

Building Strong Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiatives

Seven Building Blocks for State and Local Funders

Lessons from Pennsylvania's VIP Evaluation

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About This Brief

In 2021 and 2022, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) funded nearly 200 Violence Intervention and Prevention (VIP) programs across the Commonwealth as part of a statewide investment in community violence intervention. Between 2023 and 2025, NORC at the University of Chicago and Temple University conducted a mixed-methods evaluation to better understand how these programs were implemented, the factors that supported and challenged implementation, and lessons learned during the early years of the initiative. The evaluation included a survey of all 185 grants awarded to 157 organizations, followed by an in-depth process evaluation of a stratified random sample of 40 VIP-funded programs. The in-depth evaluation drew on interviews and focus groups with program staff and participants, document review, and an assessment of performance measurement data.

This brief presents seven building blocks for designing, implementing, strengthening, and sustaining VIP initiatives. Drawing on findings from the evaluation, it translates lessons learned into practical guidance for state and local funders seeking to build organizational capacity, support strong implementation, strengthen learning systems, and create sustainable violence intervention and prevention initiatives.

Introduction

States and localities across the country are making unprecedented investments in violence intervention and prevention. While funding is an essential first step, strong initiatives require more than grantmaking alone. They require thoughtful planning, strong organizations, implementation support, learning systems, cross-sector collaboration, and

long-term sustainability. As jurisdictions continue to develop and expand these investments, there is growing interest in understanding not only what types of programs to fund, but how to design, implement, and strengthen initiatives that support organizations and communities while advancing violence prevention and public safety goals.

In Pennsylvania, state investments in violence intervention and prevention are administered by the

Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD). Funding appropriated through the Commonwealth's budget is allocated by PCCD through a competitive VIP grant process to community-based organizations, local governments, institutions of higher education, and other eligible entities. Through this structure, PCCD translates state-level investments into grants and supports for organizations and communities working to prevent and respond to violence across Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania's VIP initiative represents one of the nation's earliest large-scale statewide investments in violence intervention and prevention. By investing in a diverse portfolio of organizations across the Commonwealth and committing to an independent evaluation during the initiative's formative years, Pennsylvania created an important opportunity to understand how violence intervention and prevention initiatives are implemented, strengthened, and refined over time. The lessons presented in this brief are intended to inform state and local funders as they design, implement, strengthen, and sustain their own violence intervention and prevention initiatives.

The seven building blocks presented in this brief draw on findings from a mixed-methods evaluation of Pennsylvania's first cohort of VIP grantees. The evaluation examined how organizations implemented violence intervention and prevention programs, the challenges they encountered, the strategies they used to adapt, and the organizational and system supports needed to strengthen implementation. The evaluation also examined the foundational infrastructure necessary to support future effectiveness research and continuous learning, including organizational capacity, implementation supports, performance measurement systems, data collection practices, and evaluation readiness. To do so, the research team combined survey findings from all 185 grants awarded to 157 organizations with an in-depth process evaluation of a stratified sample of 40 programs. The process evaluation drew on performance measurement data, 133 interviews with executive leaders, program managers, frontline staff, and key stakeholders, and 12 focus groups with program participants. Together, these data provide practical insights into how violence intervention and prevention initiatives can be designed, implemented, strengthened, and evaluated over time.

These findings should be understood within the context of the initiative's formative years. At the time the first VIP grants were awarded, many components of the initiative, including administrative guidance, performance measurement systems, technical assistance, and implementation supports, were still being developed and refined. As implementation progressed, PCCD continued to strengthen and expand these systems, including investments in technical assistance, administrative guidance, performance measurement, communication, and other supports for funded organizations. The lessons presented in this brief therefore reflect both the experiences of organizations during early implementation and the ways in which the broader initiative continued to evolve in response to emerging needs and lessons learned.

Rather than serving as a checklist of recommendations, the seven building blocks describe the critical components of a strong violence intervention and prevention initiative—from defining a clear investment strategy and building organizational capacity to supporting implementation and learning, strengthening data and evaluation systems, fostering community engagement and cross-sector collaboration, and planning for long-term sustainability. Grounded in findings from Pennsylvania's VIP evaluation, the framework is intended to help state and local funders consider how these components can work together and evolve as initiatives, organizations, and community needs change.

Seven Building Blocks of a Strong VIP Initiative

Building a strong VIP initiative is an iterative process. The seven building blocks presented below represent the key components that state and local funders should consider when designing, implementing, strengthening, evaluating, and sustaining a violence intervention and prevention initiative.

Table 1. Seven Building Blocks of a Strong VIP Initiative

Phase	Building Block	Guiding Question
Design the Initiative	1. Define Your Investment Strategy	<i>What kind of VIP initiative are we trying to build?</i>
Build Organizational Capacity	2. Invest in Organizational Capacity, Not Just Programs	<i>What organizational capacity will grantees need to successfully implement and sustain violence intervention and prevention efforts?</i>
Tailor Funding & Support	3. Tailor Funding and Support to Organizational Maturity and Local Context	<i>How can funding, expectations, and support be aligned with where organizations are and what they need to grow?</i>
Support Implementation & Learning	4. Build Ongoing Implementation Support and Learning into the Initiative	<i>How will organizations receive the support they need to implement, adapt, learn, and improve over time?</i>
Measure, Evaluate & Improve	5. Build Data and Evaluation into the Initiative from the Beginning	<i>What information will we need to understand implementation, support continuous improvement, and evaluate the initiative over time?</i>

Phase	Building Block	Guiding Question
Strengthen the Ecosystem	6. Strengthen Community Voice and Cross-Sector Partnerships	<i>How will community voice and cross-sector partnerships help shape and strengthen the initiative?</i>
Sustain the Investment	7. Plan for Sustainability from the Beginning	<i>How will we sustain investments, support organizational growth, and continuously improve the initiative over time?</i>

Each building block builds upon the previous one. Together, they provide a framework for moving from initial investment decisions through implementation, learning, growth, and long-term sustainability, with continuous improvement embedded throughout.

