

Community Violence Intervention Readiness, Opportunities, and Strengths Evaluator (CVI-ROSE)

AN ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR COMMUNITY-BASED SAFETY PROGRAMS

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Introduction

Gun violence disproportionately impacts Black and Brown men in the United States. They are often in high-poverty communities of color that experience many structural inequities. These inequities systematically deny vulnerable communities access to the resources and opportunity they need to avoid community violence. Disparities in access to healthcare, education, housing, economic development, and justice all contribute to cycles of trauma, poverty, and exposure to violence.

Community violence intervention (CVI) uses evidence-informed strategies to reduce violence through tailored, community-centered initiatives targeting individuals at highest risk of violence involvement—either as a victim or perpetrator of a shooting or homicide. CVI professionals use these strategies to prevent and disrupt cycles of violence by engaging individuals and groups, connecting them to services that save lives, address trauma, provide opportunity, and improve the physical, social, and economic conditions that drive violence. When delivered effectively, CVI can counteract the systems of harm that disadvantage Black and Brown men and their loved ones while promoting healing and agency.

While CVI strategies that reduce interpersonal conflict have been around for decades, CVI as a *field* is a more recent development. Many factors have limited the development and growth of the field, such as the lack of a research base and evidence of impact, documented standards of practice, organized funding streams, and enabling policies. As a result, many community-based CVI organizations lack the operational infrastructure, financial resources, and human resources they need to reach their objectives and sustain themselves long-term.

To establish evidence-based standards of practices and capacity development frameworks that could truly advance the field, it is critical to systematically examine, monitor, and evaluate the capacity of various types of CVI organizations and programs. While several organizational capacity assessment tools exist, the CVI-ROSE specifically incorporates practices that have been proven or shown promise of contributing to the successful design, implementation, and evaluation of a CVI program.

Glossary

NOTE: Some of the definitions below were pulled directly from relevant sources and are linked as appropriate.

Agency¹ consists of three critical, interrelated processes: voice, choice and power. Voice refers to an individual's ability to actively advocate for what they want. Choice is the ability to make and influence decisions. Power—the enabler of both voice and choice—is the ability to be influenced by or influence others and can enable or constrain agency.

Capacity² is the ability of people, organizations, and society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully.

Capacity development (capacity strengthening)³ is the process of unleashing, developing, and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes, and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adapt, thrive and maintain over time.

Capacity development support⁴ is defined as efforts by external individuals or organizations to reinforce, facilitate, and catalyze capacity development.

Community violence⁵ is exposure to intentional acts of interpersonal violence committed in public areas by individuals who are not intimately related to the victim.

Community violence intervention (CVI)⁶ is an approach that uses evidence-informed strategies to reduce violence through tailored, community-centered initiatives. These multidisciplinary strategies engage individuals and groups to prevent and disrupt cycles of violence and retaliation and establish relationships between individuals and community assets to deliver services that save lives, address trauma, provide opportunity, and improve the physical, social, and economic conditions that drive violence.

Effective interventions achieve desired outcomes.

Efficient interventions achieve maximum productivity with minimal wasted effort or expense.

Engage refers to the act of entering into an official partnership to provide services that support the creation, or strengthening, of CVI programs and expanding the overall field.

Field⁷ is a set of individuals and organizations working to address a common social issue or problem, often developing and using a common knowledge base.

Field building⁸ is defined as the activities or investments that drive a field's progress toward impact at scale.

Field support involves supporting partners to successfully plan and implement interventions that are

culturally relevant, effective, efficient, and sustainable.

Participant refers to individuals who are members of the eligible service population and receive supports and services facilitated through the program.

Program is a set of activities, processes, or projects aimed at achieving a goal or objective that is typically implemented by server parties over a specified period of time (US Dept. of State).

Promising Practices⁹ refer to programs that include measurable results and report successful outcomes; however, there is not yet enough research evidence to prove that this program or process will be effective across a wide range of settings and people.

Technical assistance (TA)¹⁰ is the process of providing targeted support to an organization with a development need or problem, which is typically delivered over an extended period of time.

Violence¹¹ is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.

