

**Gun Violence Prevention Program**

**Legislative Report**

**Sept 2021**

**Legislative Mandate**

Chapter 227 of the Acts of 2020 *An Act Making Appropriations For The Fiscal Year 2021 For The Maintenance Of The Departments, Boards, Commissions, Institutions And Certain Activities Of The Commonwealth, For Interest, Sinking Fund And Serial Bond Requirements And For Certain Permanent Improvements* more commonly known as the FY21 Final Budget

Section 2, item 4590-1504  For a neighborhood-based gun and violent crime prevention pilot program for targeted work with out-of-school youth and young adults aged 17 to 24, inclusive, intended to prevent gun violence and other violent crime in neighborhoods and municipalities with the highest rates of violent crime in the commonwealth; provided, that funds shall be awarded in consultation with the executive office of public safety and security and the department of elementary and secondary education; provided further, that funds shall be awarded to non-profit, community-based organizations located in and serving high risk youth in eligible communities; provided further, that preference shall be given to organizations that have: (i) demonstrated street outreach capacity; (ii) effective partnerships with neighborhood health and human services agencies, including mental health providers, and with schools and other local educational institutions; and (iii) clearly outlined a comprehensive plan in support of continued or expanded collaboration efforts with such partners including data related to measurable outcomes of successful partner collaboration; provided further, that eligible expenses for such grants shall include, but not be limited to, case workers, mental health counselors, academic supports and other research-based practices and related support services; provided further, that the department shall ensure that every grant recipient establishes measurable outcomes in its comprehensive plan and provides data related to those outcomes that demonstrate program success; provided further, that preference shall be given to proposals that demonstrate coordination with programs and services funded through items 4000-0005, 7061-0010, and 7061-9612; provided further, that the department shall submit a report not later than March 1, 2021 to the executive office for administration and finance, the joint committee on public health, the joint committee on public safety and homeland security, the joint committee on education and the house and senate committees on ways and means detailing the awarding of grants and details of anticipated contracts by district; provided further, that the department shall further report on the effectiveness of the program, including but not limited to: (a) any measurable data-driven results; (b) which strategies and collaborations have most effectively reduced gun and other violence in the grantee neighborhoods; (c) how spending through this item has been aligned with spending from items 4000-0005, 7061-0010, and 7061-9612 in ways that enhance public safety while avoiding programmatic duplication; and (d) what efforts have been taken by the non-profit community and municipalities to ensure the long term viability of the reforms funded by the pilot program; and provided further, that copies of the report shall be provided to: (1) the house and senate chairs of the joint committee on public safety and homeland security, the joint committee on public health and the joint committee on education; and (2) the chairs of the house and senate committees on ways and means not later than September 1, 2021, prior appropriation continued.

**Gun Violence Prevention Context and Impact**

Massachusetts has among the lowest firearm death rate in the nation. In 2018, Massachusetts had 250 firearm deaths, of which 41% were homicides.[[1]](#footnote-2) The leading circumstances of gun-related homicides in Massachusetts among males ages 15-24 between 2014 and 2018 were gang involvement (47%), precipitated by another crime (29%), drug involvement (18%), and interpersonal conflict (14%). From 2014 to 2018, 62% of homicides in the Commonwealth were carried out with a firearm.1

The firearm death rate in Massachusetts is carried disproportionately by young people: over one-third of all victims of firearm-related injuries (38%) are between the ages of 15 and 24, although this age group makes up just 24% of the population.1,[[2]](#footnote-3) Black male youth and Hispanic/Latinx male youth aged 15-24 years old are 41 times and 15 times, respectively, more likely to be hospitalized due to firearm assault than their white male peers.[[3]](#footnote-4) Young people also are overwhelmingly the suspects associated with homicides, underscoring the need for prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery efforts. The intersectionality of race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, and cognitive and physical abilities contribute to even more pronounced health inequities for many individuals in these groups.[[4]](#footnote-5),[[5]](#footnote-6),[[6]](#footnote-7),[[7]](#footnote-8),[[8]](#footnote-9),[[9]](#footnote-10)

In 2018, the Legislature allocated funding to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) to establish a statewide Gun Violence Prevention Program (GVP) focused on working with out-of-school youth and young adults aged 17 to 24 years (as defined by legislation). The program focuses on young people disproportionately at risk of being impacted by gun violence, including youth of color, court-involved youth, those with experience with substance use disorder (SUD) or violent behavior, and those who have been witness to or victims of violence. GVP’s impact has been significant:

* GVP has engaged over 2,000 youth and young adults, 55% who identify as Black and 42% who identify as Hispanic/Latinx; 65% are male.
* Of 1,248 youth and young adults receiving GVP services, 67% engaged in at least three distinct GVP service types (e.g., mental health support, mentoring, workforce development).
* 56% of GVP youth received assistance in gaining employment, and 84% of participants received mentorship from program staff and recruited mentors.
* Beyond participation in these services, GVP youth and program staff engaged in community mobilization to address the root causes of gun violence and trauma.

