

Reducing Urban Violence and Improving Youth Outcomes in the Americas

Action Tour Report

May 31–June 3, 2016
Chicago, Illinois

Executive summary

The world today has the largest population of young people in history, yet tragically, far too many of these youth are unlikely to live past the age of 30. Worldwide, youth aged 15 to 29 make up more than 40 percent of all homicides, while millions more fall victim to nonfatal violent crimes.

Three organizations—the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, the University of Chicago Urban Labs, and the World Bank—convened approximately 30 leaders in Chicago from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Jamaica, and other Latin American and Caribbean countries and the United States working on the front lines of urban youth violence prevention. They discussed promising ways to strengthen urban public safety and improve the lives of youth in cities throughout the Americas.

The action tour explored the importance of local context and the built environment to foster safer neighborhoods, how big data can shape safer cities, how to scale programs that work, and how to engage older youth. Participants also examined how violence prevention fits into a resilient cities agenda and what twenty-first century policing and security should look like.

Participants identified several themes crucial to informing their existing efforts and shaping future initiatives, including:

- Create cross-sector partnerships. Cross-sector partnerships are vital to building sustainable violence-prevention programs.
- Tailor ideas to local contexts. Leaders need to tailor promising ideas to the local context, history, culture, and political system of each city, while also harnessing the power of best practices that transcend context.
- Maintain long-term continuity. Leaders must be mindful that programs can take many years to produce results.
- Develop detailed frameworks for community policing. Leaders interested in supporting community policing programs need detailed frameworks to guide them and their law enforcement partners.
- Fully engage the youth being served. It is essential to involve youth in all facets of urban violence prevention, from program design and research design to implementation.

Participants agreed that relationships across different cities that often struggle with similar challenges can provide a framework for collaboration and sharing of best practices. Such relationships can help policymakers and practitioners move beyond ad hoc, local initiatives to truly begin to make widespread, sustainable progress and help any global city grappling with these issues. This report serves as a summary of their findings.

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Introduction

The world now has the largest population of young people in history. Tragically, a large proportion of these young people are unlikely to live past the age of 30. Worldwide, youth aged 15 to 29 make up more than 40 percent of all homicides, while millions more fall victim to nonfatal violent crimes.¹ In addition to the heartbreaking toll of urban youth violence in the Americas on individuals and families, violence also exacerbates almost every urban policy problem, drawing scarce resources away from other priorities, such as improving education and public infrastructure, building human capital, and investing in the arts.

There is no shortage of innovation among both frontline practitioners and policymakers at every level who are dedicated to finding solutions; rather what is lacking is evidence about which policies and programs really work, for whom, and why. This action tour offered an opportunity for stakeholders from across the Americas to better understand how practitioners, policymakers, researchers, the private sector, and the philanthropic community can work together to harness the power of innovation and begin to generate evidence to improve human lives.

With generous support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, three organizations—the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, the University of Chicago Urban Labs, and the World Bank—convened leaders from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Jamaica, and other Latin American and Caribbean countries working on the front lines of urban youth violence prevention to discuss promising ways to strengthen urban public safety and improve the lives of youth in cities throughout the Americas. The tour’s panels and opportunities for exchange highlighted novel policy levers for tackling urban youth violence and laid the foundation for future collaborative work. The tour also

focused on ways policymakers could leverage insights and strategies from frontline practitioners and use data and evaluation to generate rigorous evidence to increase social good. And finally, it featured potentially scalable solutions for reducing youth crime and violence across geographic contexts.

Over four days participants identified several themes to drive future discussions and partnerships. There was significant interest among participants in finding ways to implement and evaluate similar strategies in different cities in order to generate a better understanding of how a particular program works across different geographic and national contexts. There was also a shared interest in continued and collaborative learning about the

relationship between police officers and the communities they serve, particularly in regions where enforcement is the primary lever of crime control and where relationships have been historically fraught. Participants agreed that relationships among

policymakers and practitioners across different cities that often struggle with similar challenges can provide a framework for collaboration and sharing of best practices and lessons learned. Such relationships can help policymakers and practitioners move beyond ad hoc, local initiatives to truly begin to make widespread, sustainable progress.