Tool Overview

This assessment tool was created to assess a program's capacity to carry out various aspects of CVI. It was designed specifically for CVI organizations delivering programming focused on engaging and supporting people at the highest risk of gun violence involvement.

The goal of the assessment process is to identify training and other technical assistance needs of a CVI program. Once those needs are identified, a program implementer and TA provider can work together to design and implement plans and activities to help address capacity gaps. Repeating the assessment process can also reveal areas of progress and areas for further development.

Domains of Focus

This tool focuses on assessing the following domains which are key to high-performing CVI programs:

- **Program Leadership:** the extent to which leadership is equipped to direct, sustain, and communicate about CVI programs.
- **Program Design:** how appropriate and effective the program's existing interventions are, including the extent to which interventions are responsive to drivers of violence, grounded in evidence-informed practices, and specific to the priority service population.
- **Program & Performance Management:** the program's ability to implement and oversee interventions and activities effectively.
- **Staff Management:** how the program leverages staff time/positions to meet program goals, as well as the organization's approach to staff development, retention, and promotion.
- **Staff Wellness:** how well the program supports the mental health and well-being of its employees.
- **Data, Monitoring, and Evaluation:** the organization's capacity to collect, store, and utilize data to support programmatic decision-making.
- **Partnerships, Engagement, and Development:** the program's resource management, collaborative partnerships, and engagement with key stakeholders.

Each domain contains several standards of practice. These standards represent the capacities, systems, and resources needed to support the highest quality CVI program delivery in that domain. The next section explains the rating scale used to assess each standard.

Rating Scale

Both the program team and the TA provider will evaluate the program based on each standard. The **program team** may include leadership and management staff that collectively possess knowledge across the seven domains. Each rating comes with an explanation to help the program understand the rationale behind the rating, supported by documentation where possible. Both the program team's self-assessment and the TA provider's assessment use the following scale to rate each standard of practice:

- 1 – The program does not meet the standard of practice.
- 2 – The program partially meets the standard of practice.
- 3 – The program meets the standard of practice.
- 4 – The program exceeds the standard of practice.

A rating of 1 indicates that the element is missing from the program entirely. A rating of 2 indicates that the element is present in some form but does not fully meet the standard. A rating of 3 indicates that the element fully meets the standard. A rating of 4 indicates that the element surpasses the standard and is an area of notable strength for the program.

In addition to rating the standards, the assessor calculates the aggregate rating for each domain based on the average rating of all its standards. These domain ratings help provide an “at-a-glance” understanding of the program's strengths and opportunities in a specific area. The domain rating is most useful in helping prioritize areas of Training & Technical Assistance (TTA) plans.

Assessment Process

Program capacity assessment occurs in seven main steps:

1. Preparation

Before assessment begins, the program team should first review this tool to understand each of the assessment domains as well as why and how they will be evaluated. After review, the program discusses any clarifying questions with the TA provider and establishes a timeline for completing subsequent steps. Once a timeline is established, the program team gathers documentation and aligns on their ratings of each standard of practice. To ensure there is buy-in, shared ownership, and accountability of assessment results, it is important that the entire team participating in the assessment process reaches consensus before meeting with the assessor.

DOCUMENTS TO HAVE ON-HAND

In preparation for the assessment, we recommend gathering and reviewing the following documents:

- Annuals plans and strategies

- Business development plan
- Communication strategy/plan
- Any prior evaluation results
- Funding proposals
- Risk mitigation strategies
- Learning and development plans
- Policies and standard operating procedures
- Org chart and staffing plan
- Monitoring and evaluation plans

2. Self-assessment

The program team assembles a group of staff members to complete the self-assessment. This **self-assessment team** should include a combination of leadership and management staff that collectively possess broad program knowledge across the seven domains. The self-assessment team then uses the tool to assign ratings to each standard according to the rating scale. The self-assessment also prompts the program team to reflect on strengths, opportunities, and next steps for each domain. The group discusses each standard with one another and agrees on a single rating for each standard. Once complete, the program team shares the self-assessment with the assessment team.

3. Facilitated assessment

Following the self-assessment, the program team meets with the assessment team for a facilitated assessment. During this step, the assessment team will facilitate a conversation around each domain, asking questions that explore the extent to which organizational and programmatic practices align with the standards of practice outlined in this tool.