BUILDING BLOCK 1. DEFINE YOUR INVESTMENT STRATEGY

GUIDING QUESTION

What kind of VIP initiative are we trying to build?

WHY IT MATTERS

VIP initiatives can vary considerably in their goals, the organizations and communities they seek to support, and the violence intervention and prevention strategies they fund. Decisions made by PCCD and other funders about an initiative's purpose, target populations, geographic focus, funding priorities, implementation expectations, and approach to organizational support influence every aspect of implementation. Establishing a clear investment strategy before funding is awarded—and revisiting that strategy as the initiative evolves—helps ensure that funding structures, implementation support, technical assistance, data collection, and evaluation remain aligned around a common vision.

A clear investment strategy also helps funders determine how resources should be distributed across communities and what types of organizations and approaches they intend to support. Funders may choose to invest in established violence intervention and prevention models, support existing community-based organizations as they expand into violence prevention work, build the capacity of newer organizations, or develop a portfolio that includes organizations with different levels of experience and organizational capacity. These decisions shape not only funding priorities, but also the types of implementation support, technical assistance, administrative guidance, and evaluation infrastructure that organizations will need to succeed.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Findings from the Pennsylvania VIP evaluation showed that the initiative funded a diverse portfolio of organizations and violence intervention and prevention approaches across the Commonwealth. Many funded organizations did not originate as violence intervention programs. Instead, they adapted existing services, expanded longstanding prevention efforts, or incorporated violence intervention and prevention strategies into broader community-based programming. Organizations also varied considerably in their histories, organizational capacity, implementation experience, staffing, and community relationships.

This diversity meant that organizations entered the initiative with different strengths, needs, and levels of readiness. The evaluation found that these differences influenced implementation timelines, staffing, administrative capacity, data collection, and technical assistance needs. Collectively, these findings suggest that a clearly defined investment strategy can help funders align funding structures, implementation expectations, organizational supports, and evaluation activities with the types of organizations and approaches they intend to support.

Because the evaluation focused on the initiative's early years, it did not assess the relative effectiveness of different organizational models or violence intervention and prevention approaches. However, the findings underscored the importance of establishing a clear vision for the initiative from

the outset, while allowing funding structures, implementation supports and learning systems to evolve as needs and lessons emerge.

Pennsylvania's experience illustrates this evolution. Over time, PCCD has refined its funding opportunities and approaches to support different types of violence intervention and prevention investments and organizations at different stages of development. These refinements reflect an ongoing process of aligning funding structures and supports with initiative priorities, organizational needs, and lessons from implementation.

Key Questions for Defining Your Investment Strategy

A funding announcement does more than distribute resources, it helps shape the violence intervention and prevention system that develops. State and local funders should consider the following questions when defining their investment strategy.

- **What are we trying to accomplish?** Are we seeking to address immediate risks of violence, invest in longer-term prevention, strengthen community infrastructure, or some combination?
- **Do we want to fund specific approaches?** Will funding prioritize defined violence intervention and prevention models or strategies, or allow organizations and communities flexibility to identify approaches that best fit local needs?
- **Who are we trying to fund?** Are we investing in established violence intervention and prevention providers, supporting existing community organizations as they expand into this work, building the capacity of emerging organizations, or funding a combination of organizations?
- **Where do we want to invest?** Will resources be concentrated in communities experiencing the highest levels of violence, distributed more

broadly, or allocated using a combination of need, geographic reach, and equity considerations? Where could coordinated investments strengthen local violence intervention and prevention ecosystems or address gaps in services or organizational capacity?

- **How will funding reach organizations?** Will payment and reimbursement requirements allow organizations to access resources when they are needed, or could they create cash-flow barriers for organizations with limited ability to front costs?
- **What supports will organizations need to succeed?** What funding duration, flexibility, technical assistance, administrative support, and implementation guidance will be needed given the organizations and approaches being funded?
- **What do we want to learn?** What questions should the initiative be able to answer about implementation, organizational capacity, participant reach, services delivered, and outcomes?
- **How will we use what we learn?** How will implementation experiences, program data, and evaluation findings inform technical assistance, future funding decisions, and the ongoing refinement of the initiative?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

State and local funders can:

- **Define the purpose of the investment.** Clarify whether the initiative is intended to expand services, build organizational and community capacity, strengthen violence intervention and prevention infrastructure, test new approaches, or advance multiple goals.

- **Determine the scope and geographic focus of the initiative.** Clearly identify the populations, communities, types of violence, and violence intervention and prevention strategies the initiative is intended to address. Consider how resources will be distributed geographically, including whether investments should be concentrated in communities with the greatest need, used to address gaps in services or organizational capacity, or coordinated across multiple organizations to strengthen local violence intervention and prevention ecosystems.
- **Decide what types of organizations the initiative is designed to support.** Consider the role of established violence intervention and prevention providers, existing community-based organizations expanding into this work, newer organizations, and organizations with varying levels of experience and capacity.
- **Determine which approaches the initiative will support.** Decide whether funding will prioritize defined violence intervention and prevention models or strategies, allow organizations flexibility to identify approaches that fit local needs, or support a combination of approaches.
- **Align funding and payment structures with the investment strategy.** Ensure that grant size and duration, allowable costs, payment and reimbursement processes, implementation timelines, and administrative requirements reflect the organizations and approaches being funded. Consider whether reimbursement schedules or other payment requirements may create cash-flow challenges for smaller or community-based organizations with limited capacity to front program costs.
- **Define how the initiative will learn and improve.** Identify the questions the initiative should answer over time and build appropriate data collection, performance measurement, and evaluation activities into the initiative from the beginning.
- **Plan for continuous refinement.** Use implementation experiences, participant feedback, program data, and evaluation

findings to strengthen future funding opportunities, implementation supports, and the initiative as it evolves.

