

URBAN NETWORKS TO
INCREASE THRIVING YOUTH
UNITY
through Violence Prevention

“Violence is not the problem of one neighborhood or group, and the response and solutions are not the responsibility of one sector of the community or of one agency, professional group, or business. Coming together and owning this problem and the solutions are central.”

-Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith, Harvard School of Public Health

Young people are severely impacted by violence, and those who live in urban areas are disproportionately affected. Yet youth violence is preventable, not inevitable. It is a predictable behavior in the unsafe environments where people live. Rooted in a complex set of underlying issues, violence is a learned behavior that can be unlearned or not learned in the first place.

Preventing violence before it occurs involves comprehensive and multifaceted efforts to address the risk factors associated with violence, and builds on assets in youth, families, and communities. It contributes to empowerment, educational and economic progress, and improved life management skills while fostering communities in which young people can grow in dignity and safety.

Despite efforts by residents and elected officials, many cities across the country still grapple with violence. Most cities do not have a collaborative plan or a clear strategy for preventing violence before it occurs. They need help to more effectively prevent violence and improve the lives of young people in our cities. Others are well underway and can share their successes and further strengthen their efforts. All of them need effective policies and resources at the federal level to reinforce and sustain their priorities.

It is time to consider a new approach. To maximize existing resources and promote sustainability, we are proposing a paradigm shift – from programs to strategy. UNITY has been envisioned to help. UNITY is a national initiative designed to strengthen and support cities in preventing violence before it occurs and to help sustain these efforts.

Who is UNITY?

◆ **Lead Partners:** *Harvard School of Public Health, UCLA School of Public Health
SCIPRC, Prevention Institute*

◆ **Supported by:** *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) & The California Wellness Foundation*

◆ **National Consortium:** *Over 200 members from cities, national and state orgs, CBOs*



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UNITY Lead Partners are Harvard School of Public Health, UCLA School of Public Health Southern CA Injury Prevention Research Center (SCIPRC), and Prevention Institute.

UNITY is supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or the CDC. UNITY is also funded by a grant from The California Wellness Foundation.

The National Consortium includes national organizations such as: the American Public Health Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Crime Prevention Council, Forum for Youth Investment, Institute for Community Peace, Kaiser Permanente, the National Association of County and City Health Officials, the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, National League of Cities, National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center, PREVENT, and the State and Territorial Injury Prevention Directors Association. The Consortium also includes local and state health departments, school districts, elected officials, law enforcement, foundations, universities, state coalitions, and community-based organizations.

UNITY Activities

- ◆ Assessment: *What do cities need?*
- ◆ Peer Network: *Connecting cities with each other*
- ◆ Capacity Building: *Training, tools, consultation*
- ◆ City Efforts: *Highlighting what works*
- ◆ Framing: *Making the case for preventing violence*
- ◆ National Strategy: *Policies and resources to support urban areas*



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UNITY has several primary activities:

- **Assessment:** The assessment, led by Co-chair Billie Weiss, answered the question, “What do Cities need to prevent violence before it occurs?”
- **Peer Network** to create opportunities for cities to learn from each other about what works, share common concerns and strategies.
- **Capacity building:** We are creating tools and resources to increase capacity in cities. In addition, starting this year we will also be working in a few cities, providing more intensive training and consultation.
- **City Efforts:** We are collecting and highlighting what works in cities around the country.
- **Framing:** We are researching and will be sharing how to communicate to make the case for prevention.
- **National Strategy:** We are working on a national strategy to delineate the policies and resources needed to support cities.

Data Collection Methodology

- ◆ Telephone Interviews with City Key Informants
 - Mayors
 - Police Chiefs
 - Public Health Directors
 - School Superintendents



To inform our efforts, under the lead of Billie Weiss, we talked to mayors, police chiefs, public health directors, and school superintendents in a sample of cities across the country.