This report serves as a summary of the four-day action tour in Chicago. It is organized by topic and seeks to present key topic areas, session takeaways, and recommendations made by participants and organizers. The report is intended to be a resource, but all content is included on a not-for-attribution basis.

The organizers and participants are deeply grateful to the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation for its generous support of the tour and this initiative.

Understanding the unique contexts in which young people live, study, work and play, and the deep inequities in many of these environments is critical to finding solutions to the challenges of crime and violence.

Figure 1

The 50 Most Dangerous Cities in the World (2015)

Cities by rank in 2015	Country	Number of homicides	City population	Homicide rate (per 100,000)
1 Caracas	Venezuela	3,946	3,291,830	119.87
2 San Pedro Sula	Honduras	885	797,065	111.03
3 San Salvador	El Salvador	1,918	1,767,102	108.54
4 Acapulco	Mexico	903	862,176	104.73
5 Maturín	Venezuela	505	584,166	86.45
6 Distrito Central	Honduras	882	1,199,802	73.51
7 Valencia	Venezuela	1,125	1,555,739	72.31
8 Palmira	Colombia	216	304,735	70.88
9 Cape Town	South Africa	2,451	3,740,026	65.53
10 Cali	Colombia	1,523	2,369,821	64.27
11 Ciudad Guayana	Venezuela	547	877,547	62.33
12 Fortaleza	Brazil	2,422	3,985,297	60.77
13 Natal	Brazil	921	1,518,221	60.66
14 Salvador	Brazil	1,996	3,291,830	60.63
15 St. Louis	USA	188	317,416	59.23
16 João Pessoa	Brazil	643	1,100,956	58.4
17 Culiacán	Mexico	518	923,546	56.09
18 Maceió	Brazil	564	1,013,773	55.63
19 Baltimore	USA	343	623,911	54.98
20 Barquisimeto	Venezuela	719	1,308,163	54.96
21 São Luís	Brazil	802	1,511,678	53.05
22 Cuiabá	Brazil	412	849,083	48.52
23 Manaus	Brazil	985	2,057,711	47.87
24 Cumaná	Venezuela	199	416,587	47.77
25 Guatemala City	Guatemala	1,528	3,239,185	47.17

Cities by rank in 2015	Country	Number of homicides	City population	Homicide rate (per 100,000)
26 Belém	Brazil	1,101	2,402,437	45.83
27 Feira de Santana	Brazil	281	617,528	45.5
28 Detroit	USA	295	672,193	43.89
29 Aparecida (Goiânia)	Brazil	847	1,952,607	43.38
30 Teresina	Brazil	360	844,245	42.64
31 Vitória	Brazil	802	1,910,101	41.99
32 New Orleans	USA	164	395,710	41.44
33 Kingston	Jamaica	492	1,196,040	41.14
34 Gran Barcelona	Venezuela	334	833,328	40.08
35 Tijuana	Mexico	668	1,708,679	39.09
36 Vitória da Conquista	Brazil	132	343,230	38.46
37 Recife	Brazil	1,492	3,914,317	38.12
38 Aracaju	Brazil	349	925,744	37.7
39 Campos dos Goytacazes	Brazil	175	483,970	36.16
40 Campina Grande	Brazil	146	405,072	36.04
41 Durban	South Africa	1,237	3,442,361	35.93
42 Nelson Mandela Bay	South Africa	413	1,152,115	35.85
43 Porto Alegre	Brazil	1,479	4,258,926	34.73
44 Curitiba	Brazil	1,121	3,230,061	34.71
45 Pereira	Colombia	153	469,612	32.58
46 Victoria	Mexico	107	350,862	30.5
47 Johannesburg	South Africa	1,344	4,434,827	30.31
48 Macapá	Brazil	138	456,171	30.25
49 Maracaibo	Venezuela	477	1,653,211	28.85
50 Obregón	Mexico	90	318,184	28.29

Source: Citizens' Council for Public Security and Criminal Justice, <http://www.seguridadjusticiaypaz.org.mx/biblioteca/prensa/send/6-prensa/231-caracas-venezuela-the-most-violent-city-in-the-world>.