4. Analysis and alignment

Once both the self-assessment and facilitated assessment are complete, the assessment team will analyze all available information, rate each domain and standard of practice, and produce a written report. The report will provide rationale for each rating, analysis on strengths and opportunities, and initial recommendations for next steps to strengthen program capacity. After the report has been completed and the program team has had time to review, the assessment team will meet with the program team to discuss the results, answer any questions the program team has, and create alignment around what should be prioritized in a Training & Technical Assistance Plan.

5. Training & Technical Assistance Plan

The assessment and program teams collaboratively develop a Training & Technical Assistance (TTA) Plan. Drawing from the findings of the assessment, the TTA Plan identifies activities that will increase program capacity, detailing specific steps, responsible parties, and timelines for each. The program team reviews and approves the TTA Plan before moving to the next step.

6. Implementation & Program Enhancement

The program team begins executing the action steps detailed in the TTA Plan, leveraging training and coaching from the TA provider.

7. Re-assessment

Once the implementation timeline outlined in the TTA Plan has concluded, the self-assessment and facilitated assessment are repeated to evaluate whether program capacity has increased, and to what extent.

CVI Program Standards

The following standards, organized across seven domains, include the capacities, systems, and resources that support the highest quality CVI program delivery.

1. Program Leadership

Strong program leadership is critical to successful CVI program implementation. Leadership not only sets the direction and culture of the program, but they also represent the needs of the community to external stakeholders including local government authorities and donors¹². Therefore, it is critical that in all spaces, program leadership not only represents the interests of their organization and staff, but also and most importantly, the communities most directly impacted by gun violence. Due to a history of misalignment between public safety strategies and the desires of people living in the communities with the greatest safety challenges,¹³ leadership must approach their role thoughtfully and collaboratively. Strong CVI program leaders can represent their community with authenticity, steer their program with credibility and integrity, communicate with internal and external stakeholders effectively, and sustain effective interventions through partnerships and resource mobilization¹⁴.

The following standards represent the characteristics of highly effective CVI leadership:

- 1.1 Leadership is knowledgeable about evidence-informed community violence intervention strategies
- 1.2 Leadership decisions reflect a shared vision with the community around how to ensure safety
- 1.3 Leadership has a track record of influencing key decision-makers
- 1.4 Leadership can secure support from elected or appointed officials when needed
- 1.5 Leadership has credibility among key stakeholders
- 1.6 Leadership can secure adequate resources to grow and sustain programming
- 1.7 Leadership can effectively communicate violence intervention and prevention messages to various audiences
- 1.8 Leadership is supportive of employing staff with lived experiences of violence involvement and incarceration
- 1.9 Leadership has buy-in from the Board of Directors to implement programming to serve individuals at the highest risk of violence involvement

- 1.10 Leadership, including managers and supervisors, has a decision-making approach that leverages data, incorporates the voices of all levels of staff, and communicates decisions clearly and proactively

2. Program Design

The most impactful CVI program designs are grounded in robust understanding of the drivers of violence and facilitators of safety in their service communities¹⁵. They leverage evidence-informed practices and incorporate community input¹⁶. They reflect a clear understanding of their priority service population, contain activities with clear objectives, and have a mechanism to monitor the outputs and outcomes of those activities¹⁷. Strong program design goes beyond merely engaging highest-risk individuals by reducing their likelihood of violence involvement and enhancing their overall well-being.

The following standards represent the characteristics of well-designed CVI programs.

The program has:

- 2.1. A program design that leverages qualitative and quantitative research data that examines the drivers of violence in the service community
- 2.2. A foundation that has been developed in collaboration with people with lived experiences of gun violence
- 2.3. A clear logic model and theory of change that connect program inputs and activities to outcomes
- 2.4. Program activities that address the appropriate service population given the program landscape, available evidence, and opportunity for impact on gun violence reduction
- 2.5. Clear eligibility criteria to determine who should be prioritized for services
- 2.6. A standardized approach to confirming eligibility of potential program participants
- 2.7. Outreach, communication, and engagement strategies appropriate for engaging individuals who are vulnerable, marginalized, and difficult to reach
- 2.8. Strategies to address the acute needs of and improve the stability of participants
- 2.9. Evidence-informed strategies to facilitate individual behavior change among participants
- 2.10. Evidence-informed strategies to cultivate social norm change within the community
- 2.11. Activities of sufficient duration, frequency, and intensity to see improvements in expected outcomes

