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AND TERRORISM PREVENTION
(OTVTP)**

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EVALUATIONS
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Developed by:

RTI International
Matthew DeMichele, mdemichele@rti.org
Sarah Cook, scook@rti.org

Chapman University
Pete Simi, simi@chapman.edu

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Violent extremism is one the gravest dangers facing the United States. To address this problem, federal, state, and local authorities have developed a growing number of prevention and intervention programs. The efficacy of these initiatives, however, largely remains unknown and there is a substantial need for evaluative efforts to assess the process and outcomes associated with these initiatives. In this report, we provide results from an evaluation of five countering violent extremism (CVE) programs funded by the Department of Homeland Security's Office for Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention* FY2016 grant program. We use the terminology countering violent extremism (CVE) throughout the report as it was the terminology used at the time of the evaluation.

Recently, the DHS stopped using that terminology and is now emphasizing terrorism prevention and community partnerships.

The evaluation is focused on programs (in four states) administered by various combinations of nongovernmental and city/county agencies. The programs address three programmatic areas:

* In 2021, the Office for Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (OTVTP) was replaced with the Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships (CP3). Throughout this report we use OTVTP because that was the funding agency at the time.



City of Houston, Mayor's Office of Public Safety and Homeland Security

OBJECTIVES: City of Houston Will Train Professionals to Intervene with Vulnerable Youth

City of Houston (Texas) Mayor's Office of Public Safety and Homeland Security (MOPSHS) is working on the Houston Countering Violent Extremism Training and Engagement Initiative. The purpose of the curriculum was to equip adults who interact with youth (i.e., teachers, mental health professionals, and social workers) with the knowledge to identify the risk factors associated with youth vulnerabilities to recruitment by extremist groups and with strategies to mitigate these risk factors. The curriculum was designed to include pertinent information regarding terrorism ideologies, the root causes of extremism, risk factors for youth recruitment and engagement, community connections, and social-support programs.

OUTCOMES: City of Houston Created Partnership and Trained 26 New Trainers

The City of Houston MOPSHS created a train-the-trainers curriculum that individual stakeholders from various sectors would share with their respective communities, where it would be best received. They implemented training for teachers, mental health professionals, and parents about the vulnerabilities that make youth susceptible to the recruitment efforts of extremist groups. Houston CVE Training and Engagement Initiative partnered with local principals, school-based clinical counselors and social workers, and other community leaders to further the training curriculum within their communities; 26 trainers (87% of goal) have successfully completed the train-the-trainer program and are able to conduct trainings.



Crisis Intervention of Houston, Inc.

OBJECTIVES: Enhance Hotline to Reduce Extremism

Crisis Intervention of Houston, Inc., provides around-the-clock, free, anonymous crisis intervention and suicide prevention counseling and exists with one concise mission. They offer a public health approach designed to reduce harm to oneself and others.

The purpose of this project is to:

- Expand existing crisis hotline services to include specific training for crisis counselors regarding violent extremism
- Expand hotline services to include a Muslim youth-oriented hotline (ACT: NOW Hotline) to combat "ISIS recruitment"
- Develop a parent and youth training curriculum regarding extremism online and including a series of anti-bullying and online safety training workshops

The culturally competent crisis prevention and intervention is focused on Muslim youth who have concerns related to violent extremism. These concerns may come in several forms and include one or more of the following: (1) personal susceptibility to involvement, at some level, in violent extremism; (2) concerns regarding a relative's or friend's susceptibility to involvement in violent extremism; or (3) concerns related to past or future victimization stemming from violent extremism.

OUTCOMES: More Counselors and Trained Youth and Parents

Crisis Intervention's project produced crucial partnerships with the Houston Independent School District and Harris County Sheriff's Office. These partnerships provided access to several schools and training constables in crisis intervention. These partnerships were related to achieving several project goals:

- Five hotline call counselors were added
- 52 call counselors have been trained
- Outreach activities to the Muslim community in Houston were held
- 85 youth were trained to counter bullying and identify the signs of bullying
- 193 parents participated in safety workshops and seminars
- 18 community leader workshops were completed



Heartland Democracy Center

OBJECTIVES: Growing Partnerships to Reduce Radicalism

Heartland Democracy Center's project is focused on developing and extending partnerships to promote resilience and education about intervention and prevention of radicalization. Heartland planned to expand outreach to more refugee and immigrant communities to provide programs and services to adults and children in Minnesota.

OUTCOMES: Created Connections and Expanded Outreach

Heartland revised a school-based curriculum previously developed as part of its youth outreach programming and developed relationships with schools, community organizations, and parent groups to provide interventions, training, and dialogue on radicalization. These connections resulted in reoccurring group meetings as well as cultural events and guest speakers.

- Heartland identified two school sites and two community organizations in to offer their curriculum
- Heartland identified three mentors/educators and three partner leads
- Heartland identified four educators for summer youth programs
- Heartland added three instructors and conducted outreach
- Heartland edited three modules of their curriculum to address resiliency building



Nashville International Center for Empowerment

OBJECTIVES: Community Outreach and Engagement

Nashville International Center for Empowerment (NICE) led a multifaceted community outreach approach. This project focused on empowering youth and adults through a range of community engagement activities meant to enhance unity and solidarity. NICE relied on what they describe as a relationship-rich model designed to address communities experiencing trauma and language and cultural barriers. More specifically, the project focused on community leadership and dialogue, resource development, and youth engagement.

OUTCOMES: Engaged the Community

NICE convened parental groups to learn about their communities. NICE delivered 10 parental meetings and conducted a 6-week pilot program (n = 20) to increase community attachment and self-worth. NICE revised its curriculum to address social and emotional vulnerabilities among refugee and immigrant youth. This curriculum was delivered to 1,084 youth in 21 sessions. NICE conducted 10 cultural exchange activities with 94 non-unique participants and 31 community dialogues with 529 participants.



Alameda County Sheriff's Office

OBJECTIVES: Supporting Reentry of Those at Risk of Violent Extremism

The Alameda County Sheriff's Office (ACSO) project focused on improving reentry for local jail inmates at risk for extremism. ACSO's model was to identify those with traumas and vulnerabilities in the jail, provide mental health interventions for them while they were incarcerated, and establish positive support services after incarceration by building positive relationships between communities and ACSO in the process. ACSO planned to document this process with a collaborative pathway model.