The power of place: Working across policy domains to build safer neighborhoods and cities

One of the most pressing policy problems facing every big city is how to keep youth safe from crime and violence. In studies of behavioral health—including violence involvement and alcohol and other drug use—and mental health, there is growing evidence that environmental risk is a strong predictor of behavior, especially in highly disordered environments where formal social control is weak.

Many innovations in the Latin American and Caribbean region are built on the importance of place in likelihood of violence involvement and its prevention. Understanding the unique contexts in which young people live, study, work, and play and the deep inequities in many of these environments is critical to finding solutions to the challenges of crime and violence. Structural and policy interventions to address features of the built and social environment are varied and include the reduction of alcohol outlet density and the implementation of gun-carrying bans as part of larger urban policy agendas. The creation and implementation of such policies often require collaboration across sectors.

Key takeaways

Create cross-sector partnerships. Cross-sector partnerships are vital to building sustainable violence prevention programs. Multiple models exist for this kind of collaboration, driven either by government, as is the case in Cali, Colombia, or by community-based organizations, such as by Enlace in Chicago. Creating a common starting point to foster buy-in from key partners is essential, as is the need to identify and leverage existing areas of shared work and a common mission to maximize funding and other resources.

Engage the community in all phases. Effective programs can only be successful if they are actually implemented, which requires cooperation from multiple stakeholders. Participants noted that by building support with the public at large, government leaders can build a broader network of stakeholders committed to seeing

results and reduce the skepticism and lack of trust that can be caused by top-down decision making.

Understand the youth population. Many of the participants knew from experience that strong programs are built with a deep understanding of the youth population being served and how certain environments can engender a sense of stigma within the youth themselves and within society more broadly. Social media can offer policymakers and practitioners a means to foster deeper engagement with youth.

Support initiatives that reduce recidivism. Participants from across the region had a shared interest in finding strategies and interventions to reduce recidivism. The discussion highlighted important—and low-cost—ways leaders can ameliorate the conditions that can lead young people to re-engage with crime. Public-private partnerships that focus on training in both hard and soft skills as well as in on-the-job norms can also be effective.

Unleashing the power of big (and little) data to build safer cities

The growing capacity of organizations and cities to collect and analyze data is greatly advancing our ability to understand what works and why. It also increasingly allows for more accurate predictions about risk and protective factors surrounding urban youth violence. In Chicago we see immense possibilities in the wealth of administrative data the city is already collecting and in the commitment of local policymakers to make data

available for researchers and practitioners trying to better understand how to do the most social good per dollar spent.² By strengthening their local adminis-

trative data systems, other cities can harness the power of data to make smarter bets on social programs that improve public safety and human lives. But building a big data infrastructure is not enough, nor is it an immediate option for all cities, particularly for small cities where data collection infrastructure and perceptions of data sharing are still developing.

It is important to foster collaborative efforts that support local policymakers and practitioners in thinking strategically about how their own cities can use data (both large sets and small) to inform policy and practice. There

Cross-sector partnerships are vital to building sustainable violence prevention programs.

are many existing and new approaches to gathering administrative data and strategies for generating collaborative plans to harness the power of data that can be tailored to different contexts.

Key takeaways

Build adaptive, flexible research tools. The root causes and implications of urban violence are multidimensional. Effective programs are often hypertailored to target specific communities and their geographic, historic, and social contexts. But participants agreed that designing adaptive, flexible research approaches could help cities find ways to expand the potential impact of proven models to other contexts facing similar challenges.

Harness public-private partnerships. Governments may not always have the capacity to collect the data they need to answer their most pressing policy questions. In many cases, the data that are most useful are often held across multiple databases, which makes generating a holistic interpretation of the various variables very challenging. Furthermore, the success of programs and data analysis requires not only strong data, but also expertise in how to use that data. Researchers can help the public sector understand how to work with data through teaching and training partnerships. Regional leaders who want to contribute to research and identify solutions should collectively promote data sharing with scholars working on these issues.

Develop a framework for internationalizing programs. The work of UChicago Urban Labs demonstrates the strong potential for strategic research and data to have significant impact on effective program design and administration across a region. However, even in the UChicago experience, the wide-reaching impact of research can be limited by politics, country-specific variations, and society's ability to scale effective programs successfully. Participants agreed that regional leaders need a framework for internationalizing successful initiatives.