We asked about the existence of a city-wide plan to address youth violence and gathered descriptive data on youth councils, youth violence prevention programs, and coalitions. Informants were asked about their access to data and their collaborations with other departments/offices. We also asked for the informant's overall assessment of the city's effort to prevent or reduce youth violence. The interviews included close-ended questions with some "Likert" type scales and open-ended questions that required probing on the part of the interviewer. Interviews took approximately one hour to complete.

Findings

- ◆ Informants identified youth violence as a serious issue for their city.
- ◆ Few reported that their city uses primary prevention to stop violence before it occurs.
- ◆ Informants lack a shared knowledge of existing youth violence prevention resources available in their city.



Although informants identified youth violence as a serious issue for their city, few reported using primary prevention to stop violence before it occurs. Additionally, across cities informants lacked a shared knowledge of violence prevention resources that exist in their city.

Based on these findings, we can conclude that violence is perceived as a serious issue, but cities' responses to youth violence are not perceived to be highly effective or adequate. Cities lack knowledge of prevention approaches to youth violence.

These findings and conclusions will be included in a full report to UNITY cities.

UNITY RoadMap

UNITY RoadMap for Preventing Violence Before it Occurs



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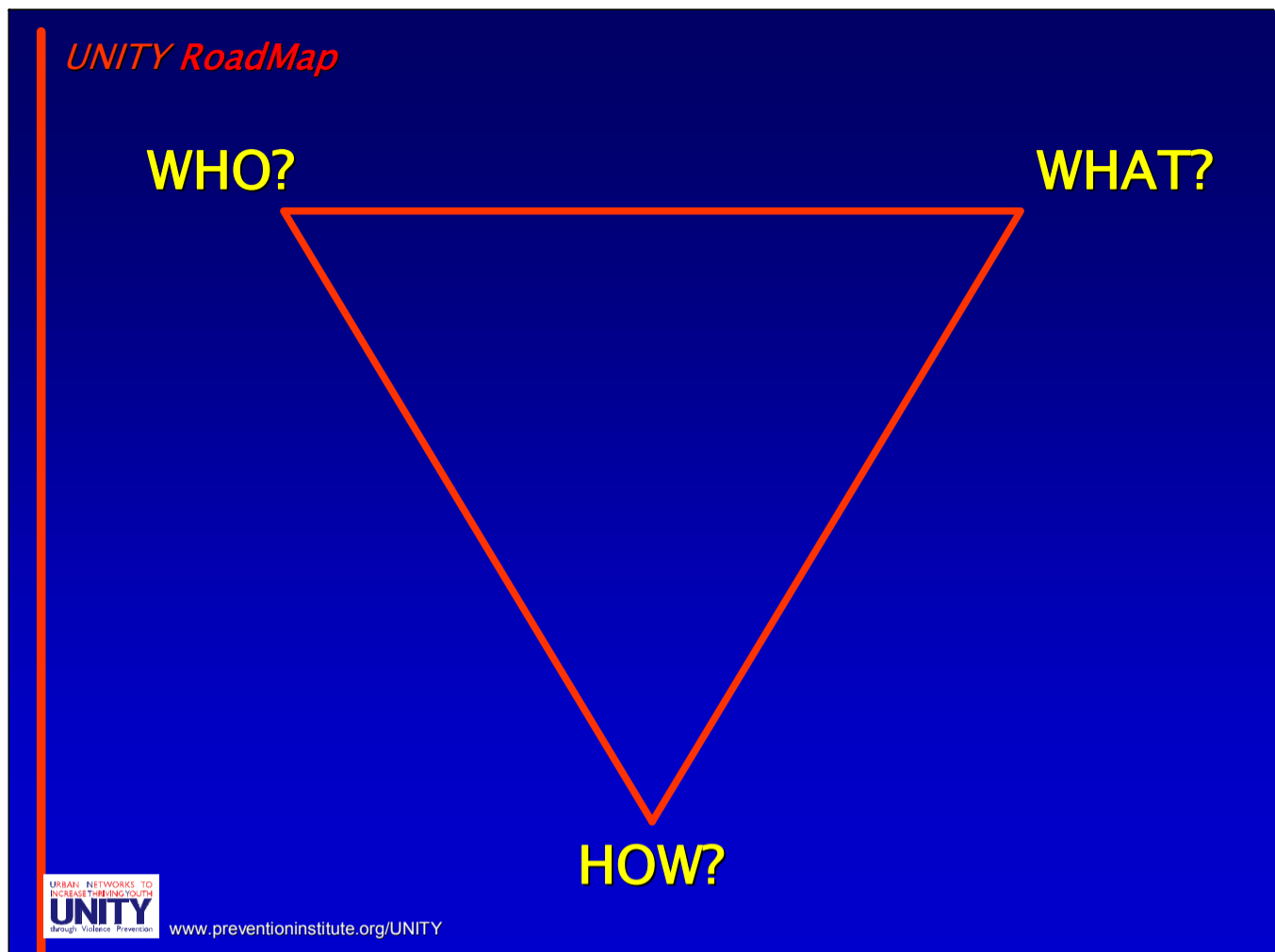
Based on the needs cities identified, UNITY is developing a framework called the *UNITY RoadMap*. It delineates the range of elements to help cities be more effective in preventing violence and sustaining these efforts. Input along the way from city representatives has helped shape and refine it.