OUTCOMES: Mindfulness Programs and Reentry Services Implemented

Working with a local nonprofit, Mind Body Awareness (MBA), ACSO implemented a 10-week mindfulness program with facilitators in two jail locations. Separate workshops of the mindfulness curriculum took place for jail law enforcement and clinicians, and residents of the Parents and Children Together (PACT) residential program. Six-week job training internships and PACT residential services for families were provided for justice-involved individuals reentering the community.

- 105 inmates participated in the MBA curriculum, with 66 graduating.
- 12 interns completed the 6-week job training program, several repeating it to gain more experience.
- 12 residents of PACT participated in the MBA curriculum, with nine graduating.
- Conducted MBA mindfulness training with six clinicians and 12 sworn corrections officers.

Executive Summary: Overview of Evaluation Findings

	OBJECTIVES	OUTCOMES
City of Houston, Mayor's Office of Public Safety and Homeland Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and administer trainings about how to address vulnerabilities among youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created partnerships with schools, social workers, and parents Trained 26 trainers to deliver curriculum in Houston communities
Crisis Intervention of Houston, Inc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand hotline services Create Muslim youth-oriented hotline Develop trainings on online extremism and bullying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 hotline call counselors hired 52 call counselors trained Outreach to Muslim community 85 youth trained to identify potential radicalization factors 193 parents participated in safety workshops 18 community workshops
Heartland Democracy Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and extend partnerships to promote resilience and education about intervention and prevention of radicalization Provide programs and services to adults and children in refugee and immigrant communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified 2 school sites and 2 community organizations in to offer their curriculum Identified 3 mentors/educators and 3 partner leads Identified 4 educators for summer youth programs Added 3 instructors and conducted outreach Edited 3 modules of their curriculum to address resiliency building
Nashville International Center for Empowerment (NICE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multifaceted community outreach approach Empower youth and adults Address communities experiencing trauma Address communities facing language and cultural barriers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivered 10 parental meetings Conducted a 6-week pilot program (n = 20) Delivered curriculum to 1,084 youth in 21 sessions. Conducted 10 cultural exchange activities with 94 participants. Conducted 31 community dialogues with 529 participants
Alameda County Sheriff's Office (ACSO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the successful reentry of residents involved in the criminal justice system who are at risk for violent extremism Strengthen community relationships with law enforcement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducted a 10-week mindfulness program to 108 inmates Provided 6-week job training internships for 12 reentering individuals Delivered residential services to parents and children (PACT) Conducted mindfulness training for 12 PACT residents Conducted mindfulness training for 6 clinicians and 12 sworn corrections officers

INTRODUCTION

Ideologically motivated extremists pose a major threat to public safety and civic life. The United States is confronting a growing, complex, and evolving threat of terrorism and targeted violence. A central aspect of terrorism is to create fear and uncertainty among the public. The attacks on April 19, 1995, (Oklahoma City) and September 11, 2001, highlighted the reality of how a group of individuals can create chaos and devastation. Extremist threats come from a myriad of social, political, and cultural ideologically motivated groups, with domestic terrorists being the most common and pervasive in the United States. Since 2015, multiple fatal attacks have been committed by U.S. domestic terrorists, with the intention to kill certain racial and religious groups, undermine governmental institutions, and incite future violence.

Previous terror attacks demonstrated the United States' vulnerabilities to terrorist attacks, and most early attempts to prevent terrorism focused on military and law enforcement activities. More recently, however, the United States and other governments have recognized the potential benefits of developing whole community practices that leverage community engagement with local stakeholders, government and nongovernmental actors that work to address the needs of at-risk populations. These efforts have been referred to as countering violent extremism (CVE) and more recently terrorism prevention (TP).

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is engaged in a series of TP efforts that incorporate community organizations to support education, awareness, and training programs that construct a whole of society prevention architecture. In 2019, DHS announced they were transitioning the Office of Terrorism Prevention Partnerships to the Office for Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (OTVTP) to use grants, community and law enforcement awareness briefings, threat assessments, and information sharing. DHS created OTVTP

to collaborate with community and civic leaders to create prevention and intervention mechanisms that support communities to develop, implement, and test local solutions.

DHS is equipping and empowering local efforts—including peers, community leaders, law enforcement, and mental health experts—to prevent individuals from mobilizing to violence. The National Strategy for Counterterrorism says the United States will “institutionalize a prevention architecture to thwart terrorism” by supporting “local solutions and empower stakeholders, providing them with the knowledge and resources they need to address terrorist threats. Early warning systems, including bystander reporting, will be a critical component of this architecture” (2018: 21).

In this report, we provide an assessment of five programs intended to counter violent extremism. The programs are varied in their approach, partnerships, and specific strategies used to prevent and intervene in the radicalization process. The evaluation uncovers several positive achievements focused on training local stakeholders, supporting New Americans, and establishing reporting mechanisms. CVE is an emerging area of social programming that is being built in local communities across the country, but there are serious challenges measuring the effectiveness of such programs. This report is an evaluation of the process and outcomes related to five CVE programs in four states with the purpose of identifying learning opportunities for program development, evaluation, and policy.

DHS is involved in several programs to facilitate intervention and prevention to stem recruitment by extremist groups and support exit from extremist groups. The community support programs are relatively new, and DHS is balancing community needs, local complexities, and cultural competencies. DHS seeks to understand the evolving terrorism landscape to prevent terrorism and enhance the United States' infrastructure to protect and prepare communities to combat terrorism (DHS, 2019). Creating and implementing community terrorism intervention and prevention programs is surrounded by unknowns and uncertainties as there is limited research demonstrating what works and what does not work for terrorism prevention. Researchers and practitioners do agree that traditional counterterrorism and law enforcement tactics alone are not the solution to terrorism prevention. Thus, the FY2016 CVE programs are a demonstration in local innovation and experimentation to develop local approaches to prepare and protect local communities.