The root causes and implications of urban violence are multidimensional.

Building better cities: The science of scaling what works

The persistence of urban challenges like youth violence and lack of educational attainment among disadvantaged youth has led to skepticism about the possibility of dramatically reducing violence, making our cities safer, and providing all youth with access to the opportunities created by education. A UChicago Education Lab study of a high-intensity math tutoring program is demonstrating the importance of generating evidence about program and policy effectiveness and how to scale up promising strategies. UChicago

researchers are working to understand more about how to create the capacity to act on that evidence and expand proven, cost-effective programs to additional sites and cities.

This “science of scale-up” could someday overturn the long-held pessimism that “nothing scales” because the challenges of fidelity, replicability, and context are simply too great in the world of social policy. To create the optimal conditions for successful scaling, policymakers, researchers, practitioners, and funders need to prepare local programs for rigorous evaluation and work together to begin to better understand what the “key ingredients” of promising programs are and what program inputs may be in short supply as a program scales.

Key takeaways

Adjust for local contexts. Few programs, no matter how successful in their locality of origin, will produce the same results in a different environment. But this does not mean that particular program strengths and ingredients cannot be successfully transferred and shared. To scale programs effectively, core components of programs need to be maintained while adjusting for local community characteristics and culture.

Maintain long-term continuity. Participants noted that leaders must also be mindful that programs can take many years to produce results. This poses a challenge in the Americas, as political administrations can have relatively short terms and continuity is difficult when new administrations take over. Too often, quality programs are abandoned or scaled back because results are not instantaneous. Deep partnerships between

policymakers and researchers are essential to maintain long-term continuity and successful implementation of programs over time.

Evidence-based solutions for older youth: Innovations in prevention and intervention

Research has shown that most “criminal careers” begin and end in adolescence, when offending rates are highest.³ This suggests that large social cost savings would be possible if we could find strategies to reduce crime and violence among youth, especially among older youth. Unfortunately, most attempts to improve outcomes for older youth have yielded disappointing results. This has led some to argue that improving outcomes of at-risk youth is too difficult and costly once they reach adolescence. Recent research suggests this conclusion might be premature. Maybe we have simply been aiming at the wrong targets.

There are many strategies for improving outcomes for these hard-to-reach—but critically important and historically underserved—populations. Leaders need to help youth think more reflexively in high-stakes situations and develop policies to address the violence prevention and rehabilitation needs of older youth who may be at elevated risk for violence involvement. Some emerging strategies leverage recent insights from psychology, trauma-informed care, and brain development research to help adolescents avoid dangerous behaviors and choices. The implementation of such programs often requires new types of cross-sector collaboration and highly focused approaches, but the lessons they offer may be adaptable across a wide variety of local and international contexts.

Key takeaways

Invest in more research. While a large body of research suggests the effectiveness of prevention, research on the efficacy of intervention with older youth is much more limited. Investment in older youth also challenges the conventional wisdom of many policymakers and researchers that intervening in early childhood is more cost effective than efforts to change outcomes later in life. More investment in research for programs targeted

to older youth is needed for scholars and policymakers to better understand the impact of intervening at various stages of a youth’s life.

Fully engage the youth being served. It is essential to involve youth in all facets of urban violence prevention, from program design and research design to implementation. Youth can be important allies to build support for programs. Social media also offers useful tools for creating connections and relationships with the population being served and fully engaging them in helping to create safer communities.

Incorporate public health research. It is important to note that public health research and intervention models are increasingly helpful in understanding and addressing the cyclical nature of urban violence. Participants noted that these models are helping shift the focus—and the “blame”—from individuals to social systems.