A road map is a plan that allows people to get to a desired destination. Building on this notion, the *UNITY RoadMap* points cities in the direction of getting to the point of preventing violence before it occurs. It helps describe a city's starting point and can help map out solutions to effectively and sustainably prevent violence, which will differ from city to city.

The *UNITY RoadMap*:

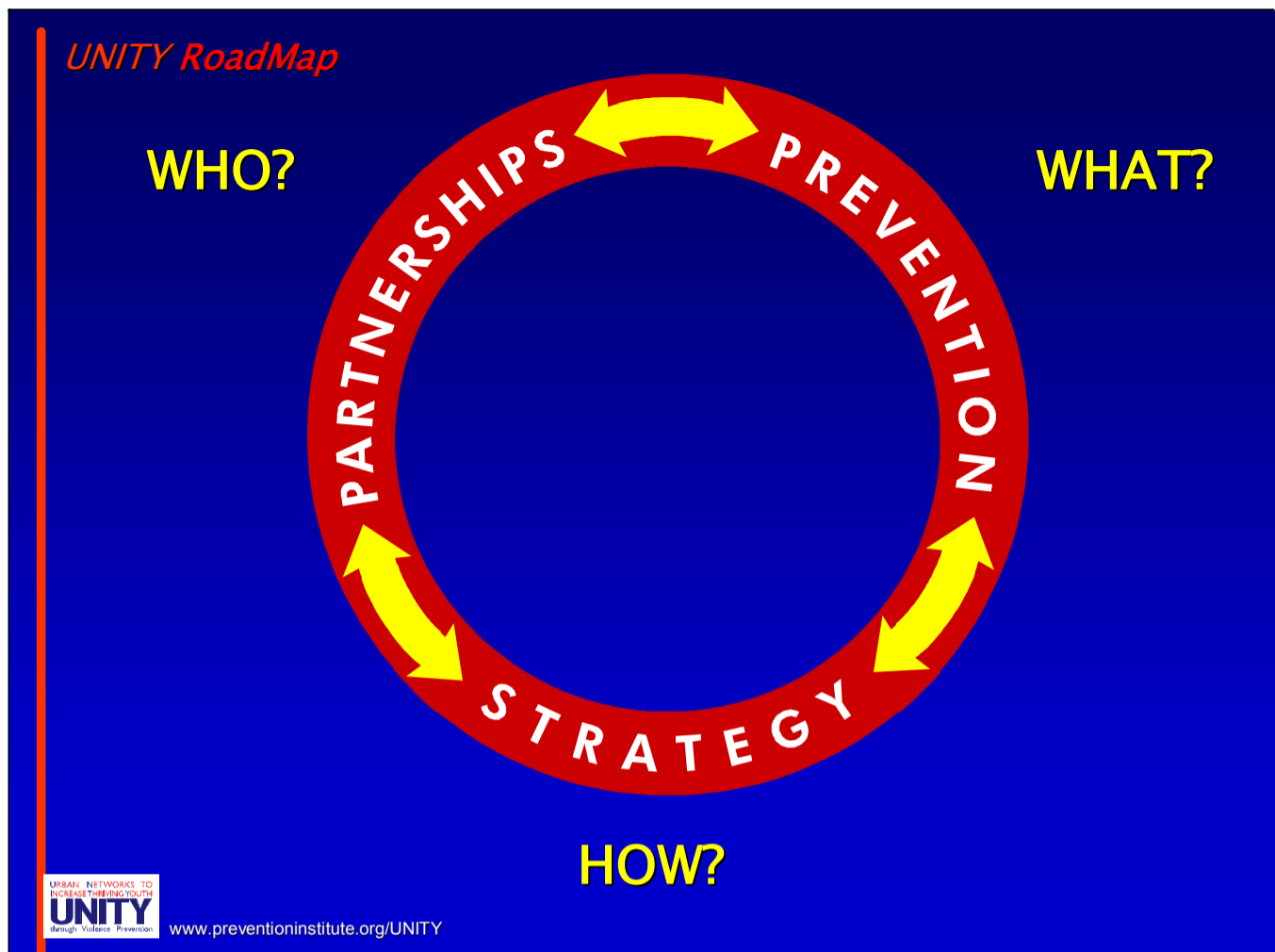
- 1) helps cities assess the current status of their efforts
- 2) describes the core elements necessary to prevent violence *before* it occurs
- 3) provides information, resources, and models about the core elements necessary to support cities in planning, implementation, and evaluation.