In December 2015, Congress approved \$10 million to support DHS's CVE efforts. DHS received over 200 applications from states and territories, nonprofit organizations, and universities. Grantees were selected for their potential to improve community security and enhance terrorism prevention through governmental and nongovernmental partnerships, demonstrating a high potential for program success, and strong sustainability of programs. These funds were to help local communities with their CVE efforts through five focus areas:

1. Developing resilience
2. Training and engaging
3. Managing interventions
4. Challenging the narrative
5. Building capacity

These grants provide an opportunity for DHS to contribute to community-level prevention and intervention of violent extremism. Moreover, these CVE awards are an opportunity for learning about CVE as a diverse set of practices to reduce radicalization, enhance community trust, and further build community resiliency. All awardees were required to agree to terms

These grants provide an opportunity for DHS to contribute to community-level prevention and intervention of violent extremism.

and conditions that include collecting and reporting performance data. CVE is routinely critiqued for the lack of methodological rigor and attention to evaluation, assessment, and performance measurement. CVE program research must confront general issues related to low base rates (e.g., acts of terrorism), poorly defined outcome variables, and poorly articulated programmatic goals, objectives, and desired outcomes.

Report Layout

In this report, we describe evaluation activities and results and offer recommendations for future CVE programming. The report provides information about the process and outcomes of the grantees related to the program design of each project, the theory of change that guided each award, project milestones, and any concrete deliverables generated as part of each award. As part of the evaluation, the report also provides a framework and tools to conduct future evaluation activities and incorporates findings from prior studies in the United States and abroad. The findings in our report should be used to inform practitioners, policy makers, and researchers. The report is a learning opportunity for the CVE field to document the types of CVE programs developed by communities and the challenges communities face implementing CVE programs and to advance evaluation methods to engage within an emerging area of programming embedded within complex adaptive communities.

The report can be read in its entirety from start to finish, or readers may prefer to skip around and read sections that pique their interest. The report is structured so readers can move to different sections. Some readers may be more interested to learn about the recommendations, and others may want to know more about the methods used for this study. The report is intended to be a user-friendly document that allows readers to learn about real-world implementation, challenges, and outcomes of CVE as it is practiced by local communities throughout the United States.

The five programs reviewed here are some of the first CVE programs supported by DHS' OTVTP, and readers identify program activities that they may want to implement in their jurisdiction. Alternatively, readers may learn that some activities do not fit the needs, circumstances, and resources of their jurisdictions. A central finding from this study and a guiding principle for DHS' community programming efforts is that there is not a one size fits all approach to CVE. Instead, whole of community approaches require communities to research the threats posed in their communities, to identify the resources they have available for CVE, and to learn from the broader field of CVE.

Community Programs

OTVTP is leading the creation of governmental and nongovernmental partnerships to support frontline stakeholders, coordinate activities across levels of government, and support counter-terrorist radicalization activities. DHS efforts are focused on developing funding streams that direct grant funding to community partners (e.g., religious groups, educators, social workers) to develop prevention strategies that target root causes of violent extremism. The purpose of these efforts is to deter radicalization to violence. The creation of OTVTP continued commitment to developing CVE programs that support community resilience.

The purpose of these efforts is to deter radicalization to violence.

OTVTP's mission focuses on five key areas:

- **Community engagement**, to build awareness and support meaningful conversations with community partners
- **Field support expansion and training**, to support DHS staff through partnerships and training
- **Grant support**, to fund community-based programs
- **Philanthropic engagement**, to share with the philanthropic community
- **Technology sector engagement**, to identify and amplify credible voices online and promote counter narratives against extremist messaging

CVE includes "strategic, non-coercive counterterrorism programs and policies including those involving education and broad-based community engagement; more targeted narratives/messaging programs and counter-recruitment strategies; disengagement and targeted intervention programs for individuals engaged in radicalization; as well as de-radicalization, disengagement and rehabilitation programs for former violent extremist offenders" (Zeiger & Aly, 2015, p. 1). The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy sees CVE as reducing the spread of terrorism by changing the conditions that encourage that spread.

Generally, CVE is directed at individuals who have become radicalized (i.e., intervention) and those who are vulnerable to radicalization (i.e., prevention) through engagement aimed at preventing individuals from perpetrating acts of violence.* CVE differs from counterterrorism by being cross-disciplinary; community-based; and focused on resiliency-building, education, and awareness to interrupt the radicalization process.

A common narrative exists that describes CVE as an emergent field of practice that has a vital role to play in the country's terrorism prevention efforts. However, these programmatic efforts have not been assessed with robust evaluations. CVE is a proactive approach to disrupting the radicalization process, but there are many unanswered questions about what works, what does not work, and why certain things work or do not work. This gap in knowledge weakens the ability to design effective programs, create useful tools, and understand impacts stemming from CVE programming.

This report seeks to address the gap in knowledge by conducting evaluation activities among the CVE grantees. The evaluation provides an assessment of the process of the programs to inform future DHS efforts. OTVTP supported the five focus areas by developing community trust, building resilient communities, and integrating influential members of the community into CVE programs. Community prevention strategies recognize that there are many motivations for extremism, that local communities are the most effective resource to combat extremism, and that intelligence-gathering is not part of CVE activities. Paramount to an effective CVE strategy is ensuring that activities adhere to all constitutional rights and privacy laws to avoid civil rights violations and extend all legal rights to communities and individuals.

Building and maintaining trust is essential for CVE to be effective, which means that community partners should not be used to gather intelligence to build criminal cases. Rather, for CVE to be effective, community partners need to come from the communities in which the programs are targeted because they provide a real-world perspective and understanding of community needs, barriers, and strategies that will have the best chance of being successful.

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* For further discussion on intervention and prevention, see Limitations on page 57.

Moreover, community members possess a unique understanding of local relationships to know which agencies and individuals should be included in a local partnership. The Los Angeles Interagency Coordination Group (2015) emphasized the importance of a community perspective for successful CVE in what is commonly referred to as a whole of government and a whole of community approach to build interagency collaborations that emphasize transparency, inclusiveness, and trust between government and nongovernmental entities. Although several CVE programs are underway in the United States, little attention is given to connecting these programs with prior research on drivers to and away from radicalization (Schmid, 2010).

