

New Jersey Urban Peacebuilding

Project Evaluation



Global Peace
FOUNDATION

Acknowledgments

Innumerable individuals and organizations contributed to the success of GPF's New Jersey Urban Peacebuilding Project. First and foremost, we offer thanks the U.S. Department of Homeland Security for funding this project and for their helpful assistance through this entire grant period. Gratitude is also due to the many Federal and New Jersey agencies, as well as community leaders, that became engaged partners; assisted with the development and continuous improvement of the training curriculum; and organized the trainings and community engagement events.

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Prologue

Trainers for the New Jersey Urban Peace Building project were gathering their thoughts before the presentation to community leaders on violent extremism hosted at a local middle school. They contemplated how much detailed information should be included in the presentation for fear of overwhelming or frightening some audience members. Freshening up prior to the start of the presentation, the trainer noticed this sign on the bathroom door.

Much like the bomb drills back in the day, it struck the trainer just how critical the violent situations facing youth of today actually are. These 11 - 13-year-old children are learning how to avoid being the victim of a school shooting. They are facing each school day being taught the best way to hide from someone who may open fire at their school.

For these students, violent extremism and targeted violence is not some hypothetical or distant possibility; it is something that needed to be as actively rehearsed and engrained in their minds as “Stop, Drop, and Roll.”

Acts of violent extremism are a reality that have only increased in recent years to the point that they can no longer be ignored. Steps must be taken to immediately and actively prevent violent extremism and targeted violence. GPF hopes that, through this project, they have begun this work and urges others to join in this fight to make communities safer.



Introduction

The Global Peace Foundation (GPF), headquartered in the Washington D.C. area successfully secured a U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) grant, in the Training and Engagement category. According to DHS, the program will advance America's capacity to counter terrorist recruitment and radicalization in the United States through community-driven solutions.

The goal of the GPF's New Jersey Urban Peacebuilding Project was to develop and provide training and foster community engagement to counter extremist violence by 1) raising awareness of law enforcement/first responders and community leaders on behavioral indicators related to mobilizing towards violence, including active shooters, and 2) strengthening community and law enforcement partnerships to counter violent extremism through Community Engagement Events.

Specifically, the project aimed to increase law enforcement/first responders' and community leaders' ability to recognize behavioral warning signs, report suspicious activity and individuals, as well as refer individuals to community-based services for help. Additionally, to increase the commitment among law enforcement and community members to reduce vulnerability to extremist violence.

Through trainings and community engagement events, the project aspired to expand partnerships within and between law enforcement and communities to prevent violent extremism. Additionally, through a specialized training on social media, the project sought to teach online safety basics and increase community leaders' knowledge on identifying, preventing, and countering extremist website narratives intended to radicalize people in disengaged communities. Further, the Community Engagement Events intended to bring about a change in perception about law enforcement as a community partner to be trusted and not as enforcer to be feared.

GPF contracted with the Walter Rand Institute for Public Affairs (WRI), Rutgers University, Camden, to evaluate the New Jersey Urban Peacebuilding Project. WRI supports and improves communities by providing objective program evaluation, policy analysis, and the convening of stakeholders on critical issues of regional importance.

Executive Summary

Goals of the Project. The goal of the Global Peace Foundation's (GPF) New Jersey Urban Peacebuilding Project was to develop and provide trainings and foster community engagement to counter violent extremist recruitment by 1) raising awareness of the frontline law enforcement workers and community leaders on indicators connected to violent extremism, including active shooters, through train the trainer programs, and 2) strengthening community and law enforcement partnerships to counter violent extremism through community engagement events. In line with the recommendations put forth by best practices in the field, the project accomplished these goals through a two-pronged approach focusing on:

- 1) Developing law enforcement/first responders', and community leaders' ability to recognize, report, and refer individuals displaying behavioral indicators of mobilizing towards extremist violence through comprehensive, interactive trainings.
- 2) Facilitating information sharing, increasing trust and confidence and expanding community and law enforcement commitment to counter violent extremism through community engagement events.

The New Jersey Urban Peacebuilding Project was tasked with providing the following services:

- Design and deliver 24 trainings about countering extremist violence reaching 1,200 law enforcement personnel (police, public safety officials/first responders, prosecutors).
- Design and deliver 24 trainings about countering extremist violence reaching 1,200 community leaders including educators, parents, employers, youth leaders, clergy of diverse faith traditions, and social service providers.
- Design and deliver 4 social media and online safety trainings for community leaders to enhance their understanding of the fundamentals of online safety, recognizing fake news and credible sources, countering online recruitment and radicalization and develop counternarratives and positive messages.
- Organize and host 5 community engagement events in each of the following cities: Jersey City, Paterson and Camden reaching 1,500 community members.

