



A Foundation for Peace

A Case Statement and Guidebook for
Community Foundations



A Note from the Authors:

We wrote this guide not just as researchers and practitioners, but as people who have sat in foundation offices, community spaces, offices of violence prevention, and living rooms where the stakes of this work are real.

We've facilitated hard conversations, witnessed harm, and seen firsthand what becomes possible when community foundations lead with equity, humility, and courage.

This guide reflects what we've learned, and what we're still learning, from so many of you. Thank you for letting us walk alongside you.

Reggie Moore

*Director of Community Safety Policy and
Engagement, Comprehensive Injury Center,
Medical College of Wisconsin*

Jen Heymoss

Senior Director, Frontline Solutions



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Dear Colleagues,

At CFLeads, we believe that when community foundations lead with courage and vision, they help create strong, equitable communities where everyone thrives. This belief has guided our work for almost two decades, and it is the foundation upon which we have built our mission: to help community foundations lead change.

The work you are about to explore in this guidebook reflects that mission in action. Over the past several years, CFLeads has convened two national cohorts of community foundations interested in improving community safety and preventing gun violence. These foundations came together to learn from each other, from national subject-matter experts, and from local practitioners on the ground. Together, they explored how philanthropy can catalyze meaningful change and achieve better outcomes for communities.

This guidebook is both a product and a roadmap - capturing key lessons, frameworks, and promising practices that emerged from these cohorts. More importantly, it demonstrates the power and potential of community foundations to serve not just as grantmakers, but as conveners, advocates, and trusted partners in the pursuit of safer, healthier communities.

CFLeads has been honored to steward this work, alongside many other initiatives that strengthen the capacity and impact of community foundations across the country. From advancing economic mobility and racial equity to promoting civic health and community safety, CFLeads has led the field in learning, collaboration, and action. By convening leaders, highlighting promising practices, and growing our collective impact, we help community foundations expand their reach, deepen their influence, and accelerate progress on the issues that matter most to their communities. Centering the community

leadership framework and competencies in everything we do enables us to support the field holistically and ensure that lessons learned in one area inform and strengthen work in others.

As you use this guide, we hope it serves as both an inspiration and a practical resource. The challenges of community safety and gun violence prevention are significant, but the leadership and commitment of community foundations offer a path forward.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the funders and partners who have made this work possible, particularly to Reggie Moore and Jennifer Heymoss who have served as thought partners throughout almost every iteration of gun violence prevention and community safety work at CFLeads. And to you - community foundation leaders - thank you for your dedication to this work and for the leadership you bring to your communities every day.

In partnership,

Mary L. Thomas
President & CEO, CFLeads

CFLeads Vision, Mission, and Values

CFLeads is the country's national network of community foundations committed to community leadership. Through CFLeads, hundreds of community foundations from across the U.S. come together to strengthen their community leadership muscle, share field innovations, and tackle the key issues of our time.

We envision a world in which community foundations are vital partners in building communities where all residents are prosperous, healthy and secure.

Our mission is to help community foundations build strong communities by advancing effective practices, sharing knowledge and galvanizing action on critical issues of our time.

Introduction





As place-based institutions with deep local knowledge, convening power, and public trust, community foundations are uniquely positioned to bring together stakeholders, shift narratives, mobilize resources, and elevate solutions driven by those most impacted by community safety issues. This guidebook exists to support community foundations, regardless of where they are on their journey, with the inspiration, insights, and tools needed to engage in community safety work.

CFLeads developed this resource in response to growing interest from community foundations across the country in community safety work and as a complement to our Gun Violence Prevention Network, now named Foundations for Community Safety.¹ It draws from the lived experiences and lessons of Network participants and other community foundations advancing safety work in their own communities.

1 See the section “Making the Case for Community Foundations in Community Safety” about the shift in language from “gun violence prevention” to “community safety.”

This document includes:

-  Insights on how to make the case for why community foundations are essential leaders in community safety work; and
-  A practice guide with real-world examples, roles foundations can play, common barriers, and strategies for readiness, equity, and accountability.