Radicalization, Extremism, and Terrorism

Before presenting the evaluation methods and site report findings, we provide a brief description of what we mean by terrorism and extremism. DHS defines terrorism as any activity involving a criminally unlawful act that is dangerous to human life or potentially destructive of critical infrastructure or key resources, and that appears intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, to influence government policy by intimidation or coercion, or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping.

There are several types of terrorism, with the two main categories being foreign and domestic. Here, we include definitions detailed in DHS' Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence (2019). The United States defines foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) as international groups with the capability and intent to engage in terrorist activity that threatens the security of the nation. Domestic terrorism is an act of unlawful violence, or a threat of force or violence, that is dangerous to human life or potentially destructive of critical infrastructure or key resources and is intended to effect societal, political, or other change committed by a group or person based and operating entirely within the United States or its territories. DHS defines homegrown violent extremists as persons, regardless of citizenship, who have lived or operated primarily in the United States and who advocate, engage in, or prepare to engage in ideologically motivated terrorist activities to further the political or social goals of an FTO.

Radicalization is the increasing commitment among individuals and groups to achieve goals by using violent strategies (i.e., terrorism) (Kruglanski and Webber, 2014). It is important to note that much of what is often defined as radicalization and extremism are legally protected ideas and behaviors which clearly complicates prevention, intervention, and suppression efforts. Legally protected ideas and behaviors may still be harmful such as targeting individuals and groups based on racial/ethnic, religious, gender, sexual orientation and other characteristics in demeaning ways. In these instances, prevention and intervention efforts can be especially important strategies to address lawful but harmful ideas and behaviors. Thus, countering radicalization requires an understanding of how individual extremists and extremist groups retain members and sustain commitment. A refined understanding of extremist retention includes identifying the incentives for remaining involved and the disincentives for exiting. Scholars have been slow to uncover the precise mechanisms by which proponents of violent extremism are able to promote ideas of hate and violence that directly shape the cognitive frameworks of those accepting extremist ideologies. Potentially more important is the lack of scholarly understanding of how to counter the extremist behaviors related to these ideologies.

The connection between radicalization and terrorism is often found to be tenuous because most radicals do not commit terrorism per se (Horgan, 2008; McCauley and Moskaleiko,

A refined understanding of extremist retention includes identifying the incentives for remaining involved and the disincentives for exiting.

2011), although they engage in higher levels of street violence and the perpetration of hate crimes (Windisch et al. 2018). Further complicating matters is that all terrorists do not radicalize in the same way (Borum, 2011), but rather, there are multiple pathways and mechanisms into and out of extremism (Simi, Blee, DeMichele, and Windisch, 2017). For CVE efforts to be successful, researchers need to chart the various pathways through which people embrace attitudes of hate, violence, and exclusion and to understand the circumstances that exist to propel the transition from extremist attitudes to extremist action (Borum, 2011). This gap in understanding pathways into radicalization further emphasizes a lack of understanding about the relationship between radicalization (i.e., embracing extremist ideology) and terrorism (i.e., conducting violence to support extremist ideology).

Developmental Evaluation: Utilization-Focused Evaluation

The evaluation design is framed around what is referred to as a utilization-focused evaluation (UFE) (Patton, 2012). This framework is appropriate because it provides the flexibility needed for the research team to be responsive to what we learn during the research process (e.g., the information we learn during the initial process could inform our strategy). A UFE is an ideal approach for this project because it provides a framework to evaluate the initial grantees with the purpose of assessing implementation and outcomes, but with the added goal of learning from grantees not solely to assess merit and worth of a program. Rather, UFE is an evaluation framework appropriate for emerging fields in the process of developing an evidence base, identifying performance metrics, and developing tools for DHS.

There is a need to understand whether CVE programs are effective, but there is also a lack of clear development of program goals, desired outcomes and impacts, and performance measurements (Mastroe and Szmania, 2016). Many commentators suggest that methodological challenges preclude evaluators from investigating in and assessing CVE programs. Some of these challenges include the following:

- Imprecise definitions of CVE programs
- Lack of program goals, objectives, and outcomes
- Difficulty creating counterfactual designs
- Lack of understanding the context and stakeholder perspectives
- Little knowledge about the mechanisms connecting inputs and outcomes

Although these and other challenges create serious methodological barriers, we do not see them as insurmountable to designing and conducting meaningful evaluations of DHS's CVE awardees. Instead, the CVE field could benefit from implementing a UFE framework. Michael Quinn Patton, former President of the American Evaluation Association, introduced the UFE approach to provide a framework for evaluators to ensure that their studies are useful, practical, accurate, and ethical (Patton, 2012). Simply, UFE approaches are meant to produce information that is useful and can be used to improve future programs, policies, and evaluations. The purpose of a UFE approach is to understand what was done, how it was done, and to what effect it was done with the distinct goals of learning for further program development.

The UFE approach is a methodological advancement that incorporates traditional evaluation techniques with the realities of contemporary program development and implementation.

The UFE approach is a methodological advancement that incorporates traditional evaluation techniques with the realities of contemporary program development and implementation. This approach emphasizes that evaluations should help program developers and stakeholders determine whether different aspects of a program are working or not. The UFE approach, essentially, posits that evaluators should apply appropriate evaluation techniques to assess program performance with the goal of informing ongoing program development.

The UFE approach is ideal for new program areas that are developing basic knowledge, identifying key insights, and trying to establish overarching concepts. As a first step toward learning key insights about CVE, the recent awardees provide a fertile landscape to understand how developing resiliency works across different types of entities (e.g., governmental, nongovernmental), what the outcomes of training and engagement activities are, and how well interventions are operating. With the FY2016 CVE awards, DHS created a learning opportunity that should be leveraged to confront the threats posed by domestic terrorists.

Our approach can be summarized in five broad steps. First, understand the audience to identify the types of stakeholders that may use a certain type of CVE program. That is, programs designed to be led by community organizations, social workers, or formers will be very different from one another and will differ even more from programs administered by law enforcement or other government agencies. Some useful questions we sought to answer include the following:

- Who knows about the CVE program?
- Who is interested in the CVE program?
- Who can use the information from the evaluation to improve a CVE program?
- What challenges emerged during program implementation?
- How did the political landscape shape the CVE program?