Project Implementation. Global Peace Foundation implemented the project over a two-year period with the primary areas of focus being Camden, Paterson, and Jersey City. The Law Enforcement/First Responders and Community Leaders Countering Violent Extremism Trainings provided information to help attendees understand the process of radicalization and indicators of violent mobilization. The Community Leaders Countering Violent Extremism Training also provided attendees with helpful resources on taking action to report suspicious activities. Social Media and Online Safety Trainings provided instruction on Internet safety, how to recognize fake and credible sources, and to be aware of how extremists use online platforms to engage and recruit vulnerable youth. Lastly, the Community Engagement Events provided opportunities for collaboration and trust-building between law enforcement and community members while

simultaneously providing attendees with valuable information on several existing social service resources available in their area.

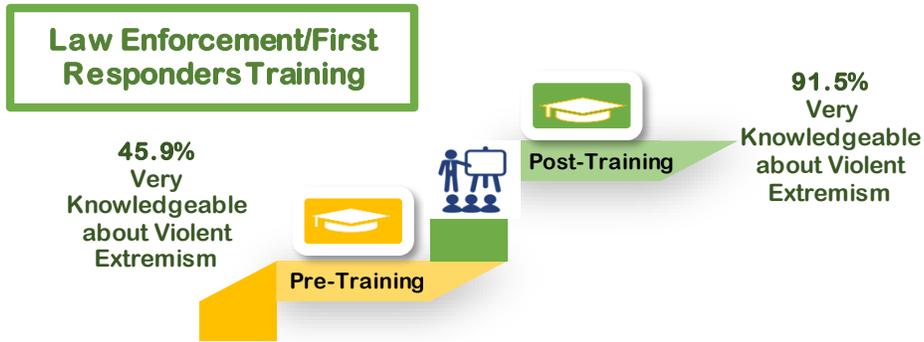
Overall, GPF exceeded the project targets, both in number of trainings and events held, as well as number of individuals trained and engaged. GPF hosted 77 trainings and events over the two-year period, 10 more than expected; and just over 5,675 individuals attended these trainings and events, nearly 1,620 more than required. These results tell the story of the willingness of New Jersey partners to work together to prevent violent extremism.

GPF utilized a collaborative approach to develop the trainings and engagement events, with multiple New Jersey agencies providing valuable contributions to the curriculum content. Throughout curriculum development and implementation, iterative changes were made based on feedback from trainees and trainers, which allowed for trainings to be adapted to meet the needs of the audiences to which they catered. For example, New Jersey specific cases were integrated into the Law Enforcement/First Responders Countering Violent Extremism Training curriculum, increasing the perceived relevance and overall interest of respondents in the training. This collaborative, iterative process of curriculum development and modification also facilitated the development of new and important relationships amongst many different agencies. For example, the NJ Division of Mental Health and Addictions had the opportunity to collaborate with the Terrorism Branch of the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, as well as the National Counterterrorism Center, bridging the important gap that often exists between law enforcement and mental health professionals.

The collaborative nature of the trainings and engagement events and the diversity of the partnerships that developed between GPF and different New Jersey State agencies also contributed to the institutionalization and sustainability of the trainings. For example, the NJ Office of the Attorney General plans on offering the Law Enforcement/First Responders Countering Violent Extremism Training to its sworn and certified first responders and law enforcement via an online e-learning management system. Further, these trainings will also be provided as part of the mandated training for the New Jersey Police Academy. Also, additional trainings are expected to be offered to over 700 mental health screeners throughout 26 screening centers in the state of New Jersey.

Law Enforcement/First Responders Countering Violent Extremism Training.

Results from attendee surveys indicate that this training was very effective at increasing the overall knowledge of topics relating to violent extremism such as general knowledge of violent extremism and other types of terrorism; overall knowledge of mobilization indicators; and knowledge of responding to radicalized individuals and extremist violence incidents amongst the target audience. The percentage of respondents reporting a high level of knowledge across these topics nearly doubled after attending the trainings.



On average 93.3% of respondents felt ‘moderately’ to ‘extremely likely’ to recognize the mobilization indicators of violent extremists following the trainings.