BUILDING BLOCK 2. INVEST IN ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY, NOT JUST PROGRAMS

GUIDING QUESTION

What organizational capacity will grantees need to successfully implement and sustain violence intervention and prevention efforts?

WHY IT MATTERS

Violence intervention and prevention programs depend not only on the services they deliver, but also on the organizational infrastructure that makes those services possible. Organizations need sufficient staffing, leadership, administrative and financial systems, technology, facilities, data capacity, and other operational resources to implement programs consistently and respond to community needs. For newer or smaller community-based organizations, building this infrastructure may be particularly important as they take on larger grants, expand services, or implement new violence intervention and prevention strategies.

Investing in organizational capacity should therefore be viewed as an essential component of violence intervention and prevention investments rather than simply an administrative expense. Building organizational capacity strengthens an organization's ability to implement programs effectively, respond to changing community needs, support and retain staff, and sustain violence intervention and prevention efforts over time.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Findings from the Pennsylvania VIP evaluation showed that PCCD's investment enabled organizations to strengthen organizational infrastructure in addition to expanding services. Organizations used VIP funding for staffing, technology, office space, equipment, administrative systems, and other organizational resources that often served as the foundation for increasing service capacity and implementing new violence intervention and prevention programming.

At the same time, organizations entered the initiative with very different levels of organizational capacity. Some had established administrative systems,

experienced leadership, and dedicated grant-management staff, while others were building these systems as they implemented their VIP grants. Smaller and newer organizations often faced challenges related to hiring, financial management, data collection, reporting requirements, and administrative capacity. These differences affected how quickly organizations could implement their programs and the types of support they needed.

One of the most consistent findings across organizations was the importance of the workforce. Organizations emphasized that recruiting and retaining qualified staff was essential to program implementation and sustainability. Competitive compensation, supportive supervision, professional development, manageable workloads, and attention to staff wellness were frequently identified as important for maintaining a stable workforce.

As the VIP initiative evolved, PCCD made substantial investments in technical assistance and other supports for funded organizations, including supports designed to strengthen organizational and implementation capacity. These investments complemented grant funding by helping organizations build the administrative, operational, and programmatic infrastructure needed to implement and sustain their work. Building Block 4 discusses the role of technical assistance and implementation support in greater detail.

Organizational capacity is therefore not separate from program implementation; it is the foundation that enables organizations to implement violence intervention and prevention programs effectively and sustain those efforts over time.

Key Questions for Building Organizational Capacity

Strong organizations are the foundation of effective violence intervention and prevention efforts. State and local funders should consider the following questions when determining the organizational capacity needed to implement and sustain these efforts.

- **Do organizations have the leadership needed to support long-term growth?**

Consider strategic planning, governance, succession planning, and organizational management.

- **Does the workforce have the support it needs to succeed?** Consider recruitment, retention, competitive compensation, supervision, professional development, and staff wellness.
- **Are administrative and financial systems sufficient?** Assess organizations' capacity to manage grants, budgets, contracts, reporting requirements, and compliance responsibilities.
- **Do organizations have the technology and data infrastructure needed to support implementation?** Consider case management systems, data collection, performance measurement, reporting, and technology needs.
- **Do organizations have the operational infrastructure needed to deliver services effectively?** Consider office space, equipment, transportation, and other operational resources that support implementation.
- **Do organizations have the partnerships needed to support implementation?** Consider relationships with community organizations, public agencies, and other partners that strengthen service delivery and coordination.
- **Can organizations collect, use, and learn from data?** Assess their capacity to collect meaningful information, use data for continuous improvement, and contribute to initiative-wide evaluation.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

State and local funders can:

- **Recognize organizational capacity as a core investment.** Design funding opportunities to support staffing, technology, facilities, administrative systems, and other organizational infrastructure needed to implement and sustain high-quality violence intervention and prevention programs.
- **Invest in the violence intervention and prevention workforce.** Support competitive compensation, professional development, supportive supervision, manageable workloads, and staff wellness to strengthen recruitment, retention, and long-term workforce sustainability.
- **Support organizational development.** Invest in leadership, strategic planning, financial management, governance, and other organizational functions that strengthen long-term capacity beyond a single grant period.
- **Pair funding with capacity-building support.** Provide or sustain technical assistance, training, coaching, and other organizational supports that help grantees strengthen administrative, financial, and operational capacity. Tailor these supports to organizations' existing capacity and needs and adjust them as organizations grow.
- **Build flexibility into funding.** Recognize that organizations may need to invest in staffing, technology, infrastructure, or administrative systems as implementation evolves and organizational needs change.
- **View organizational capacity as a long-term investment.** Recognize that strengthening organizations enhances not only current program implementation but also communities' long-term ability to prevent and respond to violence.

BUILDING BLOCK 3. TAILOR FUNDING AND SUPPORT TO ORGANIZATIONAL MATURITY AND LOCAL CONTEXT

GUIDING QUESTION

How can funding, expectations, and support be aligned with where organizations are and what they need to grow?

WHY IT MATTERS

Organizations implementing violence intervention and prevention programs vary considerably in their experience, organizational capacity, staffing, administrative infrastructure, community relationships, and readiness to implement new programs. A funding structure or set of expectations that works well for an established organization with strong administrative systems may create unnecessary challenges for a newer or smaller organization that is simultaneously building its infrastructure and implementing services.

Funding, implementation expectations, and support should therefore reflect where organizations are in their development and the context in which they operate. Tailoring grant structures, timelines, reporting expectations, technical assistance, and implementation support can help organizations build capacity while maintaining appropriate accountability. It can also create pathways for organizations to grow over time—from building foundational capacity, to strengthening implementation, to expanding or sustaining established programs.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Findings from the Pennsylvania VIP evaluation showed considerable variation across funded organizations. Some organizations entered the initiative with extensive experience delivering violence intervention and prevention programming and managing public funding, while others were building new violence prevention programs or expanding existing community-based services into this work. Organizations also differed in staffing, administrative infrastructure, financial management systems, partnerships, and data collection capacity.