3. Program & Performance Management

Many CVI programs operate under resource constraints¹⁸. Insufficient and/or inconsistent funding limit programs' ability to build up adequate operational infrastructure and invest in talent development¹⁹. Additionally, violence intervention involves frequent emergencies. The nature of the work requires CVI professionals to constantly navigate several competing, time-sensitive priorities²⁰. Therefore, addressing immediate needs may be prioritized over building systems and processes to improve operational efficiency and staff accountability. Despite these challenges, CVI programs with strong program and performance management may be better positioned to achieve consistent, high-quality results.

The following standards represent the structures that support risk management, quality monitoring, and responding to performance gaps.

The program has:

- 3.1. An annual operational plan that defines measurable objectives, resource needs, and costs
- 3.2. Alignment between operational plan and program budget forecast
- 3.3. Written policies and procedures to identify, prevent, mitigate, and respond to probable risks, including but not limited to: 1) threats to participant, staff, and program site safety; 2) emergencies and crises, and 3) security and confidentiality breaches
- 3.4. Policies and procedures that are presented in a way that is easy for all staff to understand and apply
- 3.5. Processes to ensure all relevant staff are oriented/trained on policies and procedures
- 3.6. Systems in place to ensure compliance with policies and procedures
- 3.7. Systems in place to respond to program quality concerns and support ongoing improvements
- 3.8. Systems in place to ensure that staff members are able to access available resources needed to execute their duties
- 3.9. Effective staff meeting practices

4. Staff Management

Proper staff to participant ratios and workload assignments can promote a productive, safe, and healing-centered work environment²¹. The way supervisors plan and monitor activities, implement and enforce systems, policies, and procedures, and assign responsibilities can all affect the quality of the staff experience²². This, in turn, impacts the quality of service delivery. Programs that pay particular attention to supporting and monitoring direct service staff may be more likely to see strong outcomes.

The following standards represent the characteristics of programs with effective approaches to staff management.

The program has:

- 4.1. Sufficient full-time staff allocated to the program to effectively implement program activities and maintain caseload sizes that allow staff to dedicate sufficient time to each program participant
- 4.2. Staff who are knowledgeable about CVI working in various functions (administration, operations, management, and direct care)
- 4.3. A staff/project allocation process that considers both job responsibility and expertise
- 4.4. A plan in place to recruit and retain qualified individuals with lived experiences of gun violence and/or criminal legal systems involvement
- 4.5. A standardized onboarding process that orients new staff members to organizational culture and policies, defines their roles and expectations, and equips them with the necessary information and training for strong job performance

- 4.6. A schedule for regular check-ins between supervisors and their direct reports
- 4.7. A standardized approach to sharing information with employees (updates, expectations, data, etc.)
- 4.8. A process that encourages individual goal setting and includes follow-up
- 4.9. Systems in place to monitor and evaluate employee performance against performance standards and individual goals
- 4.10. An approach to delivering timely performance feedback, including recognition of successes as well as constructive feedback
- 4.11. An approach to coaching employees and jointly solving problems
- 4.12. Methods and resources for strengthening employees' skills and knowledge
- 4.13. Systems in place for ensuring service delivery continuity and minimizing disruptions resulting from staffing changes

5. Staff Wellness

Social services programs that have high staff retention and high staff engagement are more likely to produce strong outcomes²³. There are significant challenges to retention and engagement. A history of operating with insufficient resources has left many CVI programs without an intentional approach to preventing worker burnout²⁴. Frontline CVI professionals often deliver programming in the very same communities they are from. Additionally, the nature of the work means that employees may be exposed to both direct and vicarious trauma²⁵. CVI programs that adopt an intentional and robust approach to preventing burnout²⁶, limiting trauma exposure²⁷, and providing direct support to their employees may see better outcomes.

