



# National Network For Safe Communities

Saving Lives, Saving Communities



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# CHRONICLE



# NATIONAL NETWORK FOR SAFE COMMUNITIES

The National Network for Safe Communities supports cities around the country in implementing community-based strategies to reduce violence, improve public safety, minimize arrest and incarceration, enhance police legitimacy, and strengthen relationships between police and communities.

Our strategies have shown repeatedly that cities can dramatically reduce serious crime when community members and law enforcement join together to engage directly with the small number of people driving it and clearly communicate 1) a credible [moral message](#) against serious crime, 2) a credible [law enforcement message](#) about the consequences of further crime, and 3) a genuine [offer of help](#) for those who want it.

We believe these three components are integral to the strategies' effectiveness and we are committed to building upon them. We are tremendously excited about so many developments in this work, from our recent Justice Department award to lead the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice, to generous funding from the [Jacob and Valeria Langeloth Foundation](#) that will elevate the help component of our work under our emerging "support and outreach" framework, to inspired community outreach efforts, to advances in communicating with high-risk populations.

You can read more about all of this important work in this newsletter, which we offer to provide you with updates and highlights on our partners efforts, and to promote the national conversation around our proven approach to improving community safety and rebuilding relationships between communities and law enforcement.

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Cover Photo by Peter Ringenberg; provided by the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County.

## DOJ ANNOUNCES NATIONAL INITIATIVE

On Thursday, September 18, Attorney General Eric Holder announced that the Department of Justice has awarded the National Network for Safe Communities, through [John Jay College of Criminal Justice](#), a three-year, \$4.75 million grant to launch a [National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice](#). The National Initiative will be directed by Professor David Kennedy, with John Jay College President Jeremy Travis, Professor Tracey Meares and Professor Tom Tyler of Yale Law School, Professor Phillip Atiba Goff of UCLA, and Dr. Nancy La Vigne and Dr. Jocelyn Fontaine of the Urban Institute as principal partners. The National Initiative is designed to improve relationships and increase trust between minority communities and the criminal justice system. It also aims to advance the public and scholarly understandings of the issues contributing to those relationships.

“This is one of the most ambitious and important steps the federal government has taken during my career in criminal justice,” said John Jay College President Jeremy Travis. “Addressing the broken relationships between the police and communities of color across the nation is a fundamental challenge facing our democracy. We’re honored that the U.S. Department of Justice has asked John Jay and our colleagues to do this work, and tremendously excited about what that work could mean for the country.”

The National Initiative will highlight three areas that hold great promise for concrete, rapid progress. [Racial reconciliation](#) facilitates frank conversations between minority communities and law enforcement that allow them to address historic tensions, grievances, and misconceptions between them and reset relationships. [Procedural justice](#) focuses on how the characteristics of law enforcement interactions with the public shape the public’s views of the police, their willingness to obey the law, and actual crime rates. [Implicit bias](#) focuses on how largely unconscious

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psychological processes can shape authorities’ actions and lead to racially disparate outcomes even where actual racism is not present.

The National Initiative will combine existing and newly developed interventions informed by these ideas in five pilot sites around the country. It will



also develop and implement interventions for victims of domestic violence and other crimes, youth, and the LGBTQI community; conduct research and evaluations; and establish a national clear-

***“This is the right team at the right time.”***

inghouse where information, research, and technical assistance are readily accessible for law enforcement, criminal justice practitioners and community leaders.

David Kennedy of the National Network for Safe Communities brings deep experience working in troubled communities nationally, where he has driven innovative practice in racial reconciliation. Professor Tracey Meares and Professor Tom Tyler of Yale Law School bring leading expertise on procedural justice. Professor Phillip Atiba Goff of UCLA brings leading expertise on implicit bias. Dr. Nancy La Vigne and Dr. Jocelyn Fontaine of the Urban Institute bring broad research and implementation capacity. Collectively, the partners are working with scores of cities across the United States on these issues. The initiative will be guided by a board of advisors which will include national leaders from law enforcement, academia and faith-based groups, as well as community stakeholders and civil rights advocates.

“This is the right team at the right time,” Kennedy says. “Our experience in city after city has shown us that both law enforcement and communities are far more ready for change than people think, Ferguson has galvanized the nation on this issue, and DOJ’s National Initiative will greatly enhance and accelerate that process.”

## SPOTLIGHT: COMMUNITY

## Project Longevity Bridgeport



"I believe that if you can get the community to buy into the strategy of all of us working together with law enforcement and service providers, then this can work," says Charles Grady, Project Manager for Project Longevity in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Project Longevity is a statewide initiative that uses the National Network for Safe Communities' approach in an effort to reduce homicide and gun violence in Connecticut's three most violent cities: Bridgeport, Hartford, and New Haven. With the National Network's guidance,

the city of Bridgeport launched its effort in November 2013, holding a "call-in" meeting where a partnership of community figures, law enforcement representatives, and social service providers spoke to members of the city's active gangs to deliver a credible moral message against violence, a credible law enforcement message about the consequences of further violence, and a genuine offer of help for those who want it. They have held several such meetings since then.

