity in the field. Participants outlined that these would be designated spaces/county buildings allocated as community hubs for healing allowing for continued support of community and sustainability in the offerings. Participants felt that

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.counseling.org/docs/trauma-disaster/fact-sheet-9---vicarious-trauma.pdf>

Healing Circles should be a part a monthly required County offering, to ensure the continued mental health of the workforce and community members.

#### Community Action Boards

Many agency leaders cited the necessity of neighborhood councils to serve as a forum for community feedback around the effectiveness of LA County's community safety model. This feedback will allow the County to adapt their strategies in real time to address the unique and shifting needs of community in addressing the issue of community violence. Additionally, agency leaders discussed the necessity of having diverse stakeholders take part in the forums, included but not limited to churches, community members, CBOs, school administrators, CBO leadership and employees, local business owners, as well as gang involved youth and young adults to discuss community safety initiatives and ways that they can address community-based violence. These councils or coalitions will have a formal structure and be led by CBOs that provide violence reduction services to community. These forums are meant to cultivate community leadership and community think tanks to help lead County initiatives and strategies around community-based violence reduction centered by those most impacted in those communities. Community Action Boards will have the responsibility of reporting back to LA County OVP on developments, insights and recommendations around current community-based safety efforts.

#### Capacity Building Peer-to-Peer Support Model

As discussed in the Virtual Dialogue #1 section, participants felt that collaboration and support between CBOs was not only necessary for the success of a violence reduction strategy, but they agreed that the County should incentivize agencies who actively collaborate across scopes of work. Participants suggested a peer-to-peer support model built into County contracts with Tier 3 CBOs. This peer-to-peer support model would stipulate Tier 3 agencies provide administrative support and mentorship to Tier 1 & Tier 2 agencies in exchange for bonuses and increased funding to their county contracts. This peer-to-peer model will allow for smaller agencies to grow their capacity building by learning from leading agencies in their field. Larger agencies have the opportunity to serve as models and mentors and get additional funding to support their programming. The peer-to-peer support model could be used an aspect of the capacity-building percentage of each County contract. This model presents the overall industry of community-based violence reduction an avenue for sustainable growth and impact.

#### Community Trainings on Violence Reduction Strategies

Though Community-Based Violence Reduction has been a prevalent ecosystem of addressing community violence, it is new in being a viable industry and model for addressing the growing epidemic of community violence. Its role as a professional industry and successful model has shifted its scope and impact and has created career pathway for community members and systems-impacted individuals. Due to this growth, many participants recommended community trainings led by practitioners with lived experience to discuss the on-going role and function of community-based violence reduction. These trainings would serve to inform and educate community members of their on-going role in supporting community-based safety and the agencies and resources available to them to address their needs. These trainings would include multiple sectors, such as county departments, schools, law enforcement and other stakeholders. Participants recommended quarterly trainings for community and other stakeholders funded by LA County OVP.

#### Violence Reduction Steering Committee

As the role of Community-based Violence Reduction grows across LA County, agencies and practitioners recommended an on-going committee of leaders and experts who serve as an advisory body to LA County OVP around contractual compliance, contract management and agency support. This committee will be comprised of Intervention leaders, mental health experts, and CBO directors, with the responsibility of providing on-going mentorship and support to small CBOs, contract review and agency feedback to OVP as well as overall programmatic success and growth of the industry, impact, and strategy. This Committee will serve to raise up leaders within the field of violence prevention that can serve as industry experts to aid the impact in LA County as well as provide presentations to LA County Supervisors and other national municipal bodies interested in replicating or learning from the system created in Los Angeles County.