While providing an overall framework for understanding what needs to be in place, the *UNITY RoadMap* can be tailored depending on the needs a particular city.



The *UNITY RoadMap* delineates the essential elements for preventing violence before it occurs by answering:

- WHO does it take to prevent violence before it occurs?
- WHAT does it take to prevent violence?
- HOW do we effectively AND sustainably prevent violence before it occurs?



The answers to these three questions cluster into three categories:

- WHO: Partnerships
- WHAT: Prevention
- HOW: Strategy

City leaders and community organizers can use the UNITY RoadMap to:

- improve strategy
- foster political will and accountability
- enhance coordination
- improve resource allocation
- strengthen sustainability

WHO?

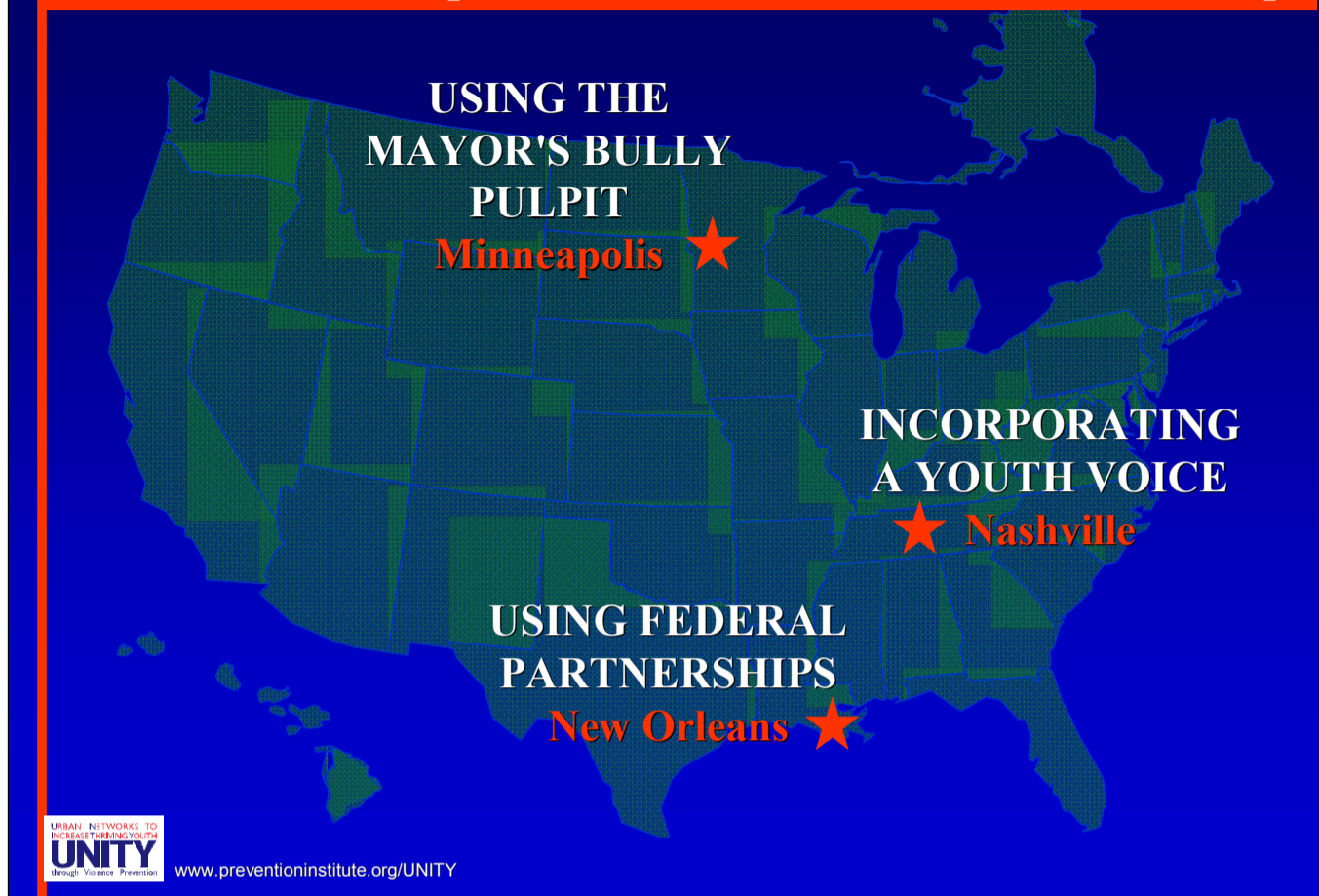


Each category – Partnerships, Prevention, and Strategy – is composed of three elements that are essential to achieving comprehensive, sustainable prevention.

WHO does it take to prevent violence before it occurs?

Preventing violence is a collaborative top-down process requiring **high-level leadership**, as well as a bottom-up venture requiring **community engagement**. In the middle is an interdisciplinary **coalition** and ongoing attention from dedicated **staffing**.

WHO does it take to prevent violence before it occurs? Partnerships



Here are some examples of who is leading efforts to prevent violence in select cities around the United States:

- **Minneapolis** convened the Mayor's Youth Violence Steering Committee who met with various experts over 8 months. Recently, in a lunchtime panel led by youth, an audience of over 800 people, which was standing room only, kicked-off the Blueprint program with 4 major areas of work. 1) every child to have an adult invested in them 2) helping children at risk 3) when a child is off track, helping him get back on and 4) changing the culture. The Mayor used his BullyPulpit to rally this energy. UNITY Co-chair said, "Every mayor and elected official needs to become fluent in these issues and needs to be able to show that s/he's not being SOFT on crime, s/he's being SMART on crime by looking at prevention."
- **Nashville**'s strategic planning process heavily incorporated youth. The plan is organized around 3 themes: safe places, caring adults and employment training and opportunities. The young people helped to identify and prioritize themes, and continuously expressed their need for caring adults.
- **New Orleans** is using federal partnerships, with invested experts from these agencies to garner resources for youth violence prevention. One group is responding to an RFP from the National Institutes of Health and the other to one from Centers for Disease Control