While this guidebook was developed with community foundations in mind, it is also a resource for other types of philanthropic institutions—family foundations, health conversion foundations, place-based funders, and others—that are working to advance community safety.

In addition, community members, nonprofit leaders, and advocates may find this guide useful as a tool to start conversations with local funders, build shared understanding, or advocate for new approaches. Our hope is that this guide can support everyone, wherever they sit in the ecosystem, towards working to create safer, more just communities.

Whether you are just beginning to explore this issue or seeking to deepen your impact, this guidebook offers a starting point, a roadmap, and a community of support.

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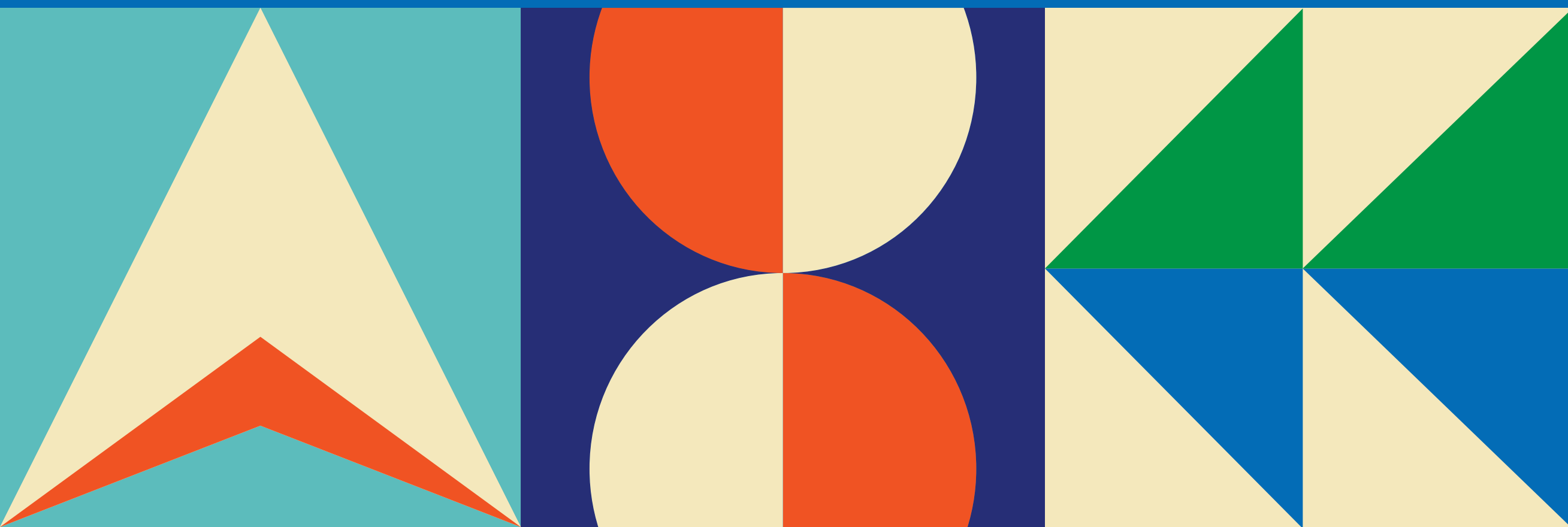
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Making the Case for Community Foundations in Community Safety



Gun violence is a deeply complex, systemic issue that touches nearly every part of community life, including housing, health, education, economic mobility, and more. While it is often framed as a criminal justice problem, communities most impacted by violence have long demanded a broader, deeper response that is grounded in healing, prevention, and structural change.

Community foundations have a unique opportunity and responsibility to respond.

As place-based institutions, community foundations know their regions’ histories, fault lines, and strengths. They have built trust over decades. They are seen as steady, civic actors. That trust, combined with their ability to convene cross-sector partners and hold the 30,000-foot view, means community foundations are positioned to do what few other institutions can: connect the dots, shift narratives, and drive sustained investment in community-rooted solutions.