**Gun Violence Prevention COVID-19 Pandemic Context: Dual Public Health Crises**

Historic structural racism has led to social and economic inequities affecting communities of color. These systemic barriers to equitable income, housing, education, and health are among the root causes of gun violence and create a disproportionate burden on Black and Latinx populations.[[10]](#footnote-11) With this understanding, GVP utilizes a public health approach to gun violence by addressing the complex interplay of contributing factors, including those at the individual, relationship, community, and societal level. The communities most affected by gun violence were also the most impacted by COVID-19 since March 2020.[[11]](#footnote-12),[[12]](#footnote-13) This is a critical consideration, as the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated many of the factors that drive gun violence. For example, job losses that occurred early in the pandemic were concentrated among low-wage workers like those in the food industry, hotels, construction, and manufacturing.[[13]](#footnote-14)

Young people were not immune to these consequences, and suffered as a result of the pandemic, particularly black and brown youth. The experiences of young people during COVID-19 and the racial inequities among youth experience were captured by the COVID-19 Community Impact Survey (CCIS), a statewide survey conducted by the Department of Public Health in the Fall of 2020. Among CCIS youth respondents, 34% reported losing a job, reducing hours, or taking leave. This economic impact had significant consequences for young people’s ability to meet their basic needs: 14% of youth reported being “kind of worried” or “very worried” about getting enough food to eat. That rate was nearly double among Black and Latinx youth (25%). With families facing increased economic pressure, youth also reported that they were supporting their families financially. This was especially common among Hispanic/Latinx youth (22%) and was also more prevalent among Black youth (16%) compared to white youth (12%). Finally, COVID-19 disrupted access to education: 40% of Black youth and 44% of Hispanic/Latinx youth reported that they were worried about continuing their education.

COVID-19 and gun violence are also linked by their dual contribution to a growing burden[[14]](#footnote-15) of trauma, contributing to further violence and presenting an urgent public health problem. When asked about PTSD reactions related to COVID-19 (e.g. having nightmares about it, avoiding situations, being easily startled), 26% of surveyed youth reported experiencing three or more reactions in the previous month. Youth respondents also reported symptoms of depression at strikingly high rates, with 48% indicating that they felt sad or hopeless almost every day for the past two weeks. The pandemic caused traumatic experiences for those who lost a loved one or who dealt with a serious illness in their household, and, like gun violence, it has done so in an inequitable way. In CCIS data, 6% of surveyed youth had lost someone close to them. This experience was nearly twice as likely among Black youth (11%) and was also higher among Hispanic/Latinx youth (9%).

Data from the survey demonstrate that the pandemic deepened social and economic inequities and intensified the needs of youth and young adults in already under-resourced communities. These are the same drivers of gun violence that GVP is designed to address. As job losses and other economic consequences accumulated in communities served by GVP, the program has continued to provide education and employment opportunities as a key part of its prevention efforts. As mental health outcomes worsened throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, participants’ need for behavioral health treatment and referrals from GVP increased. The program also continued to do outreach and connect youth with mentorship, helping to fill gaps left by the disruption of other programming. As COVID-19 had such a profound effect on the drivers of gun violence, the need for and potential impact of GVP is ever more urgent. However, as GVP works to undo generations of inequities, this work will remain important for many years to come.

**Guiding Principles**

GVP funding is intended to prevent gun violence and other violent crime in neighborhoods and municipalities with the highest violent crime rates in the Commonwealth, and is comprised of a core set of programmatic services and guiding principles:

Grantees are required to incorporate eight guiding principles within these six core domains. These guiding principles are key elements to mitigate the inequities that marginalized communities face and to ensure a public health approach. These guiding principles are:

