



# *National Countering Violent Extremism Workshop*

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*After-Action Report*

*November 2011*





*National Countering  
Violent Extremism  
Workshop*

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This project was supported by Grant No. 2010-D6-BX-K055 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Justice's Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Justice or the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.



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## *Section One Introduction*

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, and the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), hosted the National Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Workshop in Columbus, Ohio, on August 2–3, 2011. The National CVE Workshop represents the first time fusion center directors and major city police department intelligence commanders were brought together to address the CVE topic: further enhancing state, local, and federal partnerships. More than 160 participants attended and heard subject-matter experts speak from all levels of government, fusion centers, academia, and the community on emerging issues related to violent extremism.

The purpose of the workshop was to build an understanding of violent extremism and share best practices aimed at:

1. Understanding the violent extremism phenomenon in the homeland.
2. Building awareness of the violent extremism threat to local communities.
3. Supporting fusion centers to develop better intelligence products to support law enforcement customers.

To achieve these goals, workshop sessions were held on the following topics:

- ◀ Understanding Violent Extremism: An Overview
- ◀ Understanding Violent Extremism: Al-Qa'ida-Inspired Threats
- ◀ Najibullah Zazi: A Case Study
- ◀ Understanding Violent Extremism: Domestic Threats
- ◀ Countering Violent Extremism Through Community Policing
- ◀ Building Relationships and Trust
- ◀ Developing Actionable Products

- ◀ Community Awareness Brief
- ◀ Regional Breakout Sessions

This After-Action Report summarizes the workshop sessions, gives feedback from the regional breakout sessions, and provides next steps for enhancing local, state, and federal efforts to counter violent extremism.





## Section Two Overview

The workshop provided an important opportunity to address recommendations from Secretary Janet Napolitano's [Homeland Security Advisory Council \(HSAC\)](#) and, specifically, the [HSAC's Countering Violent Extremism Working Group](#), which acknowledged that "information-driven, community-based law enforcement efforts hold great promise in preventing violent crime that is terrorism-related, and that promise will be best realized when local authorities work with community members to understand and mitigate all threats facing local communities."

Based on these recommendations, the CVE workshop was developed to provide fusion center personnel and major city police department intelligence unit commanders with a better understanding of violent extremism and ongoing efforts to address the issue. Subject-matter experts were invited to present overviews of violent extremism, including academic perspectives, government perspectives, and case studies.

The workshop also provided a forum for fusion center directors and law enforcement leaders to share best practices to improve information sharing efforts and improve the development of products for state and local customers. The workshop encouraged an interactive dialogue and concluded with regional breakout sessions that provided participants with an opportunity to exchange information, share best practices, and discuss next steps to effectively:

1. Identify local law enforcement customer information needs to support efforts to countering violent extremism.
2. Identify approaches to develop new or tailor existing product lines to meet these needs.
3. Identify more effective approaches to ensure these products are disseminated to line officers (e.g., via Fusion Liaison Officer programs).

The National CVE Workshop coincided with the release of the White House strategy on countering violent extremism, entitled [Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States](#).<sup>1</sup> This strategy

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<sup>1</sup> The White House, *Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States*, Washington, DC: August 2011.

outlined the commitment of the federal government to support and help empower American communities and their local partners in their grassroots efforts to prevent violent extremism by:

1. Improving support to communities, including sharing more information about the threat of radicalization.
2. Strengthening cooperation with local law enforcement, who work with these communities every day.
3. Helping communities to better understand and protect themselves against violent extremist propaganda, especially online.<sup>2</sup>

This strategy represents the first time the U.S. government has released a national strategy to address ideologically inspired violent extremism in the homeland. In alignment with the national CVE strategy, [DHS also released its approach to countering violent extremism](#), which includes working with a broad range of partners to gain a better understanding of the behaviors, tactics, and other indicators that could point to potential terrorist activity within the United States and the best ways to mitigate or prevent that activity. The DHS approach to CVE outlines three main objectives:

1. Support and coordinate efforts to better understand the phenomenon of violent extremism, including assessing the threat it poses to the nation as a whole and within specific communities.
2. Bolster efforts to catalyze and support nongovernmental, community-based programs, and strengthen relationships with communities that may be targeted for recruitment by violent extremists.
3. Disrupt and deter recruitment or individual mobilization through support for local law enforcement programs, including information-driven, community-oriented policing efforts that for decades have proven effective in preventing violent crime.<sup>3</sup>

The National CVE Workshop reflected these goals and provided a foundation for a better understanding of violent extremism.