These differences influenced implementation throughout the grant period. Organizations adapted staffing structures, modified implementation timelines, strengthened partnerships, and refined program activities in response to changing community needs, implementation experience, and organizational learning. Rather than reflecting implementation failure, these adaptations often demonstrated organizations' ability to respond thoughtfully to real-world conditions while remaining focused on their program goals.

Organizations' needs also evolved over time. Early-stage organizations often required greater support

to build organizational infrastructure, establish administrative systems, and implement new programming, while more established organizations were better positioned to refine services, strengthen partnerships, and contribute lessons learned to the broader initiative. These findings suggest the value of aligning funding and implementation support with organizational maturity and changing organizational and community needs.

PCCD's evolving approach also demonstrates how funding structures and supports can become more differentiated as an initiative matures. As VIP evolved, PCCD refined its funding opportunities and expanded supports available to funded organizations. These developments reflect the value of designing funding and support structures that recognize that organizations may require different types and levels of investment at different stages of development.

Key Questions for Tailoring Funding and Support

Organizations differ in their experience, capacity, community relationships, and readiness to implement violence intervention and prevention programs. State and local funders should consider the following questions when determining how funding, expectations, and support can be tailored to organizational maturity and local context.

- **What level of organizational maturity does each applicant have?** How should existing leadership, staffing, administrative systems, partnerships, and prior experience inform funding decisions and implementation expectations?
- **What type of investment does each organization need?** Should funding focus on organizational capacity-building, program implementation, program expansion, innovation, or another stage of organizational growth?
- **What implementation supports will organizations need?** How should

technical assistance, coaching, peer learning, and implementation support differ based on organizational maturity, experience, and project complexity?

- **How should funding structures and expectations be tailored?** Should grant size, duration, allowable costs, implementation timelines, reporting requirements, or performance expectations vary based on organizational capacity, project scope, and stage of development?
- **How will local context influence implementation?** How should funding strategies account for differences in community needs, existing violence intervention and prevention infrastructure, available partners, geographic context, and organizational resources?
- **How will organizations be supported as they grow?** As organizations strengthen their capacity and gain experience, how will funding, expectations, and implementation support evolve to encourage continued growth and long-term sustainability?

programs, and expanding more established efforts.

- **Tailor technical assistance and implementation support.** Align training, coaching, technical assistance, and implementation support with organizations' experience, capacity, program model, and changing needs rather than applying the same supports across all grantees.
- **Calibrate expectations while maintaining accountability.** Establish reporting requirements, performance expectations, and implementation milestones that reflect project scope and organizational maturity while maintaining clear standards for responsible use of public funds.
- **Account for local context.** Consider differences in community needs, violence patterns, available services, partnerships, geography, and existing violence intervention and prevention infrastructure when determining how organizations should be funded and supported.
- **Create opportunities for growth.** Provide pathways for organizations to strengthen capacity, demonstrate progress, expand or deepen services, and pursue new opportunities as they mature.
- **Recognize that organizational needs evolve over time.** Periodically reassess organizational needs and adjust funding, technical assistance, and implementation supports as organizations and initiatives mature.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

State and local funders can:

- **Assess organizational maturity and readiness.** Consider organizations' leadership, staffing, administrative systems, financial management, data capacity, partnerships, implementation experience, and other infrastructure when determining what funding and support they will need.
- **Create differentiated funding pathways.** Consider whether different grant structures, funding levels, timelines, allowable costs, or expectations are appropriate for organizations building foundational capacity, implementing or strengthening

BUILDING BLOCK 4. BUILD ONGOING IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT AND LEARNING INTO THE INITIATIVE

GUIDING QUESTION

How will organizations receive the support they need to implement, adapt, learn, and improve over time?

WHY IT MATTERS

Funding alone does not ensure that organizations can successfully implement violence intervention and prevention programs. Organizations encounter challenges throughout implementation related to staffing, participant engagement, partnerships, program delivery, data collection, and changing community conditions. They may also need support translating program models or strategies into practice, determining when and how to adapt activities, and using implementation experience and data to strengthen service delivery.

Technical assistance and implementation support can play complementary roles in addressing these needs. Technical assistance may help organizations strengthen administrative, fiscal, data, organizational, and other capacities, while implementation support focuses more directly on helping organizations put violence intervention and prevention strategies into practice, troubleshoot challenges, make appropriate adaptations, and strengthen program delivery. Building these supports into an initiative, and creating opportunities for organizations and funders to learn from implementation, can help address challenges as they emerge and support continuous improvement.

WHAT WE LEARNED

The first cohort of Pennsylvania VIP grantees began implementing their programs while many elements of the broader initiative's support infrastructure were still being developed and refined. Organizations described wanting accessible, timely, and tailored support as they navigated program implementation, administrative requirements, data collection, staffing, and other challenges. As technical assistance became available, some organizations reported benefiting from opportunities to receive guidance, troubleshoot challenges, and strengthen implementation.

As the VIP initiative matured, PCCD made substantial investments in technical assistance and grantee support. PCCD expanded technical assistance and other grantee supports, including

additional resources, guidance, and opportunities for funded organizations to learn from one another. These investments became an important part of the infrastructure supporting VIP grantees and illustrate how implementation supports can evolve alongside an initiative.

The findings also point to the value of distinguishing between broader technical assistance and more specialized implementation support. Organizations implementing different violence intervention and prevention approaches may need access to people with program-specific expertise who can help them translate models or strategies into practice, assess implementation challenges, make appropriate adaptations, and strengthen service delivery. These needs may differ depending on an organization's experience, capacity, program approach, and stage of implementation.

These findings point to the value of building on existing technical assistance infrastructure by connecting organizational and administrative assistance with program-specific expertise, peer learning, and mechanisms for sharing lessons across grantees. This type of integrated support and learning system can help organizations address implementation challenges while also generating insights that inform the continued development of the broader initiative.