* **Racial equity:** The GVP Program engages people of color in planning and developing interventions, and partners with organizations with deep relationships in communities experiencing violence.
* **Trauma-informed service provision:** The program incorporates an understanding of trauma and its effects on individuals within all aspects of service provision and offers resources for those who have trauma-related needs.
* **Positive youth development:** Positive youth development (PYD) is based on the idea that young people develop through connections with caring adults who understand the developmental process and never give up on them.[[15]](#footnote-16) PYD promotes self-efficacy, positive self-concept, and hope for the future. All GVP Program grantees are strongly rooted in PYD principles.
* **Intersectionality:** GVP Program grantees understand that the young people with whom they work have several different social identities—gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc. — and some of them increase their risk of exposure to and engagement in violence. The goal of the GVP Program is to address and mitigate this exposure.
* **Cultural humility:** The practice of cultural humility starts with the acknowledgement that youths’ backgrounds (familial, cultural, geographic, etc.) shape their experiences in important ways. It also requires a commitment by service providers to reflect on how their own biases and those of others may interfere with the success of the young people they serve.
* **Restorative justice:** Restorative justice processes aim to repair social harm through honest, nonviolent dialogue about conflict and violence. GVP Program grantees use this approach to restore a sense of well-being to victims of harm, to those who inflict harm on others, and to surrounding community members.
* **Collective impact:** The collective impact approach affirms that organizations that work together and share what they learn will make more progress on complex social problems than any single organization alone. In the GVP Program, fifteen grantees around the Commonwealth are taking distinct but complementary approaches determined by needs within their communities. They come together in structured meetings and trainings to share what they are doing and learning.
* **Building and sustaining the leadership of people of color:** The GVP Program recognizes that nurturing leaders who are people of color is fundamental to producing the systemic changes required to address gun violence comprehensively.

**Gun Violence Prevention, Intervention, Treatment, and Recovery Services**

In June 2019, ten community-based organizations were funded to provide prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery services for youth impacted by gun violence. Through the passing of the supplemental budget in December 2019, GVP extended funding to five additional program sites based on the stipulations laid out in the legislative language. Funded programs include each of the following six core domains:

* **Comprehensive social needs intake, assessment, and referral** that includes housing, academic support, food access, employment needs, physical health needs, mental/behavioral health needs, and family/social support needs.
* **Trauma and racial equity-informed mental and behavioral health services** including substance use disorder and family/group therapy, if needed.
* **Workforce development** programs with an emphasis on economic stabilization, job skills, placement, and retention.
* **Street outreach** to find disenfranchised youth where they are and engage them in programming.
* **Mentoring** with a focus on relationship-building and improved positive youth development outcomes.
* **Community engagement and mobilization** to address systems change at the local and state level.

The GVP program is required to support and enhance, without duplicating, the efforts of the Shannon Community Safety Initiative (SCSI) and the Safe and Successful Youth Initiative (SSYI), which are collaborative violence prevention programs operated by the Executive Offices of Health and Human Services and Public Safety and Security. To be responsive to this requirement, the Department engaged SCSI and SSYI staff to assist with the design of the Request for Response 192829: Gun Violence Prevention Program.

Furthermore, the GVP program supports the work of the SCSI and SSYI by enhancing existing services and providing comprehensive wrap around and support services to families of high-risk youth and victims of violence. By comparison, SCSI and SSYI are only available to high-risk youth themselves. In addition, GVP community mobilization component works to address the conditions that contribute to youth violence and gun violence while also supporting youth that are engaged in SSYI/SCSI services. The Gun Violence Prevention program worked closely with SSYI to host joint provider calls to plan for reopening of program services throughout the phased reopening during the COVID-19 State of Emergency. In addition, SSYI and GVP staff meet monthly as part of the Statewide Youth Violence Prevention Partners Series to share cross-program updates and address high level needs of both the SSYI and GVP communities, such as youth homelessness, access to the family resource centers, and school-based issues.

**GVP Youth and Young Adult Characteristics**

Since the onset of GVP programmatic activities, grantees have entered data on 2,067 youth and young adults reached through outreach and/or direct service provision. These youth and young adults represent all individuals that grantees have connected with since the beginning of their program activities through May 31, 2021.The characteristics of youth and young adults reached by GVP are consistent with the planned target population for this initiative. Of those with known characteristics, most of the engaged youth and young adults are people of color, with 55% identifying as Black and 42% identifying as Hispanic/Latinx; 65% are male. Eighty-eight percent are within the GVP target age group of 17-24 years old. Of those outside of the target age group, 1% are 16 years of age and 11% are older than 24 years of age. Program engagement of those older than 24 years of age is likely a function of longer-term program participation, which may include those who connected with services when they were younger but continued to remain involved as they aged and those who remain connected to programs through ongoing employment supports.