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<sup>2</sup> The White House, *Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States*, Washington, DC: August 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Fact Sheet: "The Department of Homeland Security's Approach to Countering Violent Extremism," August 2011.





## Section Three Session Summaries

This section provides an overview of the workshop sessions, with the first day primarily dedicated to understanding extremist threat(s), both domestic and international, and the second day focused on how to leverage community-driven information needs in order to develop actionable products to meet the needs of local, state, and tribal customers.

### *Understanding Violent Extremism: An Overview*

This session set the stage for the workshop by providing an overview of violent extremism, as well as associated terms, such as CVE, homegrown violent extremism, radicalization, and mobilization to violence. The panelists defined *radicalization* as “the process by which individuals come to believe that their engagement in nonstate violence to achieve societal change is necessary and justified.” They then discussed the definition of *mobilization to violence* as “a process by which radicalized individuals facilitate direct engagement in violence.” However, the presenters were clear in noting that there is not a single pathway to extremism. Based upon an analysis of existing case studies, several factors were identified as potential indicators of radicalization, including personal vulnerability, group dynamics, and community, sociopolitical, and ideological factors. These factors—coupled with mobilization dynamics such as readiness to act, targets, opportunity, and capability—have an impact on whether an individual is spurred to action.

***Panelists noted that one dynamic that has changed since September 11 and, particularly, in the last five years is the emergence of social media. The increase in social media forums since 2005 has allowed for broader participation and increased learning opportunities to engage in violent extremism.***

Examples of violent extremism were discussed, as well as the diversity of the threat and the emergence of the lone offender. It was noted that there is also diversity among lone offenders, as some individuals may have organizational ties and others may be completely self-reliant. ***Because there is not a single profile of behaviors and indicators resulting in individual radicalization, it is important not to focus on narrowing extremist radicalization to one factor.*** For example, often radicalization is associated with religiosity, but religiosity is not necessarily correlated with violent extremism. ***Because there is no single profile for a pathway to radicalization, suggestions were offered to incorporate the community as one mechanism to strengthen defenses against violent extremism.*** One way of doing so is to educate the community about violent extremism and common recruitment tactics using social media.



This session also discussed some preoperational indicators, such as individual withdrawal, decreasing signs of outward religiosity, and travel arrangements. It is this type of information that can help the community recognize any potential change that may be an early sign of radicalization amongst their community member(s).

## *Understanding Violent Extremism: Al-Qa'ida-Inspired Threats*

This session built on the information presented in the prior session and began with an academic perspective on pathways to radicalization. Distinctions were made regarding the fact that threats differ based on foreign fighters versus civilian targets, lone offenders versus organizational linkages, and religiosity and ideology that are not uniform. ***The importance of suspicious activity reporting (SAR), community engagement, and community policing were also highlighted, as was the fact that citizens must view law enforcement practices as legitimate and fair in order to effectively garner cooperation from the local community.*** Often, the perception of fairness is based on the context of individual experience with local law enforcement, thus further underscoring the importance of community engagement.

The panelists then provided an overview of homegrown violent extremist activities and presented findings from an analysis of homegrown violent extremists and their associated characteristics. ***Of the 62 subjects identified through open source research, there was no single characteristic set identified,*** but four dominant characteristics were found:

1. Supported by nonkinship social networking.
2. Abandoned mainstream groups.
3. Sought out contact with a charismatic predominant figure or group associated with violent extremist ideologies.
4. Violent defense was required by their adopted social group.

By sharing this analysis, ***attendees received important context for better understanding violent extremism and the importance of ensuring close communication and coordination among local, state, and federal, partners on these issues.*** It was also noted that terrorism today is fluid, varied, and complex and that the planning of operations requires less funding, fewer operatives, less training, and a shorter execution time to implement. The panelists also echoed the increased use of social networking for propaganda and recruitment and noted that the same is also true with respect to domestic terrorism, as the Internet was noted as a primary vehicle to encourage extremist activity.

## *Najibullah Zazi: A Case Study*

This panel presented a case study on Operation High Rise, the case against Najibullah Zazi, convicted of plotting to attack the New York City subway system. This session highlighted the partnership between the FBI and the Colorado Information Analysis Center. The presenters discussed the investigative tactics used to identify, arrest, and convict Zazi. ***They also talked about the collaboration and cooperation among local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies to support the operation.*** This session provided participants with a firsthand account of the operation and lessons learned from the case about techniques, tactics, and procedures used by Zazi and his coconspirators.