Twenty-first century policing and security

Over the last 20 years, many cities across the Americas have made huge strides in their efforts to reduce crime and violence. Even with the recent upticks in shootings and homicides in some American cities, things today

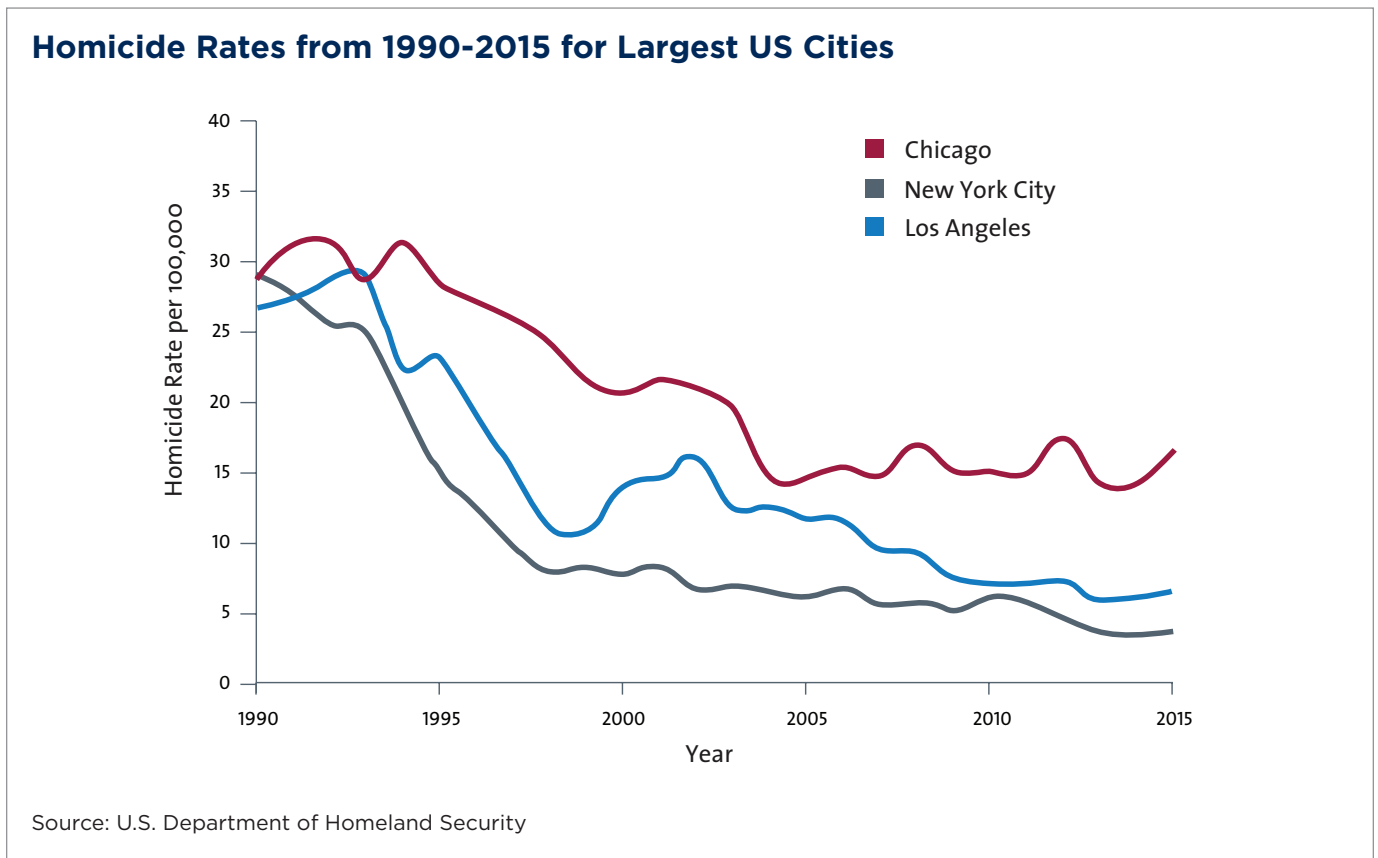
look far better than they did in the 1980s and early 1990s. Yet this progress toward stemming violence has not been without costs. Law enforcement strategies have often been accompanied by serious social costs

and unintended consequences that have disproportionately affected those in the country’s most disadvantaged and segregated neighborhoods. These costs have been heartbreakingly visible in Chicago over the last year.

Law enforcement, civic leaders, researchers, and community members have long known that policing alone will have limited impact. Public safety must be co-produced by police and communities. Yet conversations about how to promote safe neighborhoods have too long been siloed despite common goals and challenges. Participants expressed an interest in understanding more about these questions: How can police work with young people in ways that preserve and enhance public safety but don’t violate civil rights? How can police and communities rebuild trust and engage

Leaders interested in supporting community policing programs need detailed frameworks to guide them and their law enforcement partners.