And yet, too often, community foundations have been underutilized in this space, uncertain of their role, unsure of how to begin, or hesitant to take risks in politically charged contexts.

This guidebook argues that now is the time for community foundations to lead—not alone but alongside public systems, community-based organizations, and—most importantly—residents who are closest to the problem and the solution.

“Community foundations are so well-positioned in their communities because they’re place-based and have longevity. They know the tides of their community—what’s been important over time and what’s needed now. Beyond being funders, they’re trusted conveners and partners. They’re set up to be there forever, which means they have the staying power to work on complex, intractable problems that may take generations to change.”

Meghan Cummings
President and CEO, Philanthropy Ohio

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Shifting the Frame: From Violence Prevention to Community Safety

Violence is defined as *the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation*². From domestic violence to global conflict, violence impacts thousands of lives on a daily basis.

The prevention of violence became a policy priority in the United States when US Surgeon General Everett Coop declared violence a public health issue at the Surgeon General's workshop on violence and public health in 1985. In 1996, the World Health Assembly adopted Resolution WHA49.25, which declared violence "a leading worldwide public health problem." These declarations have inspired global investments in research, policy, and programming designed to prevent, intervene, and support those impacted by violence.

² World Health Organization, "Violence Prevention Alliance Approach," <https://www.who.int/groups/violence-prevention-alliance/approach>.

In recent years, significant investments from the federal government have gone to support Community Violence Intervention (CVI) strategies to address historic increases in gun violence since the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach focuses on engaging those at the highest risk of gun violence victimization. These investments have also corresponded with an increase in Offices of Violence Prevention (OVP) across the country. While funding for OVP's and CVI programming often pale in comparison to law enforcement budgets, violence prevention efforts are often held to a higher standard than law enforcement for producing immediate reductions in gun violence. Much of this is driven by a lack of understanding by policy makers and the general public regarding the complexities of violence prevention, including its strategies and goals.

When there is an uptick in gun violence, people often question whether violence prevention efforts are working despite the lack of time, infrastructure, and investment. This is a relatively young field that is currently in jeopardy due to changing public safety priorities at the federal level. This presents an urgent challenge and opportunity for philanthropic support and investment. When we lead with 'community safety,' we focus on what we're building, rather than what we're preventing. It centers the community and makes the purpose and goal clear.

Reframing violence prevention as community safety provides a vision for the intent and goal of violence prevention work. “Community” affirms the people and places that are not only involved in building and benefiting from the results of successful strategies, but are centered in its vision and impact. “Safety” explicitly defines the ultimate goal of these efforts. In recent years, community safety has become a widely used moniker for practitioners and policy measures throughout the country and offers a vision for the results we are collectively working to produce.

This framing helps us focus on long-term, community-driven solutions rooted in healing and well-being, rather than reactive or punitive responses.



The Limits of Grantmaking Alone

Many community foundations have responded to community safety concerns only by making grants to violence prevention organizations. These investments are important, but insufficient on their own in the pursuit of long-term change. **Gun violence is a systemic issue, not a programmatic issue.** That means community foundations must go beyond grantmaking to become community leaders and can do so by leveraging key resources created by CFLeads and other field leaders.

“Peace is not merely the absence of violence but the presence of safety, opportunity, and justice.”

Reggie Moore

Director of Community Safety Policy and Engagement, Comprehensive Injury Center, Medical College of Wisconsin

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A Framework for Community Leadership

In 2021, CFLeads launched the [Going All In](#) project to define what it means for community foundations to fully embrace their role as community leaders. That project emphasizes three critical commitments:

- 1. **Insisting on racial equity**
- 2. **Amplifying community voice**
- 3. **Influencing public policy and systems**

These commitments are particularly relevant in the context of gun violence, which disproportionately impacts Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities, is shaped by systemic disinvestment, and is often addressed with reactive, short-term solutions. To make real progress, community foundations must be willing to lean into each of these commitments, even when it feels uncomfortable.