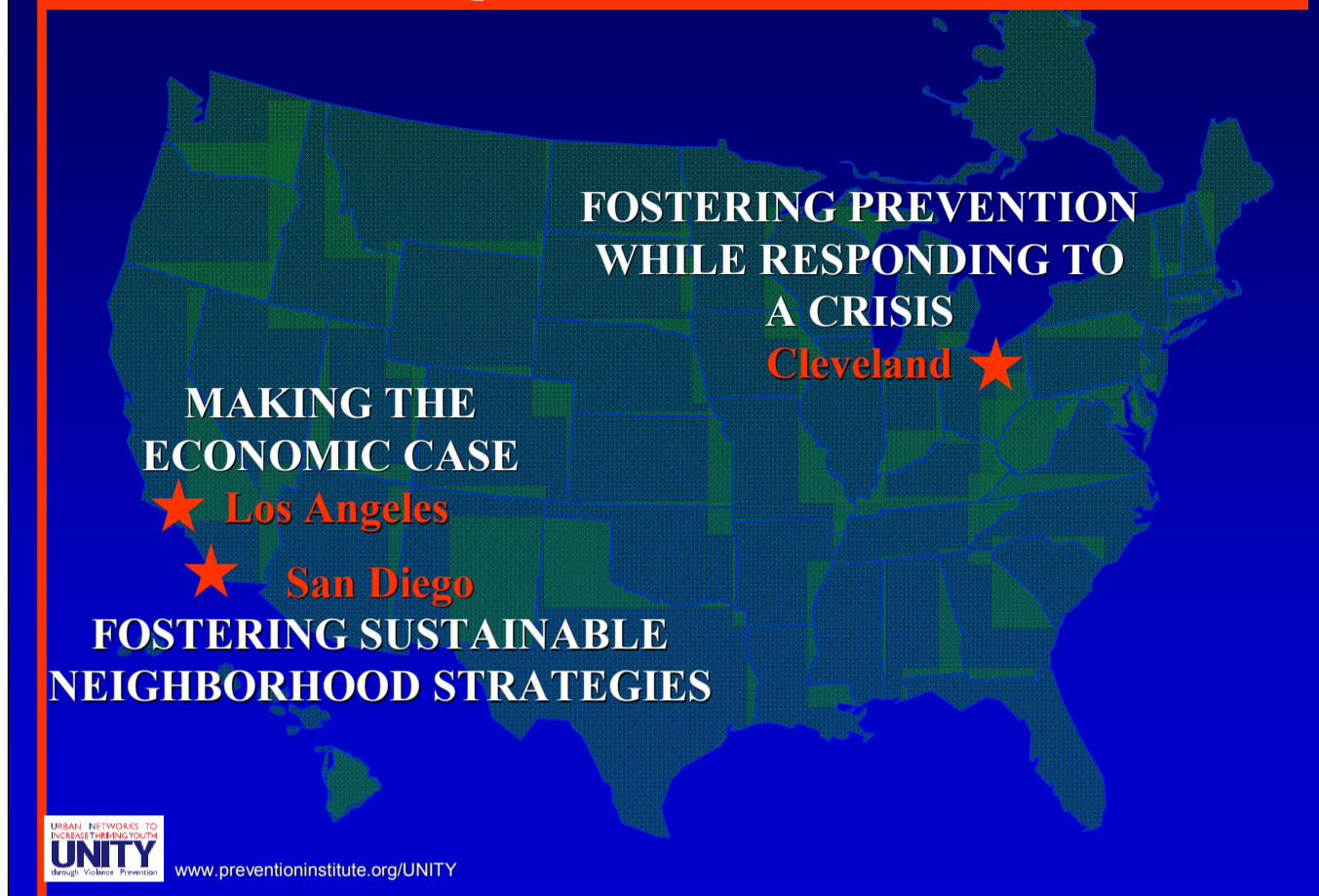
WHAT?



WHAT does it take to prevent violence before it occurs?