## *Understanding Violent Extremism: Domestic Threats*

Violent extremism is not limited to threats from al-Qa'ida, and this session was designed to provide overviews of recent domestic threats, as well as a discussion of techniques, trends, common behaviors, tactical approaches, analytical interpretations, and resulting actions to counter violent extremism. The session provided a summary of the different types of domestic groups that have become violent, including, but not limited to, white supremacists, militia extremists, sovereign citizens, antiabortionists, violent animal and environmental extremists, and anarchist extremists. Among the patterns highlighted was the increase in antigovernment groups within the United States.

To demonstrate an example of this issue, the U.S. Attorney from the Eastern District of Michigan provided an overview of the recent Hutaree Militia case. This antigovernment group used the Internet as a recruitment tool and plotted to kill law enforcement officers. Their plan was uncovered by the FBI, in partnership with state and local law enforcement, and led to several indictments.

## *Countering Violent Extremism Through Community Policing*

***A strategy that has been effective in addressing crime, social disorder, and fear of crime is community policing. The foundation of this approach is building relationships and solving problems. These same approaches are also valuable tools in countering violent extremism and have led to the adoption of community policing as an effective strategy to combat violent extremism.*** This panel featured representatives from three local law enforcement agencies who shared their community-policing approaches. The presenters identified commonalities in their approach and emphasized collaboration with the community and other key stakeholders as essential ingredients in their community-policing programs. Key partners in this community-policing effort were identified as government stakeholders; public, private, and faith-based organizations; nongovernmental organizations; schools; local businesses; and local communities. All three agencies had outreach programs, including some focused specifically on disenfranchised communities. They discussed building equity by listening to the community, helping them resolve disputes or answering questions, while at the same time building trust. There was a discussion about educating law enforcement about diverse communities and their respective traditions, while also raising awareness in the community about law enforcement cultural norms and practices in this country.

Effective programs that were highlighted included Fusion Liaison Officer (FLO) programs, which facilitate the exchange of information between fusion centers and stakeholders, including local law enforcement. FLO programs have proved valuable in building partnerships between fusion centers and local law enforcement community-policing efforts. It was noted that FLOs serve as the primary conduit for a two-way exchange of information sharing between fusion centers and local agencies. Examples provided included the relaying of suspicious activity and the sharing of intelligence reports and analysis relevant to line-level officers.

Other programs highlighted were community outreach from the grassroots level to national campaigns, such as the "If You See Something, Say Something™" public awareness campaign. For example, in order to effectively engage all communities in these efforts, outreach materials can be translated into other languages, such as Spanish, Arabic, and Hebrew.

***Panelists stressed the importance of educating line officers on the diverse communities they serve and even assigning dedicated officers to work with specific communities. They noted that outreach efforts can include law enforcement participation in community meetings, citizen and youth academies, police athletic leagues (soccer, basketball, cricket), cadet programs, and officer recruitment or the development of outreach videos about preventing crime and violent extremism.***



Finally, the panelists emphasized the importance of ensuring that community outreach efforts are separate and distinct from intelligence or operational activities and that the analytical efforts of fusion centers should be leveraged to effectively support and inform local law enforcement community engagement activities. ***While all the presenters touted community policing as an effective tool to counter violent extremism, they also emphasized that community policing is a starting point and not the total solution to countering violent extremism and must be coupled with other community-based programs and law enforcement efforts.***

## ***Building Relationships and Trust***

This session illustrated efforts to foster relationships and trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve. Discussion included overcoming barriers and highlighting promising practices at local, state, and federal levels. Panelists noted that outreach methods are similar regardless of the type of community and that the key is for law enforcement officers to engage the community at the grassroots level and focus on developing and maintaining regular and consistent relationships. There was also discussion about the importance of understanding other cultures, customs, and traditions, particularly if an agency wants to develop meaningful relationships with their diversified communities.

From a community perspective, one panelist discussed how counterterrorism efforts and investigations can cause a ripple effect throughout a community and described how relationships between law enforcement and the community can better inform community members about law enforcement and intelligence efforts, such as fusion centers, community policing, and suspicious activity reporting. This open dialogue and transparent process can help demystify law enforcement practices and build trusting relationships in the process.