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| Demographic Characteristics of GVP Youth and Young Adults |
| Age | # | % |
| 16 years | 10 | 1% |
| 17-20 years | 713 | 44% |
| 21-24 years | 715 | 44% |
| 25-26 years | 151 | 9% |
| 27-30 years | 40 | 2% |
| Total | 1629 | 100% |
| Gender | # | % |
| Female | 673 | 34% |
| Male | 1281 | 65% |
| Non-binary | 17 | 1% |
| Other | 1 | 0% |
| Total | 1972 | 100% |
| Race | # | % |
| American Indian or Alaska Native | 3 | 0% |
| Asian | 31 | 2% |
| Black | 755 | 55% |
| White | 243 | 18% |
| Multiracial | 27 | 2% |
| Other | 311 | 23% |
| Total | 1370 | 100% |
| Hispanic or Latinx | # | % |
| Yes | 550 | 42% |
| No | 773 | 58% |
| Total | 1323 | 100% |

GVP youth and young adults face significant obstacles to housing and economic security. Safe and secure housing is a significant concern across GVP communities. Although less than 10% of GVP youth and young adults are homeless, the other housing scenarios represent the range of ways youth can be unstably housed. Furthermore, fewer than half have a high school diploma or equivalent.

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| Characteristics of GVP Youth and Young Adults |
| Living Arrangement | # | % |
| Living with parent, grandparent, or extended family | 491 | 53% |
| Homeless | 78 | 8% |
| Living alone of with spouse/partner/roommate | 71 | 8% |
| Living in group home/residential care/foster home | 36 | 4% |
| Incarcerated | 30 | 3% |
| Other | 225 | 24% |
| Total | 931 | 100% |
| Highest Grade Completed | # | % |
| Grades 6-11 | 523 | 56% |
| High School Graduate | 267 | 29% |
| HiSet/GED | 64 | 7% |
| Some College | 72 | 8% |
| College Graduate | 8 | 1% |
| Total | 934 | 100% |

**Gun Violence Prevention Intervention: A Multidimensional Approach**

Of 2,067 documented youth and young adults entered in the GVP database throughout FY20 and FY21, 1,248 (60%) went beyond outreach and were connected to services. The remaining 819 have a GVP connection through outreach but had not engaged in services as of May 31, 2021.

Once youth and young adults identified through outreach agree to program participation, they receive a comprehensive social needs intake and assessment to identify the full range of supports needed related to social determinants of health (including: housing, academic support, food access, employment, healthcare, mental/behavioral health treatment, and family/social support services). Of the 1,248 individuals who moved beyond outreach to engage in services, 64% have a documented assessment since the beginning of programmatic activities. Although program enrollment (i.e., commencement of program services) and assessment are meant to coincide, how and when these processes occur vary widely across grantees. Also, it is important to note that 34% of GVP youth and young adults entered in the database had an established connection with the grantee prior to GVP. As such, their assessment may predate the GVP program and not appear in GVP data.

Documented needs of GVP participants mirror those of youth and young adults disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. For instance, of those assessed, 80% have employment support needs, 69% have academic support needs, 56% have behavioral health needs, 52% have needs related to financial or food insecurity, and 47% have housing support needs.

GVP programs track six service types: mentoring, mental/behavioral health supports, education, employment, workforce development training, and external referrals. By design, the expectation is that GVP participants will benefit most if they engage in most, if not all, of the available services. Throughout FY20 and FY21, 67% of the 1,248 youth and young adults receiving GVP services engaged in at three least distinct service types.

Mentoring is a core service component of GVP. With the goal of building trusting, supportive relationships and improved positive youth development outcomes, this is the most utilized service among GVP participants. Of the 1,248 youth and young adults receiving GVP services, 84% received mentorship from program staff or recruited mentors.

Workforce development is also critically important, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. GVP participants accessing workforce development services may engage in one of more of the following services: educational programming or educational support, workforce training, or employment. Of GVP participants receiving services, 53% received educational support to stay in school or obtain high school equivalency. In addition to education, 56% received workforce training, which aligned with participants’ career goals and served as the building blocks for future employment opportunities. As a result of moving to virtual programming due to the pandemic, workforce training focused more heavily on “soft skills” during FY21 (e.g., etiquette, communication, listening) than hard skills (e.g., technical certifications). Finally, 53% of participants received assistance in gaining employment through programs’ established relationships with employers in their communities to offer internships, apprenticeships, transitional employment, jobs, or other employment opportunities.