Preventing violence addresses multiple underlying contributors (risk and resilience/protective factors) through **programs, practices, and policy**. These efforts can be strengthened by persuasive **communication** that makes a case for prevention, and **training and capacity building** to ensure that people have the necessary and skills to support successful implementation.

WHAT does it take to prevent violence before it occurs? Prevention



Here are some examples from cities:

- As part of **Los Angeles'** effort to develop a comprehensive gang violence reduction strategy, the Vera Institute of Justice analyzed the costs and potential savings from prevention. Their analysis suggests that gang violence there is costing more than \$1 billion per year in criminal justice system costs plus medical costs resulting from gunshot costing more than \$45M annually. The program array they outlined in their analysis would save state and local taxpayers \$59 million over the lives of the program participants, and would save victims an additional \$112 million.

- San Diego's** Gang Prevention and Intervention Strategy delineates a goal of advancing programs/strategies on a neighborhood basis supported by an effective coordinated collaboration process, ongoing data and research analysis, and a sustainable funding strategy.

- Following a tragic school shooting in October 2007, **Cleveland** is using that crisis to take a prevention approach and calling-in public health and community-wide resources. Though already connected to UNITY, Cleveland had not launched an initiative before the crisis. The City used its contact with UNITY to inform both the mayor's immediate public and longer-term policy responses to the tragedy.

UNITY Cities' Priority Strategies

UP FRONT

- ◆ Positive early care and education
- ◆ Positive social and emotional development
- ◆ Parenting skills
- ◆ Quality after school programming
- ◆ Youth leadership
- ◆ Social connections in neighborhoods
- ◆ Quality education
- ◆ Economic development



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In late summer 2007, UNITY convened young people and representatives from cities across the country to **prioritize strategies** to prevent violence *before* it occurs. City representatives identified a set of key strategies from across the prevention continuum, labeled by Philadelphia youth and adopted here as *Upfront*, *In The Thick*, and *Aftermath*, respectively. These strategies are designed to prevent violence in cities and were selected both because they have been shown to be effective in preventing violence and because they would be supported by city and national leaders.

The majority of the prioritized strategies were “Up Front,” that is, the things everyone needs to be safe from violence. This was done intentionally both because of their long-term impact and because these are currently the least supported with adequate resources.

IN THE THICK



- ◆ Mentoring
- ◆ Mental health services
- ◆ Family support services
- ◆ Conflict resolution/interruption

AFTERMATH

- ◆ Mental health services
- ◆ Successful reentry



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Prioritized strategies *In the Thick*, that is those for family and kids already at risk, strategies are listed here. They are:

- Mentoring
- Mental health services
- Family support services
- Conflict resolution/interruption

Prioritized strategies in the *Aftermath* of violence that have been shown to help youth become contributing members of the community were also identified. They are:

- Mental health services
- Successful reentry

UNITY's goal is to elevate all of these strategies (those *Up Front*, *In the Thick*, and *Aftermath*) to a higher priority nationally to support work being done locally.

UNITY RoadMap



HOW?



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HOW do we effectively AND sustainably prevent violence before it occurs?

Strategy leads to better outcomes by promoting coordination, responsiveness to local needs and concerns, and building on best practices and existing strengths. **Strategic plans** and ongoing implementation should be informed by **data and evaluation** and have adequate **funding**.

HOW can we maximize and sustain efforts to prevent violence before it occurs? Strategy



Here are some examples from cities:

- In 2004 **Oakland** voters passed Measure Y: The Violence Prevention and Public Safety Act of 2004. Approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of the almost \$20M from a new parcel tax and parking surcharge on commercial lots, supports prevention programs and activities in the city.
- Through the leadership of a state representative, **Philadelphia** has received more than \$20 Million over 2 years to implement the Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia.
- Boston** is using youth survey data to work directly with the mayor's office and community partners to help rejuvenate the Boston youth violence prevention initiatives, considered one of the first "national" models for youth violence prevention.

UNITY RoadMap

WHO?

WHAT?



HOW?



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Here are the core elements of the UNITY RoadMap shown all together.



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