CFLeads also developed the [Community Leadership Compass](#), which is a visual representation of how CFLeads' [Framework for Community Leadership](#), [Five Competencies for Community Leadership](#), and the *Going All In* project work together to help community foundations advance their work. True community leadership happens when community foundations apply

the foundational building blocks of values, culture and will; relationships; resources; and understanding and skills in order to:

 **Engage residents**

 **Address structural/systemic issues**

 **Lead collaboratively**

 **Marshal resources**

 **Influence public policy**

Community leadership offers a vision and a roadmap for how community foundations can engage in community safety work, with or without new funding. The tools of community leadership as developed by CFLeads help foundations assess where they are, where they want to go, and how to lead with integrity, equity, and purpose.

The Time Is Now

This is not a passing moment. The challenges our communities face—gun violence, public mistrust, political polarization—require a different kind of leadership. Community foundations have the staying power, credibility, and infrastructure to show up in bold and transformative ways.

This work is not easy, and it won't always be popular. But the communities you serve are calling for new solutions. Rooted in humility, strategy, and partnership, this guidebook is an invitation to answer that call.

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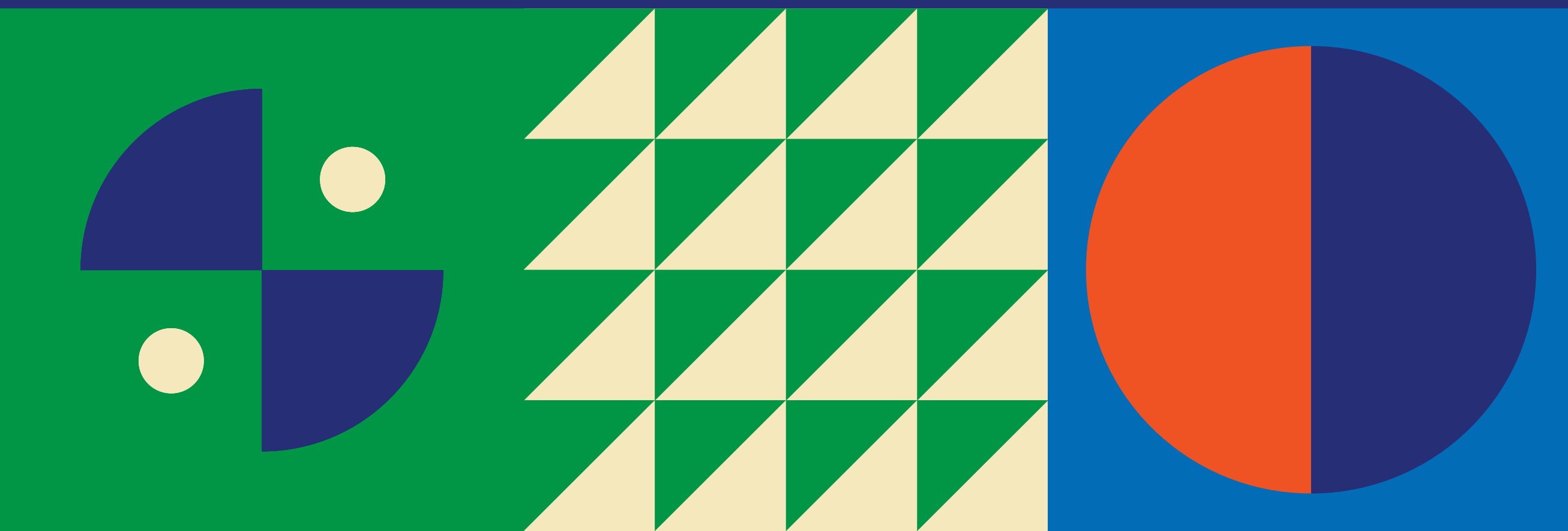
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Laying the Groundwork: Readiness, Risk, and Buy-In



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Community foundations must assess their internal readiness before developing strategies or launching initiatives. Supporting community safety—especially through the lens of equity and public health as discussed in a forthcoming section—requires not only funding but also a culture shift, courageous leadership, and a willingness to take risks.