GVP programs work in communities experiencing high levels of violence. Due to this and other pervasive adverse childhood experiences (such as having an incarcerated household member, physical abuse, or exposure to the domestic violence), GVP youth and young adults are at increased risk of suffering from trauma and its related mental health issues compared to youth and young adults in Massachusetts generally. Moreover, they live in communities suffering from community trauma, which is born of the collective experiences of all community members who live in areas with high levels of interpersonal violence (experiencing or witnessing violence) or structural violence (racism, concentrated poverty, residential segregation, and inadequate funding for schools, housing, health care, and other essential public resources). The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated levels of community trauma, leaving youth and young adults particularly vulnerable to feelings of hopelessness.[[16]](#footnote-17) The emphasis on behavioral health supports for GVP participants is significant, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic. Programs noted an increase in behavioral health needs linked to the pandemic causing stress and increased violence in their communities. Of the 1,248 engaged in services, 31% received behavioral health supports since the beginning of GVP programmatic activities.

**Gun Violence Prevention Outreach: The Value of Streetworkers with Lived Experience Engaging Youth and Young Adults**

As one grantee powerfully noted*: “Being out on the streets, where the young people are, is crucial to connecting and earning the trust of the community.”* Drawing on shared lived experience, streetworkers engage youth in outreach encounters and interventions in a personal, nonjudgmental fashion. Through this connection, streetworkers build trust with GVP youth and engage in supportive conversations that can lead to life-changing action, through demonstrating safer ways to live, earn income, and achieve educational goals, and how to lower risk for involvement in gun violence. GVP streetworkers work at the highest level of their scope of practice. They connect youth to comprehensive case management, facilitate wrap around services to address the social determinants of health, and engage in all of the GVP project service areas (mentorship, behavioral health, workforce development, and education).

Streetworkers have a deep understanding of their communities, and their practice is rooted in personal knowledge and training on effective outreach strategies, trauma informed practices, public health theories, mentoring, and referral management. The GVP project equips streetworkers with the support, training, and tools to offer youth viable and practical options for employment, educational advancement, mentoring and role modeling. Streetworkers are important members of the multifaceted GVP teams, working alongside case managers, educators, behavioral health clinicians, and administrators to ensure that GVP activities maximize opportunities for youth success.

To meet the growing needs of GVP youth and young adults, GVP grantees significantly increased youth outreach and engagement activities in FY21.7 Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, GVP streetworkers primarily engaged youth and young adults through direct in-person street outreach. However, throughout FY21, most organizations shifted to a hybrid outreach model that included in-person and virtual contact, while a few relied solely on social media and phone calls. Regardless of the format, programs prioritized street workers’ roles to engage youth and young adults who would benefit from GVP programming as well as to stay connected to current participants. Throughout the year, programs documented over 45,000 outreach contacts with youth and young adults. Although originally intended as a mechanism for program engagement and retention, programs increasingly used outreach contacts as a means of identifying and addressing pandemic-related basic needs of youth and young adults. This is consistent with the CCIS Youth Survey finding that youth and young adults faced significant financial challenges and concerns about accessing basic needs.

**Organizational Change: Advancing Racial Equity**

Through both independent and collaborative efforts with the Gun Violence Prevention Training Center for Excellence (TC4E), the training and technical assistance provider for GVP, grantees are integrating the guiding principle of racial equity into their programs, with the ultimate goal of adopting race-forward policies, procedures, and practices at the agency level. In Year 2, of the program TC4E developed the Emerging Leaders Learning Collaborative to train entry level and mid-level staff of color to develop leadership and management skills that can advance their careers to help meet the *Building and Sustaining Leadership of Color* guiding principle. Throughout the year, grantees engaged in several TC4E activities to support their racial equity work. For instance, 12 of the 15 grantees had at least one staff member participate in the Emerging Leaders Learning Collaborative; 13 of the 15 grantees had organizational and GVP program leaders participate in the Executive Session on Racial Equity and Leadership; and all grantees participated in a session on Advancing Racial Equity in the Violence Prevention Field. Participation in these events represents grantee commitment to the desired agency-level outcomes of internal leadership development and increased leadership of people of color.