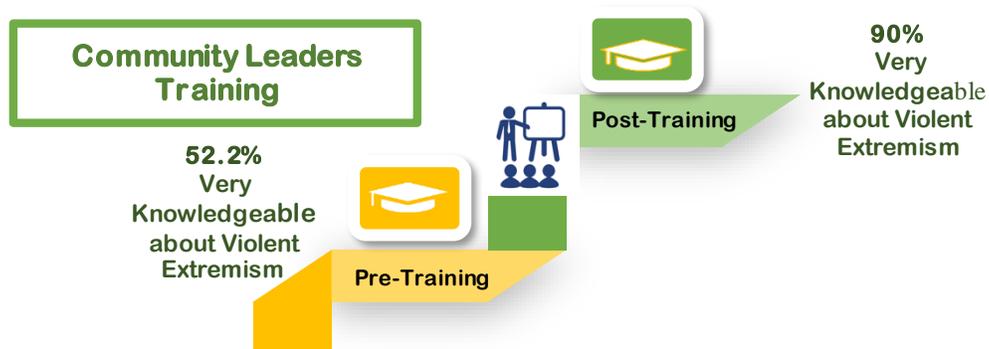


The Law Enforcement/First Responders Countering Violent Extremism Training was not only successful in attaining its educational ends but was also positively received by the respondents. Exactly 99% of respondents rated the training as ‘beneficial’ to ‘very beneficial’. Likewise, over 98% of respondents stated they would be ‘likely’ or ‘extremely likely’ to refer a colleague to the Law Enforcement/First Responders Countering Violent Extremism Training.



Community Leaders Countering Violent Extremism Training. The Community Leaders Countering Violent Extremism Training was also very effective at increasing the overall knowledge of community leaders on topics relating to violent extremism such as general knowledge of extremist violence; overall knowledge of the risks factors and behaviors related to extremist violence;

knowledge of how and where to respond to extremist violence; and knowledge of the key factors influencing extremist violence. The percentage of respondents reporting a high level of knowledge across these topics increased by nearly 40% after attending the trainings.



Over 89% of respondents felt ‘moderately’ to ‘extremely likely’ to recognize the warning signs of extremist violence following the training. Additionally, these trainings promoted action on the part of community leaders to actively prevent violent extremism. An average of 89.2% of respondents reported feeling ‘moderately’ to ‘extremely likely’ to take action to prevent extremist violence such as getting help for escalating individuals or working together with law enforcement to address extremist violence in the community.

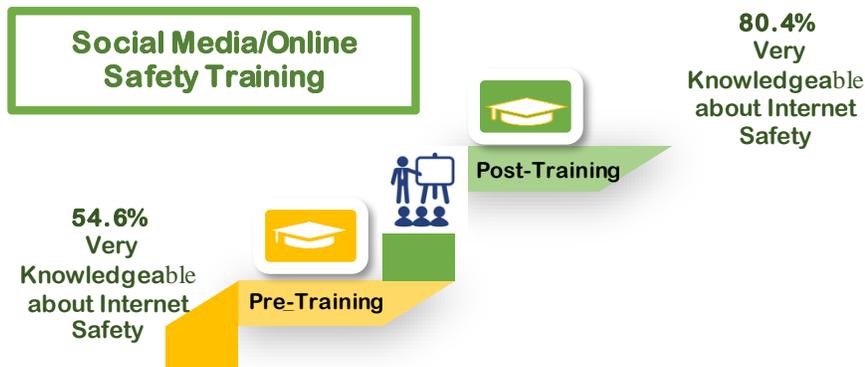


Additionally, community leaders expressed a commitment to relay the training information to their communities. Over 86% of respondents said they would share the information from the trainings with members of their community. Again, this training was well received with 98% of respondents rating it as ‘beneficial’ to ‘very beneficial.’ Likewise, 97% of respondents stated they would be ‘likely’ to ‘extremely likely’ to refer a colleague to the Community Leaders Countering Violent Extremism Training.



Over 86% of respondents said they would share the information from the trainings with members of their community. Again, this training was well received with 98% of respondents rating it as ‘beneficial’ to ‘very beneficial.’ Likewise, 97% of respondents stated they would be ‘likely’ to ‘extremely likely’ to refer a colleague to the Community Leaders Countering Violent Extremism Training.

Social Media and Online Safety Training. Similarly, the Social Media and Online Safety Training was efficacious in educating attendees on topics relating to internet safety such as good digital citizenship, recognizing fake news and understanding extremist recruitment tactics. As a result of the training, the percentage of respondents reporting high levels of knowledge about these increased by nearly 30%.