Key Questions for Building an Implementation Support and Learning System

Organizations benefit from ongoing support as they implement, adapt, and strengthen violence intervention and prevention programs. State and local funders should consider the following questions when designing or strengthening technical assistance, implementation support, and learning systems.

- **What types of support will organizations need?** What administrative, organizational, fiscal, data, programmatic, or other technical assistance needs are likely to arise throughout implementation?

- **What implementation-specific expertise will organizations need?**

Will organizations have access to people with expertise in the violence intervention and prevention models or strategies they are implementing who can help troubleshoot challenges, assess adaptations, and strengthen program delivery?

- **How will support be tailored?** How will technical assistance and implementation support reflect differences in organizational maturity, experience, program approach, local context, and stage of implementation?

- **How will organizations access support when they need it?** What mechanisms will allow organizations to identify needs, ask questions, troubleshoot challenges, and receive timely and responsive assistance?

- **How will organizations learn from one another?** What opportunities will exist for peer learning, communities of practice, convenings, or other forms of cross-site learning?

- **How will implementation experiences inform the initiative?** How will lessons from funded organizations be used to refine guidance, technical assistance, implementation support, funding strategies, and other aspects of the initiative?

- **How will support evolve over time?** As organizations grow and the initiative matures, how will technical assistance, implementation support, and learning opportunities adapt to changing needs?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

State and local funders can:

- **Establish or build on technical assistance infrastructure.** Assess the supports already

available to funded organizations and identify what additional infrastructure is needed to provide coordinated, responsive support as organizational and implementation needs evolve.

- **Provide both organizational and implementation-focused support.** Pair technical assistance related to administrative, fiscal, data, and organizational capacity with access to implementation expertise relevant to the violence intervention and prevention approaches being funded. This support can help organizations translate models or strategies into practice, troubleshoot challenges, and make appropriate adaptations.
- **Tailor support to organizational and program needs.** Align technical assistance, coaching, and implementation support with organizations' experience, capacity, program approach, local context, and stage of implementation rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all model.
- **Make support accessible and responsive.** Create clear mechanisms for organizations to identify needs, request assistance, and receive timely support as implementation challenges emerge.
- **Create opportunities for peer learning.** Support communities of practice, peer exchanges, convenings, and other opportunities for organizations to share implementation experiences, promising practices, challenges, and solutions.
- **Build feedback loops into the initiative.** Use organizations' implementation experiences, technical assistance needs, program data, and feedback to identify common challenges and refine guidance, supports, funding strategies, and other aspects of the initiative.
- **Adapt support as organizations and the initiative mature.** Periodically reassess technical assistance and implementation-support needs and adjust the type, intensity, and delivery of support as organizations

build capacity and implementation experience.

BUILDING BLOCK 5. BUILD DATA AND EVALUATION INTO THE INITIATIVE FROM THE BEGINNING

GUIDING QUESTION

What information will we need to understand implementation, support continuous improvement, and evaluate the initiative over time?

WHY IT MATTERS

Data and evaluation systems are most useful when they are designed alongside the initiative rather than added after programs are already underway. Funders need information to understand who programs are reaching, what services are being delivered, how implementation is progressing, where challenges are emerging, and whether programs and the broader initiative are achieving their intended outcomes. Establishing clear data and learning priorities from the beginning can help ensure that data collection supports accountability, continuous improvement, and future evaluation.

At the same time, performance measures and outcome expectations should reflect what programs are designed to do. Violence intervention and prevention programs may differ considerably in the populations they serve, the intensity and duration of services, the level at which they intervene, and how directly their activities are expected to influence violence-related outcomes. A focused intervention serving individuals at high risk of violence may reasonably be expected to influence outcomes more directly related to violence involvement, while broader prevention efforts may first affect protective factors, participant engagement, community conditions, or other intermediate outcomes. Data and evaluation strategies should account for these differences rather than applying the same outcome expectations across a diverse portfolio of programs.

Building data and evaluation into the initiative from the beginning also creates a foundation for stronger future evaluation. Identifying common data elements, strengthening grantee data capacity, establishing appropriate outcome measures, and planning for the information needed to assess implementation and outcomes can help funders learn from current investments while building the

infrastructure needed for future effectiveness research.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Findings from the Pennsylvania VIP evaluation highlighted substantial variation in organizations' data systems, staffing, and capacity to collect, manage, and use program data. Some organizations had established systems and dedicated data staff, while others were developing their data infrastructure as they implemented their VIP grants. Organizations also differed in the types of services they provided and the outcomes they were positioned to measure, highlighting the limitations of applying uniform performance measures across a diverse portfolio of programs.

Organizations described challenges related to data collection and reporting, including staff capacity, data-system limitations, and the fit between required measures and their program activities. At the same time, organizations valued data when it could be used to understand participant needs, monitor implementation, assess progress, and strengthen program delivery. These experiences underscored the importance of developing performance measures that generate useful information for funders while also being meaningful and feasible for the organizations responsible for collecting the data.

These experiences also reinforced the importance of aligning performance measures and outcome expectations with the goals and design of the programs being funded. Programs varied in their target populations, intervention approaches, intensity of services, and proximity to violence-related outcomes. These differences affect what changes programs can reasonably be expected to achieve and over what period of time. A common set of measures can support initiative-wide learning, but those measures may need to be complemented by program-specific measures that reflect the outcomes different types of programs are designed to influence.

PCCD has continued to refine its performance measurement approach, reporting guidance, and supports available to grantees in response to implementation experience. These developments illustrate how data systems can evolve in response to implementation experience and lessons from funded organizations. The experience of the first cohort also provides important information about

the infrastructure needed to support stronger evaluation in the future, including clear and consistent data elements, appropriate outcome measures, sufficient organizational data capacity, and data that can support analyses of implementation and outcomes over time.