Panelists also highlighted activities such as hosting regular meetings between community leadership and local law enforcement to help build and sustain trust. For example, the Building Communities of Trust Initiative was noted as one initiative to help facilitate these dialogues. ***These efforts to proactively engage with the community provide an opportunity to discuss a broad spectrum of concerns and can lead to the development of tailored solutions to a host of problems and issues raised. Ultimately, this type of communication and transparency in law enforcement efforts can help address community fears and misperceptions and provide valuable inroads to the community.***

## ***Developing Actionable Products***

This session reviewed the development of products that facilitate information-driven, community-policing efforts, including best practices for soliciting local law enforcement customer requirements and information needs. This session further discussed the development and application of both tactical and strategic intelligence products, including the process of determining the target audience(s) for the product. Panelists also highlighted the importance of FLO programs and reporting suspicious activities as driving forces for enhancing the development of fusion center products.

A firsthand perspective on product development was offered by several fusion center intelligence analysts, including a discussion of products that have been developed related to violent extremism. Analysts discussed the importance of ensuring that customers' requirements are identified prior to product development to ensure that products meet customer needs and that the customers receive products that are both informative and actionable. For example, the inclusion of key indicators and warnings associated with a particular threat provides context to local law enforcement about what they should be looking for in the course of their duties.



It was also noted that analysts should consider the product audience and customer needs in order to create targeted, actionable, and informed products. Many analysts begin to write products too early in the analytic process, which may lead to recycling the same ideas rather than looking at the problem with a new mind-set. **Panelists suggested that analysts focus on understanding how global events affect local communities; take advantage of existing resources, such as Roll Call Releases and other federal products; and research information that is actionable for local law enforcement.**

Analysts were also encouraged to work directly with liaison officers and DHS contacts to help create objective and actionable products tailored to the needs of a state or local jurisdiction. By engaging these partners and meeting regularly with liaisons, analysts are able to solicit feedback on the intelligence products. **Engagement with these partners (e.g., via FLO programs) also further supports the dissemination of fusion center products and the submission of suspicious activity reports.**

## *Community Awareness Briefing*

In order to help engage community members in countering domestic radicalization, the community needs to better understand the nature of the extremist threat. Recognizing this, NCTC developed a briefing for the public that provides an overview of violent extremism and related efforts to foster radicalization within the United States. Although the Community Awareness Briefing is targeted to the community, the abbreviated version presented during the CVE Workshop was intended to raise participant awareness about resources that are available and can be used in their communities.

The brief not only educates community members about radicalization but empowers them with information about signs of violent extremism behavior. For example, while discussing the threat of terrorist recruitment, the Community Awareness Briefing focused on violent extremist use of the Internet and provided specific examples of terrorist recruiting videos, Web sites, and the use of social networking tools and other media. The discussion also centered on measures communities and government can take—together and individually—to counter violent extremism. In this way, it was noted, **communities are not part of the problem; rather, they constitute an essential part of any strategy to counter violent extremist narratives.**

## *Regional Breakout Sessions*

Following the workshop presentations, CVE Workshop participants broke into smaller, regionally focused groups for discussions facilitated by DHS intelligence officers, fusion center directors, and local law enforcement. The purpose of the regional breakouts was to engage attendees in a facilitated discussion on how to best:

1. Identify local law enforcement customer information needs to support efforts to counter violent extremism.
2. Identify approaches to develop new or tailor existing product lines to meet these CVE needs.
3. Identify more effective approaches to ensure that actionable products are disseminated to line officers.

Participants were divided into four regions based on their area of responsibility: Central, Northeast, Southeast, and Western. Key themes that emerged are summarized below.



**1. Identify local law enforcement customer information needs to support efforts to counter violent extremism:**

- ✦ Customer information needs should be regularly validated and updated, including how often specific customers would like products.
- ✦ Fusion centers should consider hosting regular meetings (e.g., quarterly) with local agency representatives or state police associations to solicit feedback and customer needs. This also provides an opportunity to educate the customer set on fusion center capabilities, products, and limitations.
- ✦ Information needs should be articulated to line officers and other homeland security partners via training, roll call announcements, and meetings.
- ✦ Fusion centers should leverage customer information needs, as well as how often specific customers would like products.
- ✦ Local law enforcement should be informed and trained on violent extremism recruitment trends, patterns, and behaviors, so they can better articulate information needs and gaps.
- ✦ Line officers should be trained on indicators and warnings of terrorism and how to report suspicious activity.

