



**National Network  
For Safe Communities  
at JOHN JAY COLLEGE**

# PROBLEM ANALYSIS

---

## OVERVIEW OF THE GROUP VIOLENCE INTERVENTION (GVI)

Serious violence in the United States is concentrated in historically disadvantaged communities of color, and particularly among young men in those communities. The Group Violence Intervention (GVI)—known by various names, including “Operation Ceasefire”—has the strongest record of preventing such violence. The strategy is based on a set of core facts: Most people in those communities are not at high risk for either victimization or offending. A small number of identifiable street groups drive the violence, and the people in them face extraordinary risk and trauma. The most common law enforcement approaches to violence prevention don’t work well on this small, special population – even strong law enforcement agencies aren’t satisfied with their impact on group-involved violence, and at worst, some of the nation’s most-used tactics may actually cause communities harm and make violence dynamics worse. Community distrust of law enforcement—based on historical harms, over-enforcement, and disrespect—stands in the way of violence prevention efforts.

GVI focuses on the groups at highest risk for violent victimization and offending, with the intention to keep those in them alive, safe, and out of prison. The GVI partnership, which includes law enforcement, community representatives, and social service providers, communicates directly with group members, conveying a powerful community message about disapproval for violence and in support of community aspirations; concrete opportunities for both immediate and longer-term assistance and support; and clear prior notice of the legal risks associated with continued violence. The partnership then delivers swiftly on these commitments.

The National Network for Safe Communities at John Jay College of Criminal Justice (NNSC) works with cities to implement and develop this strategy. It arises from a desire to build communities’ capacity to prevent violence, use enforcement narrowly and strategically, help the most vulnerable people, and improve the legitimacy of police in the eyes of the community. Over 20 years of implementation in dozens of cities, this approach has consistently reduced serious violence.

Design work for GVI begins by assessing the facts on the ground (i.e., who and what are driving serious violence) to design an operation that addresses the problem. While law enforcement has access to a wealth of information on current and historic crimes, the

information is often captured in a way that is more useful for prosecution than for violence prevention. Information and current intelligence on the street scene are usually scattered among frontline personnel and not systematically collected. Therefore, getting a current snapshot of local group and violence dynamics is critically important.

NNSC's research uses a mix of quantitative and qualitative information. Quantitative information can be used to assess the location of target crimes and their concentration; demographic characteristics of victims, offenders, and communities; criminal histories of victims and offenders; weapon types; and similar matters.

Qualitative information is gathered through structured methods with frontline practitioners—such as police officers, probation and parole officers, and line prosecutors. NNSC works with the city partners to assemble a cohort that typically includes between 15 and 20 frontline personnel with deep day to day knowledge of violence dynamics in the city – this often includes homicide and shooting investigators, gang or street crimes personnel, highly knowledgeable patrol officers who work chronically violent beats, gun or gang prosecutors from state and/or federal offices, probation or parole officers who supervise high risk clients, and so on. NNSC and this cohort then work together to discuss basic questions such as these:

- What is the context in which violent incidents occur?
- Are victims and offenders known to practitioners before violent events?
- Do victims and offenders participate in street groups, drug crews, or other kinds of highly active groups?
- How many such groups exist, where are they active, and what are their relationships with each other?
- Who are the individuals in these groups, and which of them are most violent or otherwise influential?

Once gathered, such information can guide policy formulation as well as GVI operations.

## OVERVIEW OF THE GROUP AUDIT

The problem analysis is comprised of two research exercises: the group audit and the incident review. The purpose of the group audit is to 1) identify all street groups contributing to violence in a given city and 2) prospectively identify those groups of individuals who are escalating towards violence. The exercise is designed to work primarily from the street experience of knowledgeable police officers and other front-line personnel, rather than from formal or written intelligence. Our experience is that the depth of knowledge amongst such officers is profound, and is enormously valuable when consolidated and formalized. This information can then be supplemented with more traditional intelligence.

Because the Group Violence Intervention is designed to directly interact with the individuals and groups responsible for the violence, detailed knowledge of this population is crucial. The group audit specifically focuses on 1) the groups contributing to serious violence in the city, 2) their illegal activities, 3) key individual members and 4) the relationships among groups.