Figure 2



around the shared goal of fostering safe and vibrant communities? How can the police and the community work together to mitigate the damaging social costs of policing and craft better policing policy?

Key takeaways

Develop detailed frameworks for community policing.

While there is much discussion about the benefits of community policing, participants in the tour noted that there are few specific instructions on how to successfully implement these programs. Leaders interested in supporting community policing programs need detailed frameworks to guide them and their law enforcement partners, particularly in regions where law enforcement is accustomed to using force to obtain information or combat crime and violence. Changing damaging behaviors, approaches, and a pervasive culture of distrust will take time, but could bring enormous benefits to both police forces and communities.

Support ongoing training for officers. A task force recently came together in Chicago and produced a report that was informed by public hearings across the city. Among its recommendations was the need to imple-

ment new recruitment strategies and improve basic and ongoing training for police officers. Government police and law enforcement are often the primary government agencies working in high-poverty communities, making them the first and often the only social service support for local citizens. Support and training are needed throughout an officer's career (and not only during their initial training) to help them understand their community's history and makeup, engage in best practices in dealing with the mentally ill and the homeless, and learn skills in peacekeeping and de-escalation.

Define what the community wants. Effective policing requires that the community and the police work together to co-produce public safety. It may be beneficial for law enforcement to engage more actively in trying to understand the community perspective and most urgent needs.

Understand the youth experience. There are numerous ways that community-based organizations partner with and engage youth. Mentoring programs, youth sports leagues, and violence interruption programs are some successful models for engaging youth. But initiatives are

most effective when the leaders seek to understand the experience of youth in disenfranchised communities. As one participant noted, we should “stand in awe of the weight that these kids carry, not in judgment.”

Resilient cities

The 100 Resilient Cities program, pioneered by the Rockefeller Foundation, helps cities around the world become more resilient to the physical, social, and economic challenges that are a growing part of urban life in the twenty-first century. This program supports the adoption and incorporation of a view of resilience not just against natural shocks—such as earthquakes, fires, and floods—but also against the stresses that weaken the fabric of a city on a day-to-day or cyclical basis—such as high unemployment, inefficient public transportation, chronic food and water shortages, and endemic violence. By addressing both shocks and stresses, the program seeks to help cities become better at responding to adverse events and better able to deliver basic services to citizens in both good and bad times.

Youth violence prevention has emerged as a core focus of the Resilient Cities agenda. This initiative is helping cities withstand, respond to, and adapt more readily to chronic stresses and acute shocks so they can emerge stronger after tough times and live better in good times. One hundred cities have been invited to join the network, of which nearly 40 are in the Americas. Several of those cities are developing strategies to combat endemic crime and violence, including Buenos Aires in Argentina, Cali and Medellin in Colombia, Chicago in the United States, Colima and Juarez in Mexico, and Salvador in Brazil. Each city has a chief resilience officer to help lead their violence reduction strategy.

Key takeaways

Tailor ideas to local contexts. As previously noted, what works in one city may not work exactly the same way in another. Leaders need to tailor promising ideas to the local context, history, culture, and political system of each city, while also harnessing the power of best practices that transcend context.

Encourage strong municipal governments. The Resilient Cities model emphasizes the role of cities to

implement changes, shifting the responsibility for safer cities away from federal governments. This model can only work well in places that have strong and effective municipal governance.

Engage diverse stakeholders. Stopping the spread of violence requires the support of multiple stakeholders and a committed network that includes the community, government, and academic and research partners.

Conclusion

The four-day action tour revealed a real desire and great need among participants for opportunities to engage with peer leaders from around the region to discuss challenges in urban youth violence prevention. Partici-

pants valued the opportunity to share their experiences, gather new insights, and build relationships. Perhaps not surprisingly, many of the cities with the highest levels of violence had the most to teach.