Participants in these events highly valued the experience and the applicability to their work. One Frontline Youth Development Staff participating in the Emerging Leaders Learning Collaborative shared, *“The most relevant takeaway was the idea that I am my own author of my story and I need to embrace the strengths I already have and, ‘it's never about the role, always about the goal.’ I feel as though I was able to understand myself more, especially how I navigate professional settings. I recognized some of the barriers I face, whether systematically or internally; but most importantly different ways I can respond to situations.”* Furthermore, grantees are starting to implement a range of racial equity practices, including developing and promoting staff of color, engaging GVP participants or community partners in implementing strategies to combat racial inequity, and reviewing internal policies and practices to ensure they do not perpetuate racial inequities.

**Moving Upstream: Gun Violence Prevention Community Engagement and Mobilization**

A core component of GVP is community engagement and mobilization to address the root causes of gun violence and trauma. Grantees across Massachusetts are engaging in upstream interventions and strategies, which focus on dismantling fundamental social and economic inequities that contribute to community violence. This focus has been a key strength of GVP as it moves beyond working with individual youth and young adults to building broad coalitions to affect policy and systems change.

Grantees have leveraged longstanding community partnerships to advance their goals while also establishing new allies in the communities they serve. In a survey of community mobilization efforts implemented in Spring 2021, grantees noted a rich diversity of community partners in their efforts including: youth and families, faith leaders, law enforcement organizations, educational institutions, city officials, and legislative actors. Community mobilization activities have included strategic relationship building, roundtable discussions with community leaders, media campaigns, and co-hosting community events. One program engaged in advocacy to bring a youth center to their neighborhood along with other youth serving resources, while another agency worked to engage DCF in thinking through how young people are discharged from foster care during the pandemic and beyond. As the pandemic eased in June, programs returned to more traditional community engagement by gathering youth to engage in conversations about nonviolence. Community mobilization is recognized as a key driver for positive change.

As one grantee noted: “*Addressing issues on a local level is important for our community. Linking with the right people in the right positions is important but giving our community a seat at the table is key. Their stories and their inside view is what’s needed to make a change. All too often funding is there but policy and procedure prevents that funding from making it to the community. Giving our people/community a space to shift the narrative is key. Providing this space through partnership will help to make our communities safe again.”*

**Grantee COVID-19 Response**

The COVID-19 pandemic has been an unforeseen challenge that grantees continue to navigate. The youth served by GVP grantees have been greatly impacted by the pandemic. As one grantee noted: *“The COVID-19 crisis created an additional layer of complexity to the challenges our young people deal with every single day. Our youth faced a tightening job market and a spike in community violence at the same time that the issues that most frequently derail their success – housing instability, insufficient mental and behavioral healthcare, inadequate care in the child welfare system – became all the more dangerous as a result of the pandemic.”*

Grantees were nimble and adjusted their practices and protocols to ensure the safety of their staff and the youth served, such as by utilizing virtual platforms where appropriate. The grantees provided a range of invaluable resources to youth, such as mental health support and resource navigation for basic needs such as food, transportation, and employment. Grantees helped youth navigate the healthcare system and provided support for online learning.

While the pandemic did slow down many plans, it also spurred grantees to innovate. Some grantees note that certain changes will become permanent. One grantee describes: “*Previously, youth were paid for workforce hours, including training and internships. However, we recognized the overwhelming need for additional income during the pandemic and found that engagement increased significantly with increased stipends. This is a change we intend to make permanent.”*

Another grantee reflected about youth participation in job readiness programs: *““...Transitioning to virtual programming, particularly virtual HiSet classes [a high school-level proficiency examination for adult learners], has had far-reaching, positive consequences. Programming has become far more accessible for many youth. In particular, we have been able to enroll a number of youth who were the victims of gang-related shootings and would otherwise be unable to attend in-person classes due to safety concerns. As a result, we plan to maintain at least one track of all-remote HiSet.”*

The following table indicates the allocation of GVP funds to the ten original funded grantees and five additional grantee sites to support their capacity building. The addition of these five program sites in June 2020 brought the number of funded grantees to fifteen programs.