This section outlines what foundations should consider as they prepare to engage deeply and sustainably in this work.



Start with an Honest Assessment

Not every foundation starts from the same place. Some have a long history of convening around violence or safety. Others are newly exploring the topic after community members raised concerns or local conditions shifted. Wherever your foundation is, the first step is reflection.

Use tools like the [Community Leadership Field Guide for Community Foundations](#) to explore:

- What values are driving your interest in this work?
- What experience do you have working on public health, systems change, or racial equity?
- Who currently holds decision-making power internally?
- How has your foundation historically responded to polarizing or complex issues?

Honest answers to these questions will surface opportunities and obstacles you can begin to plan around.

“Community safety is a basic human need, just like food or shelter. Being able to leave your home and safely get to where you need to go without threat of harm must remain top of mind for philanthropy.”

Tawa Mitchell

Secure Internal Leadership and Board Buy-In

One of the most common challenges we've heard from community foundations is board hesitancy. Boards may be concerned about perceived political risks, fear of mission drift, or discomfort with confronting the racial and systemic dimensions of violence.

Here's what we've learned from foundations that have successfully brought their boards along:

- Frame the work in terms of community need and local data. Start with what your community is asking for and how that aligns with your mission.
- Focus on safety, not politics. Emphasize that community safety is a shared goal, not a partisan issue.
- Use trusted messengers. Bring in respected community leaders, public health experts, or peer foundations to share what the work looks like in practice.
- Normalize learning. Invite your board into a learning journey rather than a decision-making sprint.

The same applies to internal staff. Cross-departmental buy-in—from communications to donor services—is key to sustaining and scaling community safety work over time.



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Assess Your Risk Tolerance and Long-Term Commitment

Supporting community safety requires a different kind of philanthropic leadership in which community foundations are asked to:

- Stay with the work over the long haul, even when progress is slow
- Take positions on issues where community needs and public perception may be in tension
- Fund work that doesn't always lead to neat outcomes or short-term wins




It also means investing in people, process, and infrastructure, not just programs. That includes support for:

- Community organizing and leadership development
- Relationship and trust-building across sectors
- Narrative change and public storytelling
- Multi-year general operating support

These investments may not fit neatly into existing grantmaking frameworks, but they are essential to impact. Foundations that have made progress in this space often describe an internal culture shift: becoming more comfortable with complexity, more open to shared power, and more willing to take calculated risks for long-term change.

You Don't Have to Have It All Figured Out

Readiness doesn't mean perfection. You don't need all the answers or unanimous agreement to begin. What's most important is the willingness to:

-  Listen deeply to community voices
-  Name tensions honestly
-  Make values-aligned choices, even when they're hard

This is learning work, leadership work, and it begins with a willing foundation to grow.