Key Questions for Building Data and Evaluation Systems

Data and evaluation systems should generate useful information for accountability, learning, continuous improvement, and evaluation. State and local funders should consider the following questions when designing or strengthening these systems.

- **What do we need to know?** What information is needed to understand who programs are reaching, what services are being delivered, how implementation is progressing, and whether programs and the broader initiative are achieving their intended outcomes?
- **What information should be collected across all grantees?** What core data elements are needed to understand implementation, participant reach, services, and outcomes across the initiative while limiting unnecessary reporting burden?
- **Do measures reflect what different programs are designed to accomplish?** How should performance measures and outcome expectations account for differences in target populations, intervention approaches, intensity and duration of services, and proximity to violence-related outcomes?
- **Where are program-specific measures needed?** What additional measures are needed to capture outcomes that are meaningful for particular violence intervention and

prevention approaches beyond the initiative's common measures?

- **Do organizations have the capacity to collect and use the data?** What staffing, technology, data systems, training, technical assistance, or other supports will organizations need to collect high-quality data and use those data for program improvement?
- **How will data be useful to grantees?** How will organizations receive timely information, feedback, or tools that help them understand their own implementation and outcomes and use data to strengthen their work?
- **How will data inform continuous improvement?** How will funders use performance data, implementation findings, and evaluation results to identify challenges, refine supports, and strengthen the initiative over time?
- **What will be needed to evaluate effectiveness in the future?** What outcome measures, longitudinal data, comparison strategies, data linkages, or other infrastructure should be planned for now to support stronger evaluations as the initiative matures?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

State and local funders can:

- **Define what the initiative needs to know.** Identify the key questions data should answer about participant reach, services delivered, implementation, program outcomes, and the broader initiative before establishing reporting requirements.
- **Establish a core set of common data elements.** Identify a manageable set of standardized data elements that all grantees can collect to support initiative-wide understanding of implementation, participant reach, and services, while minimizing unnecessary reporting burden.

- **Align measures with program goals and expected outcomes.** Ensure that performance measures and outcome expectations reflect programs' target populations, intervention approaches, intensity and duration of services, and proximity to violence-related outcomes. Avoid applying the same outcome expectations to programs designed to influence different types of change.
- **Supplement common measures with program-specific measures.** Allow additional measures that capture outcomes relevant to particular violence intervention and prevention approaches while maintaining enough standardization to support learning across the initiative.
- **Invest in grantee data capacity.** Provide funding, technology, training, technical assistance, and other supports needed to strengthen organizations' ability to collect, manage, analyze, and use high-quality data.
- **Make data useful to grantees.** Provide organizations with timely access to their data, feedback, summaries, or other tools that help them monitor implementation, understand progress, and use findings to strengthen program delivery.
- **Use data for continuous improvement.** Regularly review performance and implementation data to identify common challenges, emerging needs, and opportunities to refine technical assistance, implementation supports, funding strategies, and other aspects of the initiative.
- **Plan for future effectiveness evaluation.** Identify early the outcome measures, longitudinal data, comparison strategies, data linkages, and other infrastructure that may be needed to assess program and initiative effectiveness as the initiative matures and evaluation opportunities develop.

BUILDING BLOCK 6. STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY VOICE AND CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

GUIDING QUESTION

How will community voice and cross-sector partnerships help shape and strengthen the initiative?

WHY IT MATTERS

Violence intervention and prevention efforts rarely operate in isolation. Organizations often depend on relationships with community-based organizations, schools, healthcare providers, law enforcement and other public agencies, victim service providers, and community leaders to identify and engage participants, coordinate services, make referrals, share information, and respond to changing community needs. Community members and people with lived experience also bring critical knowledge about local conditions, needs, and the strategies most likely to be credible and responsive within their communities.

Strong partnerships require more than bringing organizations together. Collaboration takes time, staff capacity, communication, coordination, and clear expectations about roles and responsibilities. Partners may also bring different levels of authority, resources, and institutional capacity to the relationship. Funders can help create conditions for productive partnerships by supporting the infrastructure needed for collaboration and encouraging clear roles, shared decision-making, and meaningful participation by community-based organizations and people with lived experience.

Building community voice and cross-sector partnerships into the initiative from the beginning can strengthen individual programs while also contributing to a broader violence intervention and prevention ecosystem. When organizations, public systems, and communities are connected through strong and collaborative relationships, they are better positioned to coordinate resources, address gaps in services, respond to community needs, and work toward shared violence prevention and public safety goals.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Findings from the Pennsylvania VIP evaluation showed that partnerships were central to program implementation. Organizations relied on relationships with schools, healthcare providers, law

enforcement and other public agencies, victim service providers, community-based organizations, and other partners to reach participants, coordinate services, make referrals, and connect participants with resources beyond those provided directly by the program. These relationships helped organizations connect participants with a broader range of services and resources and respond to needs that extended beyond what individual programs could provide.

At the same time, building and maintaining partnerships required substantial time and organizational capacity. Organizations described challenges related to communication, coordination, differing priorities, partner engagement, referrals, and data-sharing requirements. Partnership management could be particularly demanding for smaller organizations with limited administrative capacity, as staff balanced relationship-building and coordination with direct service responsibilities.

Partnerships also involved differences in organizational power, resources, and decision-making authority. Smaller community-based organizations sometimes described challenges working with larger institutions that controlled access to participants, resources, timelines, or other aspects of implementation. These experiences highlighted the importance of establishing clear roles, promoting shared decision-making, and recognizing the contributions and constraints of different partners.

Community trust and lived experience were also important foundations for implementation. Organizations emphasized the value of staff who understood the communities they served, had relevant lived experience, and brought established community relationships and credibility to their work. Programs also emphasized the importance of incorporating participant and community perspectives into program design and adaptation, reflecting an approach to developing services with communities rather than for them.