As part of this effort, Project Longevity Bridgeport has been making strides in community outreach under the leadership of Mr. Grady. A longtime Connecticut resident and activist, and a decorated retired police detective, Mr. Grady has made it a singular aim of Project Longevity to gain the support of the community in carrying the antiviolence message. As Project Longevity headed into its first summer – a season invariably plagued by increased violence in major cities as the weather heats up and schools let out – Mr. Grady and his team did something novel. They worked with a local organization, the Regional Youth Adult Social Action Partnership, to host a "summer kick-off" event in Bridgeport's Beardsley Park, which brought together all the partners of Project Longevity for food, games, radio DJs, dance competitions, and free admission to the zoo. Contributors from across city attended with their families, including police, corrections, and probation officers, neighborhood residents, reverends and bishops from local churches, social service providers, and many of the at-risk young men with whom Project Longevity works.

The Project Longevity team says that this event and others like it have helped immensely in bridging the gap between law enforcement and Bridgeport neighborhoods that have a history of tension with police. For residents, former gang members, and even some social services providers who may previously have distrusted the intentions of law enforcement, spending time with plainclothes officers and their families – at the grill or side-by-side on the park lawn – has been one step toward making a new partnership possible.

The Bridgeport team's outreach efforts are consistent with the National Network's experience across the country. Legitimate community engagement and a genuine offer to help gang members is an invaluable part of restoring relationships and strengthening community ties. This, in turn, helps to reset community norms and reduce violence.

The summer kick-off was part of a larger strategy by the Bridgeport team to engage the community through a multitude of local institutions. Says Mr. Grady, "We went on a rampage of educating the community... about what [Project Longevity] represents." This included countless presentations, in both open town hall-style forums and more casual one-on-one meetings. Since Project Longevity's launch, Mr. Grady and

his team have tirelessly visited community centers, presented at high schools and middle schools, made appearances on local radio, and staged special community-building events for Bridgeport residents.

Mr. Grady made a first highly visible effort around a community center in the city's East End. The center, according to Mr. Grady, had been all but abandoned – there were no programs because people were fearful of the violence in the area. So the Project Longevity team promised to bring community activities back to the center. First, they asked the Bridgeport Police Department to increase their presence in the area. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Grady scheduled a family movie night at which he and his team screened the movie *5k Motion*, a documentary that examines handgun violence. The event was well attended by families from the neighborhood, and after the movie Mr. Grady and his team fielded a question and answer session about the movie and Project Longevity. "The most effective way to get people on your side is to follow through with what you say you're going to do," says Mr. Grady. "People are tired of seeing programs come and go."

Restoring events to this community center is just one example of the way the Bridgeport team has come through with its promises. Since then, the Bridgeport team has organized a Christmas toy giveaway, held an event to celebrate [Black History Month](#), participated in the [Connecticut Against Violence Basketball Tournament](#), and organized a trip to a Broadway play for community members, including a group of young men engaged with Project Longevity support services. The team has also discussed [victims' rights](#) in public forums and reached out to the city's youth through more movie screenings and direct dialogue about the consequences of gun violence.

Mr. Grady says that seeking out the right people to be involved – from all sides of the Bridgeport community – has been integral to this effort. He and his small team arranged meetings with social service providers, substance abuse counselors, and representatives from the state mental health program. They went to churches in the community and asked for commitment from respected faith leaders. Where they found discord between important stakeholders, they held casual meetings over drinks or lunch, talked, and did their best to help reconcile them around the antiviolence goals of the project. When Mr. Grady heard murmurs of cynicism within the Bridgeport Police Department, he arranged to give presentations to line officers at each shift change. He did a presentation for city council when members expressed interest in Project Longevity. "The strategy for me," says Mr. Grady, "is let's talk to the community and make them understand that we can't do it without them, that the East End of Bridgeport is where the highest concentration of violence is happening, and ask what can we do as a community?"

By all accounts, the community has responded. Residents are turning out for events, showing curiosity about Project Longevity, and asking how they can become involved. Each of these events has been an opportunity for the Bridgeport team to explain Project Longevity's intention not only to break the cycle of violence, but to improve trust between the police and the streets and offer support to active gang members who want to change their lives. Of speaking with the community, Mr. Grady says, "The thing they responded to the most was the new approach – not only are we talking about putting the guns away...but we really are going to back up and help them if they do reach out for us. [We] created the mantra of 'if they take one step toward us, we'll take two steps toward them.'" Through Project Longevity, Mr. Grady and his team have begun to form a true partnership with the community of Bridgeport and created a vital vehicle for changing the dynamics of group-related violence. Says Mr. Grady, "It's all about relationship building, it's all about establishing trust—it's about follow through and doing what you say you're going to do. Everyone's jaded about programs that come and go...This community here in Bridgeport has been looking for a unity, a focus. Everyone's been doing individual stuff. [but now] Project Longevity has become a driving force to keep the community focused on reducing violent crime."