While participants discussed a wide range of topics, from evaluating programs to scaling ideas, a few key messages emerged throughout all the discussions:

- To prevent violence, collaboration with diverse stakeholders is essential, including policymakers, researchers, the public health sector, community members, and law enforcement. Leaders can have more of an impact when they keep in mind the importance of partnerships and strong relationships in ensuring long-term viability of evidence-based programs.
- There is a critical need for a strong regional partnership of organizations working together to prevent urban violence. There was enthusiasm for the suggestion that this partnership should consider implementing a particular intervention simultaneously across multiple cities and evaluate its impacts to better understand how a given approach works in varying contexts.
- While coordination between entities that manage security and those that manage social issues has been a challenge throughout much of the region, municipal leaders need to continue to identify ways to bring these bodies together and help them to work collaboratively. Additional research and dissemina-

The world has become desensitized to the horrific numbers of homicides and shootings, particularly of young people, in major cities around the Americas.

tion of best practices for fostering strong and productive relationships between social services and law enforcement is critical.

- Urban youth affected by violence need to be fully engaged in all aspects of program development, not just for feedback, but for design and implementation as well. Some participants suggested creating a “secretary of youth” position in local governments, replicating an initiative in Medellín, Colombia, as well as launching an annual youth summit organized and staffed by youth in disadvantaged communities with high levels of violence.

Ultimately, participants agreed that the challenge of urban violence needs to be reframed vis-à-vis other crises that have generated widespread public outcry and policy responses, such as international terrorism, addictions, and animal rights. The world has become desensitized to the horrific numbers of homicides and shootings, particularly of young people, in major cities around the Americas. This complacency is unacceptable, and leaders and communities must demonstrate the urgency of addressing the heartbreaking challenge of youth violence.

This core group of participants in the tour aims to continue meeting regularly, either via Skype/phone or in person. They will continue to share their experiences beyond the annual gatherings to establish sustainability and momentum within the partnership. The participants urged funders and foundations to support evaluations that demonstrate measurable results and to encourage deeper collaborations across sectors.

There is a strong commitment from the World Bank to foster this work and the collaboration of the new partnership to help bring lessons learned in Cali and Chicago and elsewhere to policymakers in other cities. But there is also the recognition that what worked in Cali may not work in Mexico City. It is critical to generate evidence that illuminates not just whether a program works, but why and how. Exploring the mechanisms behind promising violence prevention approaches can lead to powerful insights that transcend geographic context and can help any global city grappling with these issues.

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Appendix: Interviews and site visits

Participants were given the opportunity to meet with people in Chicago who are working on the front lines of youth violence prevention and to visit innovative programs currently being implemented in Chicago Public Schools in some of the city's most distressed neighborhoods. These visits and interviews were met with broad enthusiasm, inspiring many to begin thinking about how approaches like these could be implemented and potentially have an impact in their own cities

Working in Chicago's Fenger High School

One small group met with Liz Dozier, managing director of Chicago Beyond, a new Chicago nonprofit dedicated to helping Chicago youth realize their potential. Chicago Beyond sources and supports innovative programs that improve educational attainment and youth public safety, invests in research that allows partner organizations to better understand what works and why so they can improve and potentially scale their programs over time, and sparks further public and philanthropic investments in approaches that do the most good to improve young lives.

Dozier is former principal of Christian Fenger Academy High School, once known as one of the most violent and underperforming schools in Chicago. The focus of this visit was on her experience at Fenger. Having previously worked with the "turnaround model," a bold strategy to improve Chicago's lowest performing schools, she applied new tactics and policies that resulted in a decrease in Fenger's dropout rate from 19 to 2 percent, a 40 percent increase in the number of freshman students "on track" to graduate, and a double-digit increase in the school's attendance and state-ranked graduation rate. During Dozier's tenure as principal (2008–2015), Fenger High School became one of the district leaders in restorative justice, social and emotional learning, and academic interventions.

She shared that her work was rooted in her belief that children do not have a natural propensity for violence and that policymakers need to understand how long-term exposure to systemic violence creates trauma. As principal she challenged traditional courses of action in managing troubled students and provided intense "wrap-around" supports instead of using suspension or expulsion. She trained school staff in how to best sup-

port children with high levels of trauma, including bringing in professional development workshops on cultural competency and encouraging teachers to spend time in the homes of students who were failing. She engaged students' probation officers as partners, offered grief counseling for students during the school day, and asked students to lead peace circles. Integrating education with the criminal justice system and training teachers are elements of the Fenger model that could be scaled across other cities struggling to reduce youth violence and help youth succeed in school.