These findings suggest that community engagement and cross-sector partnerships are not simply complementary features of violence intervention and prevention programs; they are important components of the infrastructure that supports implementation. Funders can strengthen this infrastructure by recognizing the resources

required to build and sustain partnerships and by supporting collaborative structures that elevate community voice, promote shared decision-making, and connect organizations across systems.

Key Questions for Strengthening Community Voice and Cross-Sector Partnerships

Strong violence intervention and prevention efforts depend on meaningful community engagement and relationships across organizations and systems. State and local funders should consider the following questions when building community voice and cross-sector partnerships into an initiative.

- **Whose voices should help shape the initiative?** How will community members, program participants, people with lived experience, frontline staff, and community-based organizations have meaningful opportunities to inform priorities, program design, implementation, and improvement?
- **What partnerships are needed to support implementation?** Which community organizations, schools, healthcare providers, public agencies, victim service providers, and other partners are needed to support participant engagement, referrals, service coordination, and program delivery?
- **How will partnerships promote shared decision-making?** How will roles, responsibilities, resources, and decision-making authority be structured so that community-based organizations and community partners have a meaningful voice in collaborative efforts?
- **What resources will organizations need to build and sustain partnerships?** How will funding account for the staff time, coordination, relationship-building,

meetings, referral processes, data-sharing agreements, and other infrastructure required for collaboration?

- **How will partners coordinate across systems?** What structures or processes will support communication, referrals, information sharing, problem-solving, and coordination across organizations and sectors?
- **How will community input inform ongoing improvement?** What mechanisms will allow participants and communities to provide feedback, and how will that feedback be used to adapt programs, funding strategies, and the broader initiative over time?
- **How will partnerships strengthen the broader violence intervention and prevention ecosystem?** Where can coordinated investments and cross-sector relationships help address service gaps, connect resources, and strengthen the collective capacity to prevent and respond to violence?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

State and local funders can:

- **Build community voice into initiative design and implementation.** Create meaningful opportunities for community members, program participants, people with lived experience, frontline staff, and community-based organizations to inform funding priorities, program design, implementation, and continuous improvement.
- **Invest in partnership infrastructure.** Recognize the staff time and resources required to build and sustain partnerships, including relationship-building, coordination, meetings, referral processes, data-sharing agreements, and other collaborative activities.

- **Support equitable and collaborative partnerships.** Encourage clear roles, shared decision-making, transparent communication, and partnership structures that recognize differences in organizational resources and authority. Ensure that community-based organizations and people with lived experience have meaningful opportunities to shape decisions that affect their work and communities.
- **Strengthen cross-sector coordination.** Support structures and processes that connect violence intervention and prevention organizations with schools, healthcare providers, public agencies, victim service providers, and other partners needed to coordinate services, referrals, and resources.
- **Create mechanisms for ongoing community feedback.** Establish accessible ways for participants and community members to share their experiences and perspectives, and ensure that feedback is used to inform program adaptations, implementation supports, and future funding decisions.
- **Invest in the broader violence intervention and prevention ecosystem.** Look across funded organizations and communities to identify gaps, strengthen referral networks and collaborations, and make coordinated investments that connect organizations and systems rather than funding programs in isolation.

BUILDING BLOCK 7. PLAN FOR SUSTAINABILITY FROM THE BEGINNING

GUIDING QUESTION

How will we sustain investments, support organizational growth, and continuously improve the initiative over time?

WHY IT MATTERS

Violence intervention and prevention efforts require time to build relationships, establish services, develop a skilled workforce, strengthen organizational capacity, and demonstrate progress. Short-term or uncertain funding can make it difficult for organizations to retain staff, maintain partnerships, plan strategically, and sustain services

in the communities they serve. Sustainability should therefore be considered from the beginning of an initiative rather than addressed only as individual grants approach their end.

Sustainability also extends beyond continued funding for individual programs. It includes maintaining the workforce, organizational infrastructure, partnerships, community trust, data capacity, and other investments that support violence intervention and prevention over time. Funders can help create conditions for sustainability by providing greater predictability about funding horizons, supporting organizations in building durable capacity, and considering how successful programs and infrastructure can be maintained, expanded, or integrated into longer-term violence prevention and public safety strategies.

Clear expectations about future funding are also important. Organizations are better positioned to plan when they understand whether continued funding may be available and how decisions about renewal or future investment will be made. Establishing transparent criteria, including how implementation progress, performance, community need, initiative priorities, and available resources will inform future funding decisions, can help organizations plan while maintaining accountability for public investments.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Sustainability was a consistent concern across Pennsylvania VIP organizations. Programs described uncertainty about whether funding would continue and emphasized that maintaining services depended heavily on their ability to retain qualified staff and preserve the organizational infrastructure developed through VIP funding. Staffing was among the most frequently identified sustainability challenges, with organizations emphasizing the importance of competitive compensation, supportive supervision, professional development, and staff wellness for retaining the workforce needed to continue violence intervention and prevention efforts.

Organizations also described sustainability as extending beyond the continuation of individual program activities. VIP funding supported investments in staffing, technology, facilities, partnerships, administrative systems, and other organizational capacity that organizations viewed as

important to their longer-term ability to serve their communities. Sustaining these investments was therefore closely connected to sustaining the programs themselves.

Organizations varied in their ability to plan for what would happen after VIP funding ended. Some pursued additional grants, partnerships, or other funding sources, while others had fewer options for replacing public investment. These experiences highlighted the limitations of relying solely on individual grantees to sustain programs, particularly when organizations are delivering services that depend on continued staffing, community relationships, and organizational infrastructure.

The evaluation points to sustainability planning as a shared responsibility between funders and funded organizations. Organizations need to consider how programs, partnerships, workforce investments, and infrastructure can be sustained, while funders need to consider the duration and predictability of investments, pathways for continued funding, and how decisions about future support will be made. Providing organizations with clear information about funding priorities and the criteria that will inform future investment can support more realistic sustainability planning and strengthen accountability on both sides.