**Gun Violence Prevention Grantees and Service Areas**

| Grantee  | Service Area  | Cumulative Award (FY19-FY21) | FY21 Award | Target Population  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| College Bound Dorchester/  Youth Options Unlimited  | Dorchester  | $1,175,227  | $490,749 | Core influencers in Boston neighborhoods with the most youth violence  |
| Madison Park Development Corporation  | Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan  | $821,955   | $368,080 | Low-income, out of school youth and young adults of color, ages 17- 24, without a high school credential residing in the Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan neighborhoods of Boston  |
| More Than Words  | South End Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan  | $753,833   | $348,328 | Young adults and youth ages 16-24 who have recent or current court involvement, or involvement with DCF  |
| Mothers for Justice and Equality  | Dorchester, Roxbury, Mattapan  | $664,994 | $312,318 | Low-income, at-risk, and/or system-involved youth and young adults, ages 17-24  |
| New North Citizens Council, Inc.  | Springfield  | $872,931 | $390,304 | At-risk young adults and victims of violence  |
| NorthStar Learning Centers, Inc.  | New Bedford  | $872,931 | $390,304 | Young adults and youth ages 17-24 living in New Bedford who are out of school, incarcerated or otherwise engaged within the criminal justice system, homeless, or who have experienced/are experiencing trauma  |
| Old Colony YMCA  | Brockton  | $899,942 | $394,971 | Young adults and youth of color, ages 17-24, who are out of school, court-involved, and who experience substance use disorder (SUD) and/or violence  |
| ROCA, Inc. - Springfield  | Springfield | $872,931 | $390,304 | Young males, ages 17-24, who are at high risk for future long-term adult criminal justice system involvement  |
| UTEC, Inc. - Lawrence  | Lawrence  | $517,227 | $410,749 | Young adults with a history of incarceration, serious criminal and/or gang involvement  |
| Worcester Youth Center  | Worcester  | $872,931 | $390,304 | Young adults and youth, ages 17-24, who are living in communities and families experiencing a high burden of gun violence and/or violent crime  |
| 18 Degrees, Inc.  | Pittsfield  | $601,611  | $424,666 | Young adults and youth, ages 17-24, many of whom are gang members or affiliates who have been impacted by trauma  |
| Greater Fall River RE-CREATION  | Fall River  | $601,611  | $424,666 | Young adults and youth, ages 17-24, who have experienced primary or secondary trauma  |
| Project R.I.G.H.T., Inc.  | Dorchester  | $601,611  | $424,666 | Nontraditional students at high risk for violence and trauma  |
| ROCA, Inc. - Lynn  | Lynn  | $601,611 | $424,666 | Young males, ages 17 to 24, who are at high risk for future long-term adult criminal justice system involvement  |
| UTEC, Inc. - Haverhill  | Haverhill  | $601,611 | $424,666 | Young adults with a history of antisocial behavior, such as incarceration, serious criminal and/or gang involvement |

**Gun Violence Prevention Training, Technical Assistance, and Evaluation Contractors**

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| Vendors | Role | Cumulative Award | FY21 Award |
| JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. | Gun Violence Prevention Program Support | $620,000 | $341,000 |
| UTEC | Gun Violence Prevention Training Center for Excellence | $850,000 | $350,000 |
| University of Massachusetts Medical School | Gun Violence Prevention Program Evaluator | $535,000 | $310,000 |
| University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute | Gun Violence Prevention Communication Support | $50,000 | n/a |

**Gun Violence Prevention Year 2 Program Advancements**

The root causes of gun violence are steeped in generations of structural and systemic inequities. As such, preventing future gun violence and reversing the devastating impact of gun violence on communities of color takes time, resources, and multifaceted approaches to affect needed foundational change. GVP grantees are working with youth and young adults to address the social and economic determinants that place them at risk. Through consistent engagement, mentoring, behavioral health supports, and workforce development, grantees are strengthening the protective factors that prevent youth exposure to violence. However, realizing and sustaining significant reductions in violence over time requires more than direct supports to those most affected. It requires identifying and changing the policies and systems that contribute to racial inequities at both the organizational and community levels. To that end, GVP grantees are examining how their organizational systems and policies contribute to racial inequity and taking steps to address those inequities and promote staff of color. Recognizing that gun violence is interconnected with issues of social justice, disinvestment, and marginalization of community voices, GVP grantees are mobilizing community members and stakeholders to build broad coalitions to affect policy and systems change in areas such as: mental health supports, affordable housing, and eliminating bias from the justice system. It is through this holistic approach to address longstanding social and economic inequities that communities will realize reductions in violence over the next decade.

**The Programmatic Infrastructure Supporting Gun Violence Prevention**

DPH funded the Gun Violence Prevention Training Center for Excellence (TC4E to foster networking and collaboration, share best practices related to core GVP components, and promote the full integration of GVP guiding principles into their programming and organizational culture. Through learning collaboratives, affinity groups, and training sessions in FY21, TC4E reached at least 151 staff from 24 violence prevention direct service organizations across Massachusetts. Areas of focus included advancing racial equity in the violence prevention field and mobilizing communities to make upstream change. Feedback from event participants confirms that TC4E is fostering and strengthening relationships between GVP grantees, even during COVID-19, which necessitated virtual programming. The importance of this relationship building to the program cannot be overstated, given DPH’s interest in GVP being a unified statewide effort to address the root causes of gun violence.