After the audiences were identified and evaluation questions were developed, we developed a measurement and design approach. This approach includes identifying data capacity, quality, and accessibility. The CVE awardees range across five broad topic areas, with each having different specific audiences, purposes, and desired goals, necessitating a flexible evaluation approach that can adapt to the needs of each intervention strategy.

Depending on the specific data collection (e.g., database construction, interviews, observations, document reviews), analyses will draw varying levels of conclusions and inferences to inform program stakeholders and DHS. Moving the CVE field forward requires generating knowledge to enhance theories of change, inform logic models, and shape future CVE program development.

STUDY METHODS

In this section of the report, we will detail our evaluation methods. In August 2017, DHS, through OTVTP, awarded grants to 25 sites across the United States as part of its CVE program. In 2018, DHS, through the Science and Technology Directorate (S&T), commissioned RTI International ("the evaluation team") to evaluate a sample of five CVE grant programs across four states (i.e., California, Minnesota, Tennessee, and Texas).

RTI designed a methodological approach for the purpose of determining each grantees' program goals, tracking program development, assessing accomplishments during the grant period, and providing recommendations for future grantees. As part of the evaluation, RTI conducted regular monthly telephone calls with primary contacts at each site. During these calls, the team discussed progress at each site, short- and long-term goals, and any challenges encountered or strategies developed to overcome those challenges. The Team Meetings and Monthly Check-Ins section below provides further information regarding this aspect of the evaluation.

RTI also conducted at least two in-person site visits with the sample of grantees. Each site visit included an interview with the site's project director, meetings with various project partners and other contributors to the grantee site, and observation of program delivery when possible. These visits were prearranged; before each visit, the project director provided the evaluation team with a list of partners. The evaluation team reached out independently to these partners to arrange individual interviews, which were semi-structured. The evaluation team relied on a general interview protocol developed as part of the evaluation, although adaptations for site-specific issues were also included. The interviews involved a flexible question-and-answer format with opportunities for follow-up probes and unstructured conversation. More information on the in-person site visits is provided in the Site Visits and Interviews section below.

DHS grant awards provided funds for a 12-month period of performance.

Grantee Timetables

The grant awards selected for inclusion in the evaluation were the Mayor's Office of Public Safety and Security of the City of Houston, Texas, in partnership with the media consulting group Outreach Strategists ("City of Houston"); Crisis Intervention, a nonprofit in Houston that operates a crisis and counseling hotline ("Crisis Intervention"); and the Nashville International Center for Empowerment, in Nashville, Tennessee ("NICE"). Several months later, in early 2019, the sample was expanded to include two additional grantees: Heartland Democracy, a nonprofit working to increase community engagement in Minneapolis, Minnesota ("Heartland Democracy"), and the Alameda County Sheriff Department in Alameda, California, in partnership with a local nonprofit, Mind, Body, Awareness (MBA), which implemented a mindfulness program in two county jails ("Alameda County").

DHS grant awards provided funds for a 12-month period of performance, beginning during the summer of 2018, although the evaluation team did not establish contact with the sites until several months later. The Crisis Intervention and NICE grantees finished their original periods of performance in June and July of 2019, respectively, and neither applied for an extension.

The remaining three sites received no-cost extensions for their periods of performance, which originally would have ended during the summer of 2019. The City of Houston and Heartland Democracy each received 6-month extensions, moving their grant end dates from June 2019 to December 2019 and from July 2019 to January 2020, respectively. The Alameda County grantee received a 12-month no-cost extension; the end date of that grant's period of performance was moved from July 2019 to July 2020. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Alameda received an additional 6-month no-cost extension with its grant closing in December 2020.

Team Meetings and Monthly Check-Ins

RTI established initial contact with each of the five sites by holding an introductory kickoff telephone call. Introductory calls for the City of Houston, Crisis Intervention, and NICE grantees were completed during November 2018, whereas the Heartland Democracy and Alameda County grantee calls were conducted during February 2019. Following the introductory call, each site was assigned a team of two evaluators, who conducted all monthly calls with the project director at each site.

The monthly calls were arranged with each site's project director. In addition, the project director sometimes invited other team members and/or partners who could address a particular issue or question relevant to the evaluation. An RTI site liaison was present for all calls and was responsible for drafting and disseminating notes to the evaluation team and scheduling future calls.

Generally, the check-in calls were semi-structured, and the evaluation team began each call by asking whether the grantee had any updates. As updates were provided, the site evaluators followed up with questions as needed. Conversation then moved into discussion of any deliverables that the grantee was expected to provide as part of the award. As deliverables varied across each site and period of performance, RTI structured the monthly calls based on each site's current progress. Further, RTI used the calls to coordinate site visits and other data collection. As part of this, RTI used the calls to confirm partner lists, confirm contact information, and discuss each partners' role in the grant award. Short- and long-term goals were also typically discussed during monthly check-in call. RTI completed 47 monthly check-in calls across the five sites, with one site cancelling its monthly update call on multiple occasions.

Site Visits and Interviews

RTI scheduled site visits with the five grantees to conduct face-to-face interviews and directly observe different aspects of each grant program. RTI developed a formal itinerary for each site visit based on the grantees and their partners' availability. Before each visit, RTI requested the project director provide a list of partners for the grant award. The evaluation team also provided the grant project director with an introductory email template that she or he could send to project partners to inform them of the dates and details of the upcoming site visit. The evaluation team then corresponded directly with project partners via email and telephone to set up a series of interviews based on their availability. Interviews were scheduled for locations that were convenient to interviewees, such as business offices and coffee shops.

The site visits were typically conducted over 2 days, and during each visit, the site liaisons reserved time to meet with the program director and conduct individual interviews with the other project participants. When possible, site visits were scheduled to correspond with program activities to provide opportunities for the evaluation team to directly observe a portion of the program. Direct observation included a train-the-trainers session in Houston, Texas; a story-exchange and a summer program in Nashville, Tennessee; and a mindfulness group session in Santa Rita Jail in Alameda County, California. Aside from the Alameda County site, which received the longest no-cost extension, two site visits were conducted for each program; three site visits were completed in Alameda County.