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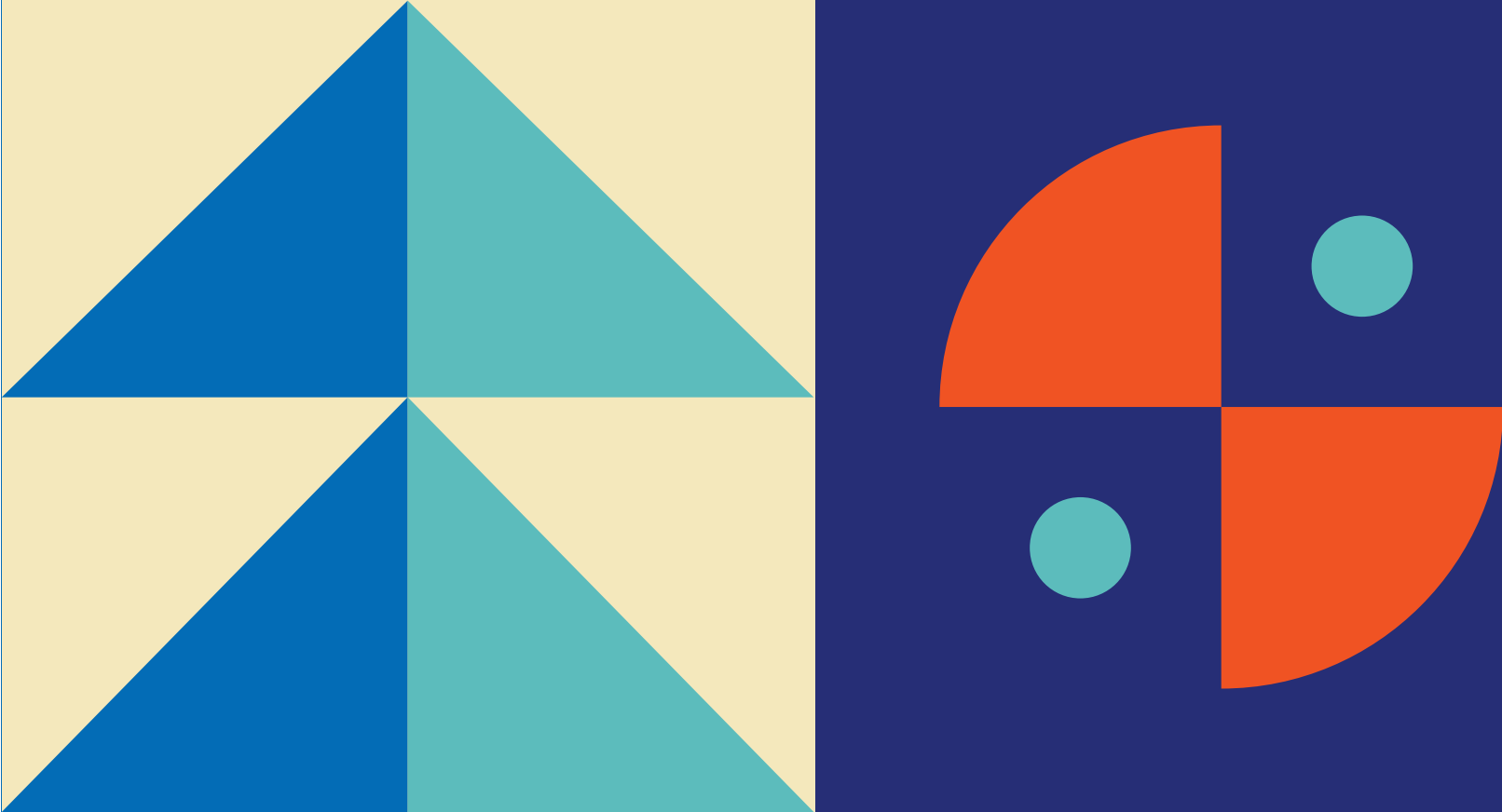
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Framing Violence as a Public Health Issue



As previously defined, violence is a complex, layered issue often viewed as isolated interpersonal conflicts, however this lens is incomplete and often limiting. Violence can be sudden or chronic, and can occur between individuals or be embedded in policies and systems. It causes harm to individuals, families, and entire communities.

In many communities, violence is treated as an inevitable and intractable part of life—or worse, the sole result of personal individualistic failure. Structural and systemic factors that have created the conditions for the highest burden of violence remain largely ignored, even as they are concentrated in communities with generations of economic, housing, and employment insecurity. An over-reliance on law enforcement to manage the problem has resulted in mass incarceration, which in turn has had a disproportionate impact on vulnerable and minoritized communities.

Shifting from solely viewing violence through a criminal justice lens to understanding it as a public health issue allows communities to focus on root causes, prevention, and healing. This reframing invites more holistic, community-led responses that address trauma, support survivors, reduce harm, and create the conditions for long-term safety and well-being.

This section explores what it means to take a public health approach to violence, and why that matters for community foundations stepping into this work.

If cops, courts, and cages were the primary solution to the problem of violence, America would be the safest country in the world. Unfortunately, that is not the case.

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