In addition to the TC4E, DPH also engages JSI Research & Training Institute (JSI) to provide support and coordination for the GVP program at large, as well as contract management and coaching for GVP grantees. JSI assists DPH with the design of GVP program elements and deliverables, as well as coordination of the TC4E and evaluation teams. JSI also offers contract management and coaching to each of the 15 GVP grantees; each grantee has a dedicated grant manager who offers support via monthly meetings, routine communication, and Technical Assistance.

In FY21, JSI continued to build trust with grantees, communicate transparently, and offer support to meet expressed needs. JSI offered coaching to GVP grantees in the areas of program planning, work plan development and implementation, fiscal planning, data collection and analysis, and the integration of racial equity and trauma-informed principles. JSI also supported grantees to make adjustments to GVP programming during the COVID-19 outbreak. JSI collaborated closely with the TC4E to share grantees’ TA needs and to offer coaching in complementary areas. JSI also worked with the evaluation team to facilitate grantees' engagement with the program evaluation. JSI met regularly with DPH to plan program activities and convened a monthly meeting for all supporting agencies to promote shared decision-making and transparency.

Finally, DPH engaged the University of Massachusetts Medical School to lead program evaluation of GVP. In FY21, the UMass team implemented a mixed-methods evaluation designed to gather data at three levels: individual, agency, and community. Findings at the individual-level rely heavily on the GVP database and include data from semi-structured interviews and program documents. Agency-level findings include information gathered from TC4E and their training participants and are informed by information gathered through semi-structured interviews. Community-level findings also include data gathered through TC4E training feedback surveys and technical assistance documents as well as information gathered from grantees through focus groups and a survey about grantees’ community engagement and mobilization efforts.

**Long-term Viability of Gun Violence Prevention Efforts**

During COVID-19, GVP grantees overcame tremendous social, economic, and public health challenges to support youth and communities navigate the pandemic. When faced with the COVID-19 emergency, grantees innovated and developed new, flexible approaches to engaging with youth. Through the GVP program, grantees also built organizational capacity, including creating new staff positions, integrating the GVP guiding principles into organizational norms, practices, and workflows, and forming new partnerships with local youth-serving and multi-sector agencies, as well as across the GVP cohort. Despite these efforts to build infrastructure for gun violence prevention, there is substantial work to be done for GVP programs to achieve sustainability, and to address the generations of structural drivers of gun violence and community violence.

Moving forward, the GVP program has an opportunity to support community growth and cohesion alongside other statewide efforts to reduce intergenerational poverty, improve education and housing systems, expand employment opportunities, reform the justice system, and end racial inequities in healthcare.

1. Approximately 56% of firearm deaths were suicides and the remaining deaths were recorded as legal interventions, unintentional death or undetermined death. Data Source: Massachusetts Violent Death Reporting System, Massachusetts Department of Public Health 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. [Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Selected Age Groups by Sex for Massachusetts: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2019 (SC-EST2019-AGESEX-25) Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division Release Date: June 2020](https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-kits/2020/population-estimates-detailed.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. [Massachusetts Inpatient Hospital Discharge Database, Massachusetts Outpatient Emergency Department Discharge Database, and Massachusetts Outpatient Observation Stays Database, Center for Health Information and Analysis (CHIA), 2018](https://www.chiamass.gov/case-mix-data/) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
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11. [Baker-Polito Administration Awards $8 Million to 10 Local Agencies to Address Gun Violence Prevention among Youth](https://www.mass.gov/news/baker-polito-administration-awards-8-million-to-10-local-agencies-to-address-gun-violence) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. [COVID-19 Vaccine Equity Initiative: 20 Prioritized Communities](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-vaccine-equity-initiative#20-prioritized-communities-) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. [Kim, D. (2019). Social determinants of health in relation to firearm-related homicides in the United States: a nationwide multilevel cross-sectional study. *PLoS medicine*, *16*(12), e1002978.](https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1002978) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
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15. [The Positive Development of Youth: Comprehensive Findings from the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development](https://4-h.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/4-H-Study-of-Positive-Youth-Development-Full-Report.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. [COVID-19 Community Impact Survey: Impact of COVID-19 on Youth (Results as of June 8, 2021)](https://www.mass.gov/doc/ccis-webinar-youth-part-1/download) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)