The evaluation team created site visit interview protocols, which they relied on to conduct semi-structured interviews. All prime and partner grantees were first asked to explain their role on the grant-funded project. Subsequent topics included the effects of the national and local political climates on the grant-funded program; the quantity and quality of communication between the client, the prime grantee, and the community partners; perceived successes and challenges of the program; and advice for future grantees. The interviews were semi-structured, with some questions asked consistently across participants at each site. The interviews were also flexible and adapted to each participant, in part, based on their level of involvement. Multiple members of the evaluation team drafted notes during the interviews which were compiled and circulated following each site visit.

Survey Instrumentation and Administration

In addition to the monthly contacts and site visits, the evaluation team also constructed two online surveys to disseminate to program participants. These surveys included a broad range of items designed to measure communication between primary and secondary grant recipients; communication between all grant recipients and DHS officials; the local and national political climate; and suggested improvements to the program. The survey served as a compliment to the information gathered during monthly phone check-ins and in-person site visits. Survey items included both Likert scale and open-ended response options.

One version of the survey (i.e., prime survey) was created for the primary grantee, and the second version (i.e., partner survey) was designed for all other program participants or project-involved community members who the director thought could provide useful project information. After the first site visit was completed for a given grantee, the survey was distributed to the primary and partners for that site. The evaluation team fielded questions about the survey and provided prompts to increase response rates. Upon receipt of completed surveys, the evaluation team used Microsoft Excel to analyze the responses. Given the small sample size, the evaluation team relied on descriptive statistics to assess the results. The team then analyzed survey responses according to the percentage of individuals who provided each answer to a given question.

The site visits were typically conducted over 2 days.

SITE REPORTS

In the next section of the report, we provide the detailed findings from each of the CVE programs. The site reports are written as standalone chapters to allow readers the ability to learn about each site independently. The programs, local contexts, and resources varied across the sites, and as such, they netted very different results. Although the sites are discussed separately in the results section, they provide an opportunity to think wholistically about the results to identify lessons learned and develop recommendations for future programs, policies, and evaluations.

City of Houston, Mayor's Office of Public Safety & Homeland Security



This section focuses on the work that the City of Houston (Texas) Mayor's Office of Public Safety and Homeland Security (MOPSHS) completed under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) grant award for its project, Houston Countering Violent Extremism Training and Engagement Initiative. To understand the work that the City of Houston and its subcontractors did, one must first look more broadly at the national climate and the local community.

Houston: A Core Part of the American Infrastructure

Houston, with a population of 2,325,502 as of 2018, is the fourth largest city in the United States. It is also one of the country's economic hubs, with major centers for oil, chemical, and aerospace production. According to the Rice University Kinder Institute for Urban Research, Houston is one of the most ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse cities in the country. Because of its strong labor market, relatively low cost of living, and proximity to Latin America, Houston has become a hub for refugee resettlement for Latin and other migrant populations. Houston's size, in combination with its economic infrastructure and substantial diversity, makes it a target for terrorism as well as for extremist recruitment and propaganda. This characteristic is evidenced by the case of

Houston-born Asher Khan, who was convicted of providing material support to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) after he and a friend devised plans to travel to Turkey and then Syria to fight on behalf of the terrorist group. The friend went on to Syria, where he later died, but Khan returned from Turkey after his family feigned his mother's severe illness in an attempt to save their son. Khan's recruitment and radicalization generated national headlines, but his is only one of many cases and these processes are not exclusive to any one type of extremist ideology. The Anti-Defamation League has documented that Houston is a hotbed of anti-Semitic and white supremacist extremist activities as well, especially in the rural regions surrounding Houston. White supremacist activities include

the distribution of hate-filled propaganda; harassment; vandalism; and various types of violent attacks, such as shooting rampages. In response to the threat of youth radicalization, the City of Houston implemented training for teachers, mental health professionals, and parents about the vulnerabilities among youth that increase the risk of violent extremism.

City of Houston Mayor's Office of Public Safety and Homeland Security

When the Houston MOPSHS prepared its proposal for the current DHS grant, the main purpose of the initiative was to develop a training module that would invite youth and parents to address violent extremism within their local communities. MOPSHS referred to its proposed initiative as being "government supported" rather than "government driven" as an indication that broad-based community involvement would be essential for a successful effort.

For this reason, the MOPSHS proposed collaborating with a subcontractor to develop the training curriculum and partnering with the Houston Regional CVE Steering Committee to engage the community stakeholders and have a broad reach to families in Houston and the surrounding areas. Furthermore, as part of the program development phase, MOPSHS designed a sustainable model by creating a train-the-trainers curriculum that individual stakeholders from various sectors would carry into their respective communities, where it would be best received. In 2017, MOPSHS was awarded a 2-year DHS CVE grant to develop its training and engagement initiative. The purpose of the curriculum was to equip adults who interact with youth (i.e., teachers, mental health professionals, and social workers) with the knowledge to identify the risk factors associated with youth vulnerabilities to extremist group recruitment and with strategies to mitigate these risk factors. The curriculum was designed to include pertinent information regarding terrorism ideologies, the root causes of extremism, risk factors for youth recruitment and engagement, community connections, and social support programs. MOPSHS intended to share the curriculum with the greater Houston region through its relationships with partners in academia and nonprofit organizations. To address existing concerns related to CVE, MOPSHS thought it best to avoid explicitly including law enforcement agency partners in this initiative. As such, the role of law enforcement was limited; however, law enforcement expertise was used in the curriculum development.

On the basis of their knowledge of the local context and community concerns, MOPSHS and its subcontractor Outreach Strategists ultimately decided to implement changes to the planned approach. The changes in scope are addressed in further detail below.

The original plan to achieve the initiative was three pronged:

1. Establish a cadre of trained, culturally competent community educators/facilitators to support CVE workshops for parents and youth.
2. Increase parental engagement and understanding of radicalization, risk factors, and available social resources through community-based Empowered Parents workshops.
3. Increase youth understanding and engagement through the Three Cities program, which involves facilitated dialogue, scenario discussions, and critical thinking challenges.