The following standards represent the characteristics of CVI programs that center staff wellness:

The program has:

- 5.1 Safety policies and procedures (weapons screening, crisis response, etc.) in place to ensure the physical safety of everyone at the program location
- 5.2 Policies and tools for assessing the safety of community areas prior to sending employees into the field
- 5.3 Regular, predictable work schedules that allow for adequate rest; if employees are expected to be on-call, this is factored into their overall workload and on-call time is equitably divided
- 5.4 Program leaders who respect boundaries between work and non-work time
- 5.5 Program leaders who normalize and support employee mental health (for example, providing an Employee Assistance Program, creating wellness plans, offering support after crises)
- 5.6 Staff salaries commensurate with regional living wage standards (see: <https://livingwage.mit.edu/>)
- 5.7 Employee benefits that include adequate paid leave (sick leave, family and medical leave, time off for vacation, etc.)
- 5.8 Program leaders who grant employees autonomy over how, when, and where their work is done, as appropriate

- 5.9 A regular practice of involving employees in workplace decisions
- 5.10 A regular practice of recognizing and celebrating employee accomplishments
- 5.11 Formal policies (equal opportunity, grievance procedure, whistleblower protections, etc.) and informal approaches to ensuring fair treatment of employees and addressing misconduct
- 5.12 Formal processes and activities for cultivating positive connections between coworkers and teams
- 5.13 Consistent practices that support employee professional development and career advancement

6. Data, Monitoring, and Evaluation

CVI programs often deal with highly sensitive information that warrants a careful approach to documentation.²⁸ CVI practitioners are often cautious about collecting and sharing data that could create vulnerabilities for program participants.²⁹ CVI programs can bolster their impact by leveraging the insights afforded by data and evaluation while taking steps to gain buy-in from their staff and stakeholders. Many CVI programs also face resource limitations that constrain their options related to data systems or evaluation strategies³⁰. Strong CVI programs navigate these challenges, ensuring that they can access reliable data that can help them understand their strengths and challenges, guide program decisions, and demonstrate their effectiveness.

The following standards represent the characteristics of CVI programs that excel in leveraging data, monitoring, and evaluation approaches to maximize their effectiveness:

The program has:

- 6.1 A process for involving program participants in determining measures of program quality and success
- 6.2 Clearly-defined standard indicators that assess program fidelity, quality, and impact
- 6.3 A regular practice of collecting and monitoring administrative data, financial data, and program data
- 6.4 A schedule of regular internal reporting (for example, weekly or monthly) that facilitates ongoing monitoring of the program's main activities
- 6.5 Formal expectations for staff regarding what information to document, how to document it, and how to store it. Offers trainings on data collection, data monitoring, qualitative and quantitative research, and evaluation as needed
- 6.6 Software systems that facilitate the secure storage of program documents and data
- 6.7 A regular practice of analyzing and reporting monitoring and evaluation data to internal and external stakeholders to inform decisions
- 6.8 A practice of leveraging relevant external data sources to inform actions and decisions (for example, regional violence dashboards)
- 6.9 An evaluation conducted by an external evaluator

7. Partnerships, Engagement, and Development

CVI programs require consistent and diverse funding to ensure they can effectively respond to the complex challenges of community violence³¹. Historically, many have operated under financial constraints that have hindered their growth and long-term sustainability³². The most successful CVI programs take steps to ensure the sustainability of their programs and operations.

The following standards represent the characteristics of CVI programs that effectively engage stakeholders, ensure their own sustainability, and leverage partnerships to deepen their impact:

- 7.1 Program has sufficient funds to support activities for the next fiscal year
- 7.2 Program receives support from more than one funder
- 7.3 Program has identified potential funders or donors who are not yet supporting it
- 7.4 Organization has a communication and engagement strategy targeting potential funders
- 7.5 Organization has a fundraising plan
- 7.6 Staff or board members in the organization have the skills needed for proposal writing
- 7.7 Organization has a plan for promoting successes to donors and other stakeholders
- 7.8 Organization has income-generating activities or other sources of funds that are not tied to a single program but can support general operations
- 7.9 Organization has complete and up-to-date information about all stakeholders working in the same geographic and/or technical areas
- 7.10 The organization has collaborative agreements with other organizations to maximize shared resources, expertise, and services while minimizing costs
- 7.11 Organization has teaming agreements with partners to jointly pursue competitive funding

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