## LAW ENFORCEMENT

### Chicago Custom Notifications



The National Network for Safe Communities has been supporting the Chicago Violence Reduction Strategy (VRS) since 2009 in their effort to engage directly with street group members to reduce violence through a partnership of community leaders, law enforcement, and service providers.

In 2013, the VRS team began conducting “custom notifications” in the city’s volatile West Side and has now expanded their use to many more districts. Custom notifications give individualized messages to group members who seem to be involved in street situations like

running “beefs” that produce violence. The notifications aim to prevent retaliation after homicides and shootings and help calm neighborhoods when there has been a spike of gun violence.

In each district, the police commander and VRS staff (representing the community) identify high-risk group members and knock on their doors to deliver a joint message that the community cares about them but the violence must stop, informing them of their risk for prosecution based on criminal history, and explaining their opportunities for community support. When possible, the notifications include group members’ “influentials,” such as mothers and other family members with positive sway in their lives.

Supt. Garry McCarthy is making custom notifications one of the Chicago Police Department’s first responses to violence. “We had a murder last night, and today we’re working up all the players from these two or three particular gangs that are involved,” he told the *Baltimore Sun*. “We’ll be going to their residences and...sitting down with their family members and saying, ‘We don’t want to see you in a body bag.’” The method is seeing promising results: very few of those notified have been arrested in connection with further violent crimes. Encouraged by this, the National Network is taking steps to launch custom notifications with its partners in Baltimore and elsewhere.

## SOCIAL SERVICES

### Council of Thought and Action

The Council of Thought and Action (COTA) began in 2008 in Hempstead, NY, as a movement to assist men and women trying to leave the street life of gangs, guns, and drug dealing and rejoin the community in a legitimate way. Formed by Suffolk County Deputy Police Commissioner Risco Mention-Lewis (then the district attorney) while Hempstead was working with the National Network for Safe Communities to implement the Drug Market Intervention, COTA has grown beyond Hempstead to support at-risk individuals across Long Island and in the Chicago area.

Each chapter of COTA holds weekly support meetings where at-risk youth, offenders, and the formerly incarcerated share their experiences and challenges with a facilitator and a group of peers, and connect with opportunities for mentorship and employment training.

Each new member of COTA develops short- and long-term plans, which include goals for education, health, employment, and relationships.

***“Once you come to COTA, you never have to be alone again.”***

COTA’s goal is greater than successful reentry or job placement alone. The program aims to help transform the street mindset of its members and create bridges to legitimate citizenship. It is designed to provide a sense of community and support to its members, hold them accounta-



ble for their actions, and remind them that they are not alone in their struggles. As one member says, “Once you come to COTA, you never have to be alone again.”

The National Network believes the COTA framework brings a much-needed model of support to former offenders and has been collaborating with Ms. Lewis and COTA to bring the model nationwide. In an exciting recent development, Evelyn Diaz, commissioner of Chicago’s Department of Family and Support Services, supported the formation of two new COTA chapters, with Ms. Lewis’s training, in areas of Chicago where the National Network is actively working to reduce violence.

The National Network is honored that our work has appeared recently in major national media coverage. To see a full list of media highlights, visit us at our [website](#), [Twitter](#) account, and [Facebook](#) page.



#### **President Obama Highlights the National Initiative at the Congressional Black Caucus Awards Annual Dinner in Washington, D.C.**

At the Congressional Black Caucus Annual Awards dinner in September, President Obama addressed the corrosive effect of mistrust between minority communities and law enforcement. The President also pointed to the work represented by the new National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice, adding that, “America is not special because we’re perfect. We’re special because we work to address our problems. We need to help law enforcement and communities build trust and build understanding so that our neighborhoods stay safe. The Department of Justice has launched a national effort to do just that.”

## MEDIA



#### **Bridging the Great Divide: Can Police-Community Partnerships Reduce Crime and Strengthen Our Democracy?**

In September, John Jay College’s [Bridging the Great Divide](#) workshop featured National Network Director David Kennedy as a panelist. It also hosted Connie Rice of the Advancement Project and New York Police Department Commissioner Bill Bratton in a discussion of police legitimacy, broken windows policing, stop-and-frisk use, and other issues between communities and police. “The challenge for us is how do we continue to work to reduce violence but do it in a way that we build up legitimacy, build support for procedural justice,” said Commissioner Bill Bratton. The conversation and the workshop as a whole are germane to the topics covered under the [National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice](#).

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