The Houston CVE Training and Engagement Initiative

In 2014 Mustafa Tameez, the Managing Director for Outreach Strategists, and Wardah Khalid, also of Outreach Strategists, were asked by the Harris County Sheriff's Office to facilitate focus groups of concerned citizens, synthesize the findings, and offer recommendations for local efforts to prevent violent extremism. Their findings revealed that Muslim youth, in particular, feel a sense of isolation and disenfranchisement; that community members lack trust in law enforcement; and that respondents want interfaith, education, and civic organizations to collaborate to meet community needs. The recommendations included hosting parent workshops highlighting available resources; increasing communication and collaboration between interfaith, education, and community organizations; building capacity among interfaith leaders; and responding to at-risk youth in ways that mirror anti-gang models to improve relationships between law enforcement and community members. MOPSHS recognized that these recommendations aligned with the focus areas of the FY2016 DHS CVE grant program and used them to write its proposal. MOPSHS proposed to partner with a vendor (later chosen to be Outreach Strategists) to develop both the parent- and youth-oriented curricula; MOPSHS would support the vendor with connections to local partners and with managerial oversight. MOPSHS relied on its reputation as well as that of Outreach Strategists to convene a steering committee comprising local government, law enforcement, education, and nonprofit organizations.

Barriers and Resistance to the CVE Grant Award

Like many communities across the United States, some communities of Houston were concerned about receiving a grant award from DHS as part of the CVE program. The concerns stem from the perception that CVE is essentially a Muslim-focused program that involves surveillance and leads to further stigmatization of the Muslim community by branding individuals (youth in particular) as being "at risk" for terrorism.

To mitigate this concern, MOPSHS aimed to create a steering committee that was inclusive for the purpose of demonstrating that this initiative was aimed at CVE efforts across the spectrum, not focused solely on Islamist extremism. Delays caused by bureaucratic processes and a major hurricane (Harvey), however, delayed the project's initiation, and some of the partners that had committed at the time of the proposal were less engaged 2 years

Houston CVE Training and Engagement Initiative Methodology

- Develop curricula and videos
- Develop communication strategy
- Identify and vet trainers
- Train the trainers
- Conduct parent workshops
- Conduct youth workshops
- Engage with national and international partners

later when the program kicked off. The absence of some key interfaith partners unintentionally contributed to the belief that this initiative was narrowly focused on Islamist extremism.

MOPSHS was officially informed of its award in June 2017; in August 2017, Hurricane Harvey devastated the greater Houston area and MOPSHS staff were forced to turn their attention to emergency management. The aftermath of the hurricane delayed the project's initiation; later, City Council was reluctant to accept the funding because of the controversial nature of the grant. In August 2018, MOPSHS internally kicked off the grant program and launched the steering committee the following month; this kickoff came 2 years after it had initially reached out to partners about supporting the proposal. The delay prevented some partners from engaging in the project as much as they had at first planned to do.

Key Partners Connecting With the Community

Outreach Strategists, the City of Houston's key partner and subcontractor, is described in the nearby box. MOPSHS also involved interfaith, education, and community service organizations in its steering committee.

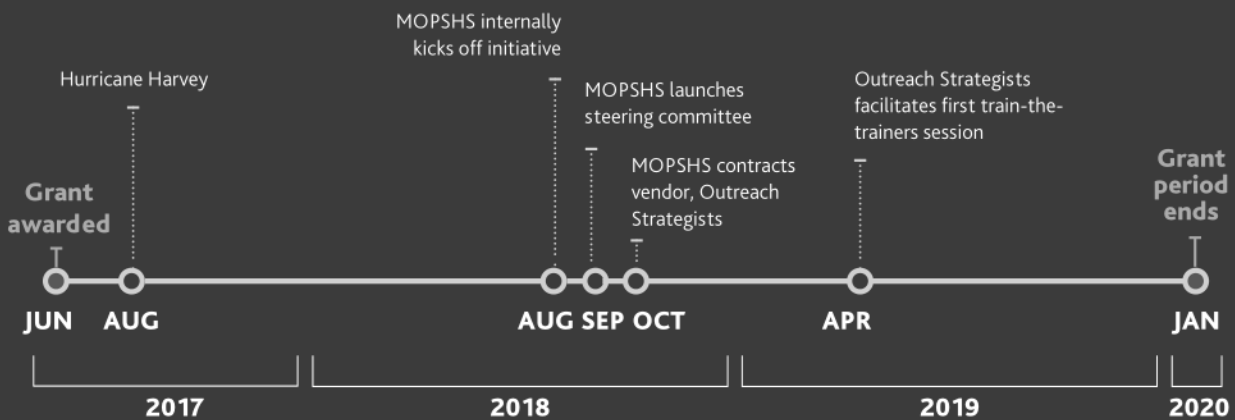
During the award period, the Houston CVE Training and Engagement Initiative partnered with some local principals, school-based clinical counselors and social workers, and other community leaders to further the training curriculum within their communities. The partnership with educators and school-based staff was used to begin a dialogue with teachers and parents about students who may be susceptible to recruitment by violent extremist groups.

Outreach Strategists — A global communications and public affairs firm. Its diverse team of experts has extensive backgrounds in government, politics, and media. They specialize in public relations, business development, campaigns, and communications. Outreach Strategists advises clients on the most effective ways to navigate in the public and political arenas.

Baylor College of Medicine — A health sciences university that creates knowledge and applies science and discoveries to further education, health care, and community service locally and globally. Baylor psychiatrists were instrumental in bringing colleagues to the trainings, hosting trainings for their staff, and collaborating with MOPSHS to plan for the sustainability of the program.

The Alliance for Compassion and Tolerance (ACT) — A forum organized to focus on our shared humanity; foster harmony, trust, and understanding among people of all faith traditions; and undertake initiatives that promote compassion, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence. ACT condemns violence against individuals or groups on the basis of race, religion, or ethnicity.

Timeline



Performance and Outcome Indicators

As part of the evaluation, performance and outcome indicators were reviewed using quarterly Project Implementation & Evaluation Plan (PIEP) data.

Accomplishments Visualized Through PIEP Output Data

Outcome 1: Increase capacity of the Houston CVE Training and Engagement Initiative by building a sustainable approach to training implementation and program socialization.