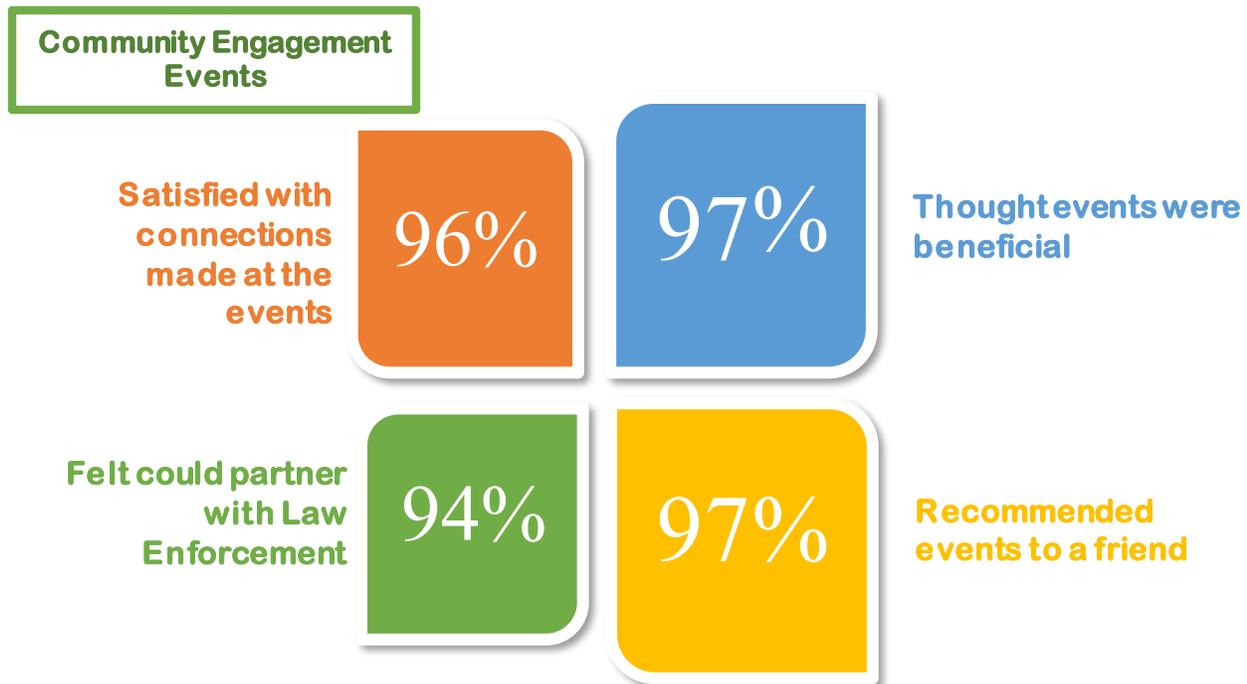
After attending the training, 73.1% of respondents reported feeling ‘moderately’ to ‘extremely likely’ to share online safety tips with others. Again, the trainings received overwhelmingly positive reviews. Exactly 92% of respondents rated the trainings as ‘beneficial’ to ‘very beneficial’ while 88% of respondents stated that they would be ‘likely’ to ‘extremely likely’ to refer a colleague to the training.



Community Engagement Events. The Community Engagement Events also provided important opportunities for building trust and strengthening partnerships between community members and law enforcement to counter violent extremism. Over 96% of respondents indicated they were ‘satisfied’ to ‘very satisfied’ with the meaningful connections made at the events.

Likewise, over 94% of respondents were ‘satisfied’ to ‘very satisfied’ with their experience of feeling like they could partner with law enforcement in a positive way to combat violence in their community. Event organizers echoed these sentiments, citing how community members attending these events felt like valued stakeholders in partnering with law enforcement in combatting violence in their communities.

Overall, respondents have an extremely positive outlook about the Community Engagement Events. Over 97% of respondents rated the events ‘beneficial’ to ‘very beneficial.’ Likewise, 97% of respondents said they would be ‘likely’ to ‘extremely likely’ to recommend a friend or colleague to attend a Community Engagement Event.



Lessons Learned/Challenges and Recommendations. GPF’s experiences with the project provide meaningful insights into ways the implementation of the Countering Violent Extremism Train the Trainer project could be improved. The train the trainer model has broad applicability in leveraging the reach of programming and content, as well as implementation dollars. However, applying the model to this topic created some challenges which were identified and addressed as part of the overall implementation. The most significant challenge is that the CVE issue area is complex, sensitive, and requires cultural competency to successfully deliver key messages and training content. This creates a trainer competency requirement that includes technical knowledge of the training curriculum plus a broad understanding of CVE and targeted violence in the general public, as well as New Jersey specific case file information. In addition, GPF learned that trainer credibility, including diversity in demographics/backgrounds was important in presenting information and data contained in the curriculum to our diverse training audiences.