Cure Violence

All participants met with Cure Violence at their offices at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Cure Violence is a teaching, training, research, and assessment NGO focused on violence prevention. They are leading a movement to treat violence as a public health issue, fundamentally changing the discourse on and approach to violence. Rather than viewing violence as a human failing that requires punitive responses, Cure Violence views it as a contagious epidemic. Cure Violence galvanizes voices and resources throughout the health system to establish violence prevention as a health sector responsibility and imperative.

The Cure Violence health model is used by more than 50 cities and organizations in the United States as well as in eight countries around the world (from Canada to South Africa to Syria). Cure Violence provides cities and organizations with the training and technical assistance to effectively implement its model. The organization is currently focusing its efforts on three parts of the world: the United States, Latin America, and the Middle East/North Africa. Cities and organizations implementing the Cure Violence health model regularly experience



*Cure Violence worker working with a client.
Credit: Cure Violence*



Students engaged in a team-building exercise during a BAM group session.
Credit: Youth Guidance

reductions in violence within the first year (ranging from 40 to 70 percent) and greater reductions in subsequent years.

Interventions in Chicago's high schools

Some participants had the opportunity to visit one of two high schools in Chicago: the Little Village Lawndale Campus, a predominantly Hispanic school, and Bowen High School, a predominantly African American high school. Both visits featured three promising programs that are offered to youth during the school day.

- Becoming a Man (BAM)** program is a violence-reduction program that offers youth weekly group sessions for one hour during the school day and a counselor they can seek out individually throughout the week. BAM counselors use standard elements of cognitive behavioral therapy to help youth recognize their automatic responses and slow down their thinking in high-stakes situations. The curriculum includes weekly “check-ins” to begin each session as well as role-playing, team-building, and problem-solving activities. The University of Chicago Crime Lab has evaluated BAM in two separate randomized controlled trials. The Crime Lab’s first BAM study found that the program decreased violent crime arrests by 45 percent. Recent results from the second, two-year study of more than 2,000 young men found a 50 percent reduction in violent-crime arrests. The Crime Lab’s research also demonstrates the long-term benefits of the BAM program on educational attainment: youth who participated in the Crime Lab’s first study (2009-10) were 19 percent more likely to graduate

from high school on time than their peers who did not participate in the program.

- Working on Womanhood (WOW)** uses cognitive behavioral therapy approaches to work to improve the social-emotional and behavioral outcomes of the young women it serves. Young women attend one-hour group sessions during the school day, which are led by a trained counselor. WOW participants discuss challenges, share experiences, and receive help from counselors in visionary goal setting. They also learn respect for others and, most importantly, for themselves.
- SAGA Innovations** provides youth with high-intensity, individualized math tutoring designed to help them catch up to grade level so that they can re-engage with regular classroom instruction. The University of Chicago Education Lab is evaluating this approach in a large-scale randomized controlled trial in the Chicago Public Schools and has found that it improved student math test scores by the equivalent of an extra one to two years of learning in just one year. The Education Lab’s work on SAGA suggests that it is possible to substantially and cost-effectively improve academic outcomes for disadvantaged children even once they reach adolescence.



Students engaged in a team-building exercise during a WOW group session.
Credit: Youth Guidance

Endnotes

1. Source: United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, “Global Study on Homicide 2013,” Vienna: United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, 2014, https://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014_GLOBAL_HOMICIDE_BOOK_web.pdf.
2. Chicago Public School and Chicago Police Department data are publicly available at <https://data.cityofchicago.org>.
3. Sources: Lance Lochner, “Education, Work, and Crime: A Human Capital Approach,” *International Economic Review* 45, no. 3 (August, 2004), p.811-843; S.F. Leung, “An economic analysis of the age-crime profile,” *Journal of Economic Dynamics and Control* 18 (1994), p. 481-497.



180 North Stetson Avenue, Suite 1400
Chicago, Illinois 60601
www.thechicagocouncil.org

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33 N. LaSalle, Suite 1600
Chicago, IL 60602
www.urbanlabs.uchicago.edu

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