**2. Identify approaches to develop new or tailor existing product lines to meet these CVE needs:**

- ✦ Fusion centers should look for opportunities to interact with local law enforcement customers and seek feedback on products via a standardized process.
- ✦ Fusion centers should engage with their customers and develop tailored products with a targeted audience in mind.
- ✦ Fusion centers should recognize that information/products necessary to support local efforts may be different from information needs of federal partners.
- ✦ Knowledge of area of responsibility (AOR) and local law enforcement customers is crucial to product development.
- ✦ Fusion centers should leverage current products and/or develop new products to highlight actionable items for line officers.
- ✦ Fusion centers should optimize requests for information (RFIs) from local stakeholders to better inform and improve products.
- ✦ Daily fusion center products can be condensed into a weekly intelligence product summarizing activities for ease of use by fusion center customers.
- ✦ Participants agreed that developing joint-seal products between fusion centers and local law enforcement agencies would be a more effective way of fostering partnerships and collaboration.
- ✦ Fusion centers should develop roll call briefs and products for use at shift changes.

**3. Identify more effective approaches to ensure that actionable products are disseminated to line officers:**

- ✦ Fusion centers should identify all appropriate mechanisms/portals to disseminate products within their AOR.
- ✦ Leveraging FLOs, fusion centers should promote products being shared/briefed during shift changes.
- ✦ Fusion centers should use individualized tracking numbers on products to trace dissemination
- ✦ Fusion centers should consider the use of nondisclosure agreements for product recipients.
- ✦ Local law enforcement agencies should consider using technology, such as smart phones for line officers, to access critical information.
- ✦ Fusion centers should identify resources to help support outreach, products, and training for local customers, such as Anti-Terrorism Advisory Councils, Peace Officer Standards and Training Council (POST) training, and SAR training.
- ✦ Fusion centers should explore using social networking to disseminate information.
- ✦ FLO programs should be used to disseminate products in order to leverage the most efficient distribution processes.







## Section Four

# Next Steps and Recommendations

As a result of the presentations, regional breakout sessions, and participant feedback, CVE Workshop participants recognized the importance of building partnerships among fusion centers, major city police department intelligence units, and federal partners to effectively understand and mitigate violent extremism. Additionally, it was recognized that fusion centers should focus their efforts on providing support and actionable information to law enforcement, so that law enforcement can more effectively engage with their communities. Feedback from the workshop discussions and regional breakout sessions is reflected below and includes the identification of next steps and recommendations, as well as opportunities for future engagement and support:

- ❖ More opportunities to engage fusion center directors and major city police department intelligence commanders on topic-specific issues (e.g., violent extremism).
  - Recommend future opportunities for engagement between these partners, such as collaborative forums and analyst exchanges.
- ❖ Continued expansion and growth of FLO programs to support coordination and communication between fusion centers and local law enforcement agencies.
  - Forums for FLO coordinators to share and exchange best practices to help standardize efforts across the nation.
- ❖ Continual evolution of products based on customer needs will support local law enforcement in understanding local implications of national intelligence, thus enabling local officials to better protect their communities.
  - Best practices and sample products should be shared across the national network of fusion centers to effectively showcase how local context can be provided on national intelligence.
  - Fusion centers should provide visibility on production plans, product catalogs, and distribution processes to ensure that local law enforcement customers have visibility and access to pertinent information.

- 4 Expanded delivery of training on indicators and warnings associated with violent extremism at the local, state, and federal levels.
  - Training should be made available to local, state, and federal law enforcement partners on violent extremism trends, patterns, and behaviors.
  - Training should provide best practices and approaches to effectively mitigate threats by engaging and building relationships with communities and through community-oriented policing.
  - SAR training should continue to be provided to all line officers, including training on indicators and warnings and how to report suspicious activity.





## *Section Five Conclusion*

The National CVE Workshop provided an opportunity for local, state, and federal attendees to better understand violent extremism, particularly the behaviors, tactics, and other indicators associated with violent extremism. As highlighted during the workshop, the dynamics of radicalization can vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, and understanding the local area of responsibility is a key factor to countering extremism. Effective CVE approaches include community policing, building relationships and trust with community members, raising awareness and understanding of extremism both within communities and among local law enforcement, and the development of informative products that provide local context and relevance.

The workshop provided a forum for attendees to discuss these issues and also provided an opportunity for fusion center directors, major city police department intelligence commanders, and community-policing experts to discuss the role of the fusion center in developing and tailoring products to meet the needs of state and local law enforcement customers. In particular, fusion centers play a vital role through their assessment of the local implications of national intelligence and then sharing actionable information with local officials to enable them to more effectively tailor their efforts to engage and better protect their local communities.

**For additional information or questions about the National Countering Violent Extremism Workshop or related materials, please contact the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.**