### Sample Group Audit Agenda

1. Opening remarks by police command staff
2. GVI overview and overview of confidentiality agreement
3. Description of data collection activities
4. Participants will share information with NNSC about groups that are 1) currently involved in violence or 2) escalating towards violence (e.g. weapons carrying). **Note: The term “group” can refer to any group, set, or gang of individuals who run together (i.e., it need not be an official gang by statutory code).**
  - a. Specifically, audience members are asked to provide the following information on each known group:
    - i. Group name (if one is known)
    - ii. Street location (if applicable and meaningful to the groups’ dynamics)
    - iii. Estimated group age range
    - iv. Relative level of violence (low, medium, high)
    - v. Estimated number of members
    - vi. Key members (for the purpose of ensuring that everyone in the room is discussing the same group)
    - vii. Illegal activities of group
    - viii. Other groups with whom they have alliances
    - ix. Other groups with whom they have feuds
    - x. Any other additional information known that is relevant to groups’ violent activity

## OVERVIEW OF THE VIOLENT INCIDENT REVIEW

The purpose of the retrospective incident review is to determine the proportion of total jurisdiction violent incidents (measured as homicides, shootings, or other violent incidents—community-specific, determined by the law enforcement team) that can be attributed to street groups for a given time period. The information from this session will be used as a baseline to which future violent incident data for the city will be compared. During this meeting, NNSC facilitates a review of a subset of recent violent incidents in the city --- usually five years of homicide incidents and 1-2 years of nonfatal shooting incidents – and leads a discussion about each incident in turn, focused on the informal information that goes beyond the official information recorded in the incident files. This discussion intentionally taps the collective knowledge of a carefully assembled cohort of frontline law enforcement officers to capture the circumstances of the incidents,

particularly whether they are tied to a violent street group and therefore a subject of attention for this initiative. These reviews are different from standard case reviews held by the detective bureau: while case reviews establish fact patterns and attempt to close cases, incident reviews are about understanding each incident in context, seeing group connections, and identifying and interrupting cycles of violence.

### **Sample Violent Incident Review Agenda**

1. Opening remarks by police command staff
2. GVI overview and overview of confidentiality agreement
3. Description of data collection activities
4. Participants then share information with the research team regarding each violent incident presented to the group (including official information, along with informal information, rumors on the street, etc.). The information provided here should be much more inclusive than that which would appear in official files. Note that the term “group” can refer to any violent group, set, or gang of individuals who hang out together (i.e., it need not be an official gang by statutory code).

Specifically, participants will be prompted about each violent incident based on the case number, date of incident, location, victim and suspect information. Participants are then asked to provide the following additional information:

- Incident known to participants? (Do folks remember this incident?)
- Incident context—narrative of what happened
- Type of incident (e.g., homicide, shooting, robbery)
- Reason for the incident (e.g., running dispute, sudden dispute, respect issue, drug business, robbery, drug robbery, domestic violence)
- Victim known to participants? Victim involved in a violent group?
- Suspect known to participants? Suspect involved in a violent group?
- Incident connected with previous homicide/shooting/violence?
- Incident connected to subsequent homicide/shooting/violence? Type of weapon?
- Group Member Involved (GMI)?

### **Logistics for the Problem Analysis**

Typically, the NNSC conducts the problem analysis via an in-person site visit over the span of 3-4 business days, depending on the jurisdiction and volume of violent incidents under review. This typically involves working closely with law enforcement partners to identify the practitioner cohort, securing a space to occupy for 3-4 days, and assembling information about the 5 years of homicides and 1-2 years of nonfatal shootings to be reviewed during the group audit.

Given the travel and gathering restrictions currently in place due to the COVID-19

pandemic, NNSC is shifting to conducting modified problem analyses by video conference through at least September 2021. This will permit the collection and analysis of sufficient frontline data to successfully launch the implementation of GVI with a strong foundation, and will reserve the ability of the city partners and NNSC to conduct additional analysis as necessary via site visits, as travel and gathering restrictions ease.