Outcome indicators

- Number of vetted trainers who have completed the train-the-trainer program and are certified to teach the curriculum to parents
- Number of certified trainers who have effectively conducted at least one training event to positive reviews

Midterm Outcome 1.1: Increase Houston's regional capacity to counter violent extremism through the development of training tools, curricula, and guides.

Midterm Outcome 1.2: Build community support for the program through all types of media via a structured communications strategy.

Midterm Outcome 1.3: Enhance program sustainability through the development of a train-the-trainer program, with appropriate vetting and certification.

Results

- 26 trainers (87% of goal) have successfully completed the train-the-trainer program and are able to conduct programs.
- No additional information was provided about how many trainers have conducted at least one training event and received generally positive reviews.¹

¹This was all the information provided on this outcome.

Outcome 2: Increase community engagement and resource awareness to counter violent extremism through participation in scenario-driven workshops and events and resource awareness.

Outcome indicators

- Percent increase in score from pre- to posttest in workshops
- Percentage of workshop reviews that are positive (average 4 out of 5)
- Percentage of trainer/facilitator reviews that are positive (average 4 out of 5)
- Number of social media engagements (likes, retweets, and impressions)

Midterm Outcome 2.1: Increase public engagement through implementation of comprehensive communications plan.

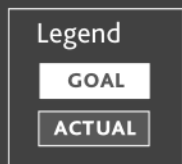
Midterm Outcome 2.2: Increase access and knowledge of support resources and services to parents with at-risk youth.

Midterm Outcome 2.3: Enhance educational opportunities for youth specific to countering violent extremism in the Houston Urban Area.

Results

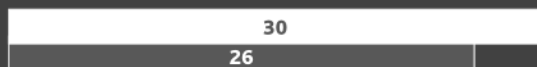
No results for these outcomes indicators have been reported at this time.²

²This was all the information provided on this outcome.



Increase Capacity

Trainers Trained in Curriculum



Change of Scope

As noted above, MOPSHS's original proposal included three key components: a culturally competent coalition of trainers and increased parental and youth engagement and understanding. However, MOPSHS, in tandem with its subcontractor Outreach Strategists, decided to omit the third component—youth engagement through a youth-specific curriculum—to concentrate its efforts on engaging parents, who would be best situated to address concerns about youth engagement with extremist groups by speaking to their own children. Furthermore, because of concerns about the potential for community backlash and negative media attention, MOPSHS decided not to engage the local community through social media promoting either the training curriculum or the current CVE Grant Program. Thus, a comprehensive communication plan about the initiative was not implemented.

Results from Partner Surveys About the Houston Project

To help supplement the monthly calls and site visits, the evaluation team also conducted a comprehensive survey.³ Partner surveys were sent to contacts identified by the prime grantee. The purpose was to obtain feedback on partner interactions with the prime, each other, and the community regarding the grant. Two respondents from the grantee completed the prime survey; four respondents from partner organizations completed the partner survey.

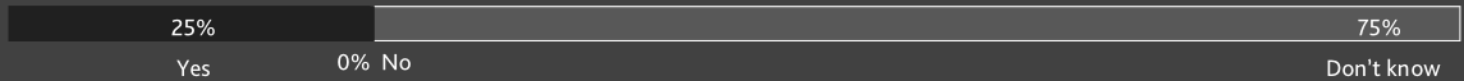
³ These survey results are a summation of received partner responses; most grantees had a small number of partners. These responses are representative of partner perspectives; they are not intended to be generalized to the broader population.

The tables below show responses to a selection of the survey items. The first item addresses perception of community experiences with violent extremism. The second item gauges whether partners felt valued and utilized by MOPSHS of Houston. The third and fourth items address local and national political climate and how it may affect CVE-related work.

Perception of Community Experiences with Violent Extremism

Regarding a local history of violent extremism incidents, one respondent answered that the Houston region had experienced incidents of violent extremism, listing school shootings and religiously or racially motivated hate crimes such as mosque bombings, stabbings of individuals in religious garb, and honor killings. Most respondents were not sure whether the region had been victimized by violent extremism. The inconsistency may reflect the larger confusion about how to define “violent extremism.” Although the survey provided a specific definition, the determination of when an incident is motivated by religious or political ideology is fraught with subjective perceptual issues, and an overall uncertainty about interpreting a perpetrator’s motivation is difficult to overcome.

In the last ten years, has your community experienced an incident of violent extremism?



Whether Partners Felt Valued and Utilized

All four partners felt their contributions were valued and utilized to some extent. Two partners expressed feeling moderately valued and utilized; two others said that they felt that their contributions were greatly valued and utilized. The discrepancy between organizations suggests that the grant program was not especially cohesive and that additional team building at the outset of the project would have been beneficial.

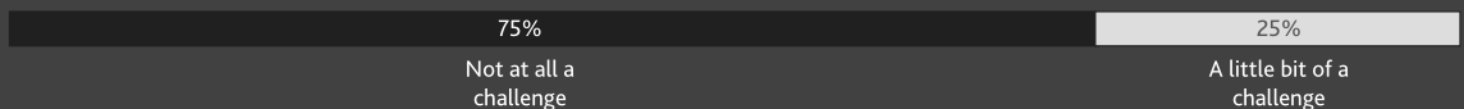
Throughout the grant period, how much do you feel that your contributions to the Houston CVE Training & Engagement Initiative were valued and utilized by the MOPSHS? (Not at all, To a small extent, To a moderate extent, To a great extent)



Local and National Political Climate and How It May Affect Related Work

Last, two survey items measured perceived challenges related to local and national political climate. The results were disparate in that the local political climate seems to have less bearing on the success of the local CVE effort than does the current national political climate.

Please indicate how much of a challenge the *local political climate* has been to the successful implementation of the Houston CVE Training & Engagement Initiative in your jurisdiction? (Not at all a challenge, A little bit of a challenge, Somewhat of a challenge, A substantial challenge)



Please indicate how much of a challenge the *national political climate* has been to the successful implementation of the Houston CVE Training & Engagement Initiative in your jurisdiction? (Not at all a challenge, A little bit of a challenge, Somewhat of a challenge, A substantial challenge)