GPF suggests that future projects consider emphasizing and planning for the delivery of trainings to individuals with diverse personal and professional backgrounds to help ensure they are able to share the information with their colleagues. Additionally, expanding the curriculum to include other types of violent extremism such as school shootings, workplace violence, and gang violence would help to make the material more relatable and relevant to more diverse audiences, thereby increasing the reach of the trainings.

Conducting community outreach and information dissemination around CVE was also a complex and sensitive issue area. One simple recommendation GPF suggests is to place CVE within the larger context of community safety.

Based on these observations, GPF also suggests developing a ‘How To Guide’ for community leaders that would be given to interested respondents at the end of the training and would expand on ways in which they could both engage larger communities in this effort and partner with law enforcement. Additionally, GPF recommends providing communities an open line of communication for responding to questions and providing advice on the implementation of additional community efforts. Such efforts would facilitate the broadcasting of this information to the community while also creating a sense of accountability and accomplishment for the community leaders.

Moreover, the experiences of GPF and evaluators outline challenges to evaluating projects of this scope. Individuals registering and attending the trainings and engagement events were often reluctant to complete the online Pre-Post-Tests and Satisfaction Evaluations. Furthermore, it was difficult to motivate participants to complete electronic surveys during trainings/events; and the paper surveys used in their place were frequently left incomplete by respondents and required the additional step of deciphering attendees’ handwriting and entering responses into online platforms. The Community Engagement Events were particularly challenging as the large crowds made it difficult to collect Satisfaction Surveys with the limited number of staff. As such, the wider scope of the evaluation was often limited by the small number of responses, particularly with the Social Media and Online Safety Training and the Community Engagement Events. GPF and evaluators suggest more formal policies and procedures that help ensure those attending the trainings/events complete the evaluation measures, such as reminding respondents to complete the evaluation throughout the event, designating specific times during the event for respondents to fill out the evaluation, and providing incentives for those who fully complete the evaluations.

Furthermore, evaluators found that differences in the scope of the Community Engagement Events made it difficult to design and administer a reliable evaluation tool, as well as compare the efficacy of these events to one another and to aggregate data across all events. As such, GPF and evaluators suggest some formal Community Engagement Events criteria in order to allow for measurement across events. They also suggest the use of evaluation measures that capture the specific characteristics of Community Engagement Events so that differences between them can be quantified and compared in relation to the primary outcomes of interest.

Overall, the Global Peace Foundation’s (GPF) New Jersey Urban Peacebuilding Project successfully developed and delivered comprehensive trainings and community engagement events to prevent violent extremism. Results from the evaluation of the project emphasized the widespread, positive impact of both the trainings and the engagement events in not only promoting knowledge of best practices for preventing violent extremism (PVE), but also bringing together different organizational and community members to lead these efforts. Communities interested in preventing violent extremism and targeted violence could consider replicating GPF’s curriculum

and implementation practices as a foundation for their efforts and consider technical ‘start-up’ support from GPF’s project team.

As a result of the project, GPF further refined its credentials in digital media and online safety and will continue to explore opportunities to partner with similar organizations to leverage digital technology to expand its scope of impact. Already plans are being explored to further develop organizational capacity, curricula, and project implementation partners.

Global Peace Foundation will also continue to be active in CVE and digital technology thought leadership and is a founding member of the Alliance for Peacebuilding Technology Working Group and active in other networks related to CVE and prevention efforts related to terrorism and targeted violence.

In “Building an Effective Practice and Practical National Approach to Terrorism Prevention,”¹ Rand Corporation researchers noted that successes in this field are considered fragile because of the controversy surrounding past CVE and current terrorism prevention efforts with limited funding. Outside of government funding, many U.S. private foundations funding in the peace and security issue space have been difficult to engage on this issue, with a focus on policy and government driving action with technology companies. While the law enforcement and State agencies involved in the project will continue to expand the reach and sustainability, there is not the same sustainability in the community training and social media aspects of the project.

Funders and those potential collaborating partners with resources are encouraged to consider enhancing and strengthening their support for funding prevention of extremism, violence prevention and school and community safety, trust building between law enforcement and community members, and also more funds for digital media awareness raising about critical information and awareness related to violent extremism and targeted violence.

¹Jackson, B. A., Rhoades, A. L., Reimer, J. R., Lander, N., Costello, K., Beagley, S. (2019). *Building an Effective and Practical National Approach to Terrorism Prevention*. (RB-10030-DHS). Retrieved from the Rand Corporation website: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB10030.html