Key Questions for Planning for Sustainability

Sustainability requires planning for the programs, workforce, organizational capacity, partnerships, and infrastructure that support violence intervention and prevention over time. State and local funders should consider the following questions when planning for long-term sustainability.

- **What needs to be sustained?** Which services, workforce investments, organizational capacities, partnerships, infrastructure, and community relationships are important to maintain beyond an individual grant period?
- **What funding horizon is needed?** Does the length and predictability of

funding provide organizations sufficient time to build capacity, implement programs, strengthen partnerships, demonstrate progress, and plan for what comes next?

- **How will the workforce be sustained?**

What funding and organizational supports are needed to recruit and retain qualified staff, provide competitive compensation and professional development, support staff wellness, and maintain workforce stability?

- **What role should funders and grantees play in sustainability planning?** What responsibilities should organizations assume for identifying future resources and strengthening organizational capacity, and what role should funders play in creating realistic pathways for continued investments?

- **How will decisions about continued funding be made?** What implementation progress, performance information, community needs, initiative priorities, available resources, or other criteria will inform decisions about renewal or future investment, and how will those expectations be communicated to grantees?

- **What other pathways to sustainability are available?** Where appropriate, can programs or infrastructure be supported through diversified funding, partnerships, integration into existing systems, or other longer-term funding strategies?

- **How will data and learning inform future investment?** How will implementation experiences, performance data, evaluation findings, community feedback, and changing needs inform decisions

about what to sustain, strengthen, expand, modify, or discontinue?

- **How will the broader violence intervention and prevention ecosystem be sustained?** How can funders preserve the organizational capacity, partnerships, referral networks, community trust, and other infrastructure developed through the initiative even as individual grants or funding priorities change?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

State and local funders can:

- **Plan for sustainability from the outset.** Incorporate sustainability planning into funding opportunities, implementation support, and ongoing conversations with grantees rather than waiting until grants are nearing completion.
- **Provide realistic and predictable funding horizons.** Structure funding periods, when feasible, to give organizations sufficient time to build capacity, establish services and partnerships, demonstrate progress, and plan for what comes next.
- **Sustain the workforce and organizational infrastructure.** Recognize that sustaining violence intervention and prevention efforts requires continued investment in qualified staff, competitive compensation, staff development and wellness, administrative systems, technology, partnerships, and other organizational capacity—not only direct program activities.
- **Establish transparent pathways for continued investment.** Clearly communicate whether continued funding may be available and the criteria that will inform future funding decisions, such as implementation progress, performance, community need, initiative priorities, and available resources. Provide organizations with sufficient notice to plan for continuation, transition, or closeout.

- **Support multiple pathways to sustainability.** Where appropriate, help organizations identify opportunities to diversify funding, strengthen partnerships, integrate services into existing systems, or pursue other strategies for sustaining programs and organizational capacity beyond a single grant.
- **Use data and learning to guide future investments.** Draw on implementation experiences, performance data, evaluation findings, community feedback, and changing needs to determine which investments should be sustained, strengthened, expanded, modified, or discontinued.
- **Sustain the broader violence intervention and prevention ecosystem.** Consider how future funding decisions can preserve valuable organizational capacity, partnerships, referral networks, community trust, and other infrastructure developed through the initiative, even as individual grants and funding priorities change.

Conclusion

Pennsylvania's investment in violence intervention and prevention provides important lessons for jurisdictions seeking to build or strengthen similar initiatives. The experience of the first cohort of VIP-funded organizations demonstrates that these investments extend beyond individual programs. They can help build organizational capacity, strengthen the violence intervention and prevention workforce, deepen community relationships and cross-sector partnerships, and develop infrastructure that supports communities' ability to prevent and respond to violence.

The evaluation also underscores the importance of pairing public investment with the structures and supports needed for successful implementation. Strong violence intervention and prevention initiatives require intentional decisions about what and where to fund, which organizations and approaches to support, and how funding structures and expectations should reflect differences in organizational maturity and local context. They also require ongoing technical assistance and

implementation support, meaningful community engagement, useful data and evaluation systems, and attention to sustainability from the beginning.

Pennsylvania's experience illustrates how this infrastructure can evolve as an initiative matures. PCCD has continued to refine its funding approaches, expand technical assistance and grantee supports, and strengthen performance measurement and learning systems in response to implementation experience and emerging needs. The lessons from the initiative's early years provide a foundation for continuing to strengthen these investments while building the data and evaluation capacity needed to understand implementation, assess outcomes, and support more rigorous assessments of effectiveness over time.

Ultimately, building a strong violence intervention and prevention initiative is not simply about funding a collection of programs. It is about creating the conditions in which organizations and communities can implement high-quality services, learn and adapt, build lasting capacity, and sustain the relationships and infrastructure needed to prevent violence and increase public safety. Pennsylvania's experience offers a valuable example of how sustained public investment, coupled with ongoing learning and refinement, can help build a stronger violence intervention and prevention ecosystem over time.

Endnotes

1. Because it was not feasible to conduct in-depth qualitative data collection with all 185 VIP-funded programs, the process evaluation included a stratified random sample of 40 programs. Programs were stratified by geographic location (Philadelphia vs. the remainder of Pennsylvania), grant size (less than \$500,000 vs. \$500,000 or more), and program type (prevention vs. intervention), resulting in eight strata. Five programs were randomly selected from each stratum, with no organization selected more than once, producing a balanced sample that reflected the diversity of VIP-funded programs. For this evaluation, prevention programs were defined as those that proactively addressed risk factors for violence and generally did not require person-based eligibility criteria, whereas intervention programs served individuals already identified as being at elevated risk for violence or recently impacted by violence and typically limited participation based on specific risk factors.

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For more information about the evaluation, the full evaluation report and other materials produced by the evaluation team, see [Evaluation of Pennsylvania Community Violence Intervention Programs | NORC at the University of Chicago](#)

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