

Factsheet:
A Comprehensive U.S. Government Approach to Countering Violent Extremism

The nature and range of terrorist and violent extremist threats has evolved quickly, in a media environment that often seizes on the sensational. As a society it is vital for all of us to come together to channel the positive energy of communities, and the private sector toward building a greater sense of awareness, engagement, and resilience.

Policy Context

In August 2011, the White House released *Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States*, the first national strategy to prevent violent extremism domestically. In December 2011, a corresponding Strategic Implementation Plan outlined the specific steps departments and agencies will take to achieve the strategy's central goal of preventing violent extremists and their supporters from radicalizing, recruiting, or inspiring individuals or groups in the United States to commit acts of violence.

Successfully preventing violent extremism requires a range of tools beyond traditional law enforcement activities. CVE often involves undercutting terrorist ideologies and local drivers of radicalization, and it is therefore equally if not more important that civil society and non-governmental actors participate, particularly given government's legal and credibility limitations in this space. As such, the underlying premise of a comprehensive approach to countering violent extremism in the United States includes two key provisions: (1) local communities are the solution to violent extremism; and (2) consideration must be provided for each community's local dynamics.

At the federal level, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) are implementing the strategy by working together with other agencies to ensure a coordinated, whole-of-government approach. In the field, local governments and law enforcement agencies continue to build relationships within their communities through established community policing and community outreach mechanisms. In this respect, decades of community-based problem solving, local partnerships, and community-oriented policing provides a basis for addressing violent extremism as part of a broader mandate of community safety, with an emphasis on crime prevention.

What is CVE?

The term "Countering Violent Extremism" refers to efforts focused on preventing all forms of ideologically based extremist violence, to include prevention of successful recruitment into terrorist groups. It is distinct from disruptive actions which focus on stopping acts of terrorism by those who have already subscribed to violence.

CVE efforts include awareness building, counternarrative measures, and intervention programs:

- **Violent extremism awareness:** programs that build awareness of the violent extremism (such as briefings on radicalization, recruitment, and indicators).
- **Counternarrative measures:** programs or messages that directly address and counter the violent extremist recruitment narrative (such as encouraging community-led counternarratives online).
- **Intervention measures:** programs that facilitate intervention in a person's pathway to radicalization before the line of criminal activity is crossed (such as community-led intervention models).

Broad community outreach and engagement efforts, made in the effort to address civil rights protections, or advance common community goals (such as bullying prevention or anti-gang efforts) that are conducted for the purpose of building stronger communities, and not explicitly CVE, can nonetheless have important CVE benefits by reducing alienation of vulnerable minority populations and assisting in developing integrated and resilient communities.

Role of Local Partners

CVE efforts rely heavily on well-informed and equipped families, local communities, and local institutions. Communities play a strong role in CVE efforts—they are the first line of defense against violent extremists, and are best suited to lead in both counternarrative and intervention measures. Communities have more credibility than government to challenge the ideological underpinnings of violent extremist groups, and they are more suited to know when and how to engage with a vulnerable individual. .

Community Engagement on CVE

The U.S. Government has conducted outreach in various cities across the country with law enforcement, public safety officials, and directly to communities around the threat of violent extremism and terrorist recruitment. They have used certain “CVE Tools” that include the Community Awareness Briefing (CAB), as well as the Community Resilience Exercise (CREX).

- The Community Resilience Exercise (CREX) is a half-day table-top exercise designed to improve communication between law enforcement and communities and to share ideas on how best to build community resilience. DHS's Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) and NCTC have worked with U.S. Attorneys and other local partners to implement this exercise—which involves an unfolding scenario of possible violent extremist activity—in cities across the United States.
- The Community Awareness Briefing (CAB) is a presentation designed to help communities and law enforcement develop understanding of violent extremist recruitment tactics and explore ways to collectively prevent and address such public safety threats at the local level. It is updated continually with new information or from feedback. Due to the growing number of individuals traveling to foreign conflicts, such as Syria and Iraq, the Community Awareness Briefing now includes information relating to the foreign fighter recruitment. The Community Awareness Briefing has been conducted by multiple U.S. cities over the past few years.

“Three Region” Pilot Program

Over the past several months, non-governmental and governmental stakeholders in the Greater Boston region, Los Angeles, and Minneapolis-St. Paul have been collaborating to develop locally-driven prevention frameworks that best address the unique issues facing their communities. In the same way local partners have developed frameworks to address drug and gang prevention, they are developing frameworks to address violent extremism prevention. This pilot encourages stakeholders to collectively evaluate solutions and determine resources and expertise available or needed to implement those solutions.

Local stakeholders—which include public health professionals, mental health experts, educators, faith-based leaders, non-governmental organizations and local, state and federal government - are in the best position to identify needs and gaps in services, assess existing local programs, leverage existing networks, define and develop measurable goals and implement solutions.

The Federal Government’s role is to marshal efforts and, as appropriate, provide support to communities so they may enhance their ability to respond to the needs of individuals and families.

Importance of Intervention Options

There are important non-law enforcement efforts that communities can take to engage with vulnerable individuals before they turn to extremist violence. We can learn from intervention approaches in other situations, such as gang prevention. CVE intervention aims to use the same principles and we can make real progress by adapting the kinds of programs we are using in non-counterterrorism areas for our needs. Some examples of successful programs include:

- Montgomery County, MD, where communities and law enforcement are collaborating to bring together faith-based leaders, as well as education and mental health officials to help at-risk youth.
- The World Organization for Resource Development and Education (WORDE), partnered with the Montgomery County Chief of Police to set up an intervention board. This program has successfully convened local government resources, such as mental health professionals and school officials, as well as interfaith leaders who help with religious counseling. The intervention board receives referrals from the community, and the board identifies accessible government and community resources.
- Also, the Muslim Public Affairs Council released their Safe Spaces Initiative, which is essentially a guide for community centers on how to deal with violent extremism in their communities using a phased approach of prevention, intervention, and ejection.

Counternarratives

- Communities have also taken a lead in creating counternarratives to violent extremists. For instance, Somali communities in Minneapolis have created The Truth About Al Shabaab and Broken Dreams to highlight the bankrupt ideology of this terrorist group. And communities are utilizing social media to challenge ISIL online.