### 3. Virtual Dialogue #3: Professionalization and Workforce Development

***Grow and invest in a workforce of systems-impacted service providers as thought leaders in the LA County's strategy to address community-based violence.***

#### Formal Education Reimbursement Program

Many agency leaders discussed growing the effectiveness and impact of their workforce through formal trainings and education. As the industry of Community-Based Safety grows, there will be an on-going need for people with lived experience to take on diverse roles within the ecosystem; however, due to backgrounds of incarceration and low-incomes, many employees are not able to dedicate time and

resources to pursuing higher education. Agencies highlighted a formal education reimbursement program as an incentive for employees looking to grow academically and professionally. LA County would provide educational reimbursements for the costs of tuition/cost of certificate program for formal trainings and education of community-based violence reduction employees. In exchange, participants would dedicate 1-3 years of service to CBOs providing community-based services through county contracts. With this initiative, interested parties have an avenue to pursue higher learning and grow professionally, while the industry of community-based public safety cultivates a more diverse and skilled workforce.

#### LA County Community-Based Safety On-boarding

To introduce smaller CBOs and agencies to LA County OVP and the contractual process, agencies suggested an on-boarding presentation created by LA County OVP that outlines the history and role of LA County Office of Violence Prevention in community-based safety, the contractual process to apply for grants and an introduction to existing agencies providing services. This on-boarding will be used to orient new agencies within the broad ecosystem of county-wide public safety and will provide critical information on contract compliance and organizational growth. This on-boarding also gives agency leadership an opportunity to network and meet with new agencies providing services across LA County creating opportunities for mentorship and potential collaboration.

#### On-Going Industry Trainings

In the field of community-based safety, practitioners and employees need a breadth of trainings to provide effective services to community and ensure their safety as well as the safety of the community members they serve. Agencies highlighted the need for on-going trainings around domestic violence, anger management, conflict resolution, outreach, job development, sex trafficking and social media to ensure that the workforce remains equipped to provide services to community members. These trainings would be monthly trainings where participants would receive certificates of completion; these certificates would certify and qualify employees to apply for varied job offerings within LA County offices. These trainings will be conducted by violence prevention practitioners and leaders who have a strong pulse of evolving community dynamics. Agencies that lead trainings receive points toward access to the LA County Master List.

## County-wide Workforce Deployment

A prevalent obstacle in the field of community-based safety is workforce development. The field necessitates younger practitioners who are connected to community in order to be effective. However, due to limited funding and a lack of career pathways, many jobs within the field of community-based safety are taken by practitioners who have been in the field over 20 years. Because there are no pipelines for career growth, and many community-based safety employees have no other viable career alternatives, individuals who acquire leadership roles within community-based safety never grow or retire. Agencies suggested that LA County partner with other County offices to outline career opportunities for employees with lived experience within the County infrastructure and in other County departments or offices. The previous recommendations of on-going trainings, professional development formal education support programs will create a more skilled workforce capable of managing the roles and responsibilities of leadership positions within other County offices. Additionally, there are many County services that could use the support of community-based safety workers in providing resources to community, such as with the LA County Community Health Worker Outreach Initiative. There have been examples in other cities of opportunities to employ community-based safety workers in unconventional departments, such as Intervention workers employed as community safety liaisons in public libraries across Oakland. The community-based workforce is a strong, available, viable and effective workforce that can be employed in sectors and offices across LA County to support in initiatives to provide resources to community.

### Prioritization:

During the Virtual Dialogue Series, participants outlined these recommendations as a part of a 7–10-year investment plan by LA County OVP into Community-based public safety. Recommendations were ranked in priority to provide a blueprint forward for LA County OVP in providing these services to agencies and community members, with the expectation that a robust community-based ecosystem would be fully funded and established within 10 years (Fiscal Year 2030). Below, recommendations are prioritized based on years participants would like to see programs offered.

Year 1-3 (Fiscal Year 22-25)	Tiered County Contracts Mini Grants County Contract Restructuring County Recommendations for Private Grant Funding Community Trainings on Violence Reduction Strategies
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	Violence Reduction Steering Committee LA County Community Based Safety Onboarding On-Going Industry Trainings
Year 4-7 (Fiscal Year 25-28)	Incentivization of Collaboration between CBOs Healing Circles/Restorative Justice Spaces Community Action Boards Capacity Building Peer-to-Peer Support Model
Year 7-10 (Fiscal Year 28-30)	Equity Fund Model Incubation Academy Formal Education Reimbursement Program County-wide Workforce Deployment

Table 3: Recommendation Prioritization Calendar

This prioritization schedule is contingent on access to funding and can be amended as LA County OVP gains access to more funding channels and as the field of violence prevention continues to evolve. This schedule is meant to highlight, acknowledge, and propose an infrastructure necessary to develop these programs county-wide and the urgency of creating systems and supports that invest in community-based public safety.

**Conclusion:**

Virtual Dialogue participants highlighted the need for County investment to be focused on providing on-going sustainable funding for the field of community-based public safety, creating capacity-building and technical assistance programming to grow and support smaller CBOs and developing career pipelines and professional development opportunities for the current community-based work force. These recommendations are a preliminary assessment of feedback and insight provided by community organizations currently providing public safety and public health services in LA County. These recommendations have been refined by a Steering Committee of 14 front-line gang intervention agencies across LA County; these agencies are multi-disciplinary agencies that provide various services to support community needs, such as violence prevention, violence intervention, re-entry services, gendered violence and intimate partner violence support, job development and placement, safe passage programs and violence intervention trainings. These recommendations in no way constitute the complete and comprehensive breadth of community feedback on public safety and public health in LA County. On-going assessment and community feedback sessions are viable tools to ensure LA County OVP’s continued correspondence of county offerings with community and CBO needs. Nonetheless, in

order to address the current crises of community violence and public health disparities, the County is well positioned to expand and innovate its current programming, capitalize on growing resources and political will, and harness community capacity to increase community safety and health for all across LA County.

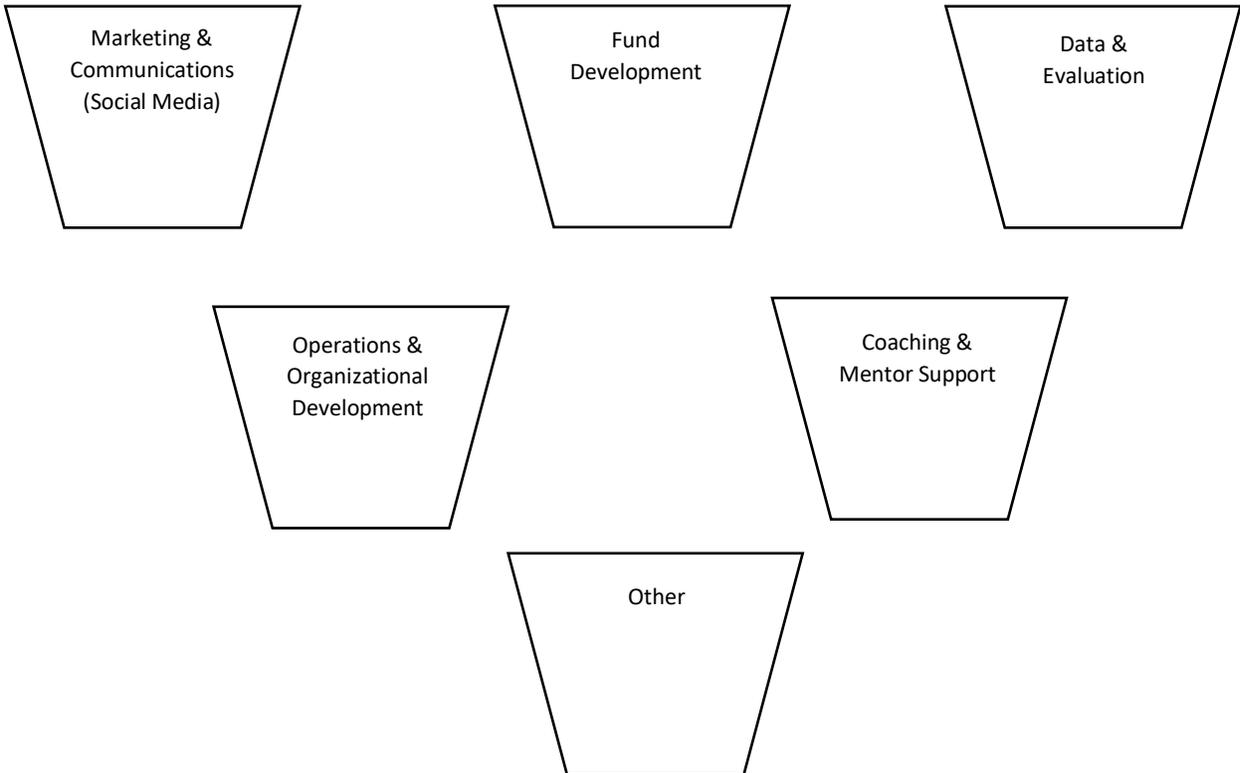
## Appendix A: Virtual Dialogue Convening Series Questions

## Virtual Dialogue Convening #1, April 29, 2021: Funding, Contracts and Fiscal Sponsorships

1. What does a comprehensive community-based violence reduction strategy look like?
  - 1.1. What are the components of a CBVRS? Ex. Prevention, Intervention, Case Management, Youth Services, etc.
  - 1.2. How are the components prioritized? Which components should be prioritized for immediate investment?
  - 1.3. How much do you estimate a comprehensive strategy would cost?
  - 1.4. How many organizations do you estimate it would take to implement the strategy impactfully?
  - 1.5. How much would a 1-year CBO contract be with this strategy?
2. How should LA County be mapped/zoned to implement LA County contracts?
3. Describe your funding experience with LA County?
  - 3.1. What funding sources exist in LA County? Which County offices/departments have provided funding?
  - 3.2. Have you had access to LA County funding? If so, what was the process like? If not, what were the barriers to you gaining access to County funding?
4. Describe your experience with RFPs.
5. How can funding be streamlined directly to CBOs? What systems can be put in place to ensure CBOs receive adequate, direct, timely funding?
6. What do you think about a Fee Schedule for County contracts?
  - 6.1. What kind of fee schedule or payment plan would you recommend?
7. Should LA County contracts/funding for CBOs have a prioritization/Master List system?
  - 7.1. Who should be prioritized in funding?
  - 7.2. What guidelines/metrics should exist in funding prioritization?
  - 7.3. How should funding prioritization impact subsequent/future contracts?
8. How should County funding be disbursed?
  - 8.1. Who should lead/help inform disbursement?
  - 8.2. How should success of deliverables be determined?

Virtual Dialogue Convening #2, May 27, 2021: Capacity Building, Infrastructure and Technical Assistance

Categories of Capacity-Building support:



1. Please name a program or service you would like to receive to help your organization grow its capacity and reach. (List one program/service per category)
2. How should the County prioritize the above categories?
3. Are there any areas of capacity-building that were not included above? (ex. Physical spaces/building for CBOS)
4. How can LA County improve the capacity-building programs and services that it already provides?
5. How should these capacity-building programs/services be structured?
6. Do you have any examples of/experiences with capacity-building programs that were effective? How was the program structured? What were the outcomes?

Virtual Dialogue Convening #3, June 24, 2021: Professionalization & Workforce Development

1. What alternative career pathways would you like to see for someone with your experience & background (ex. school college counselor, OVP CBO liaison, etc.)?
2. How can offices & organizations create job posting/descriptions that target and include someone with your background and experience?
3. What protocols & supports can OVP create to support agencies in growing an effective workforce?
4. What professional development programs and trainings would help you be more successful in your current role?  
-Which trainings should be required for the field of public safety?
5. What support/trauma informed care programs would you like to have available to you in your current role?
6. What long term benefits & programs would you like to see developed and invested into for the public safety industry (ex. unions, mutual funds, start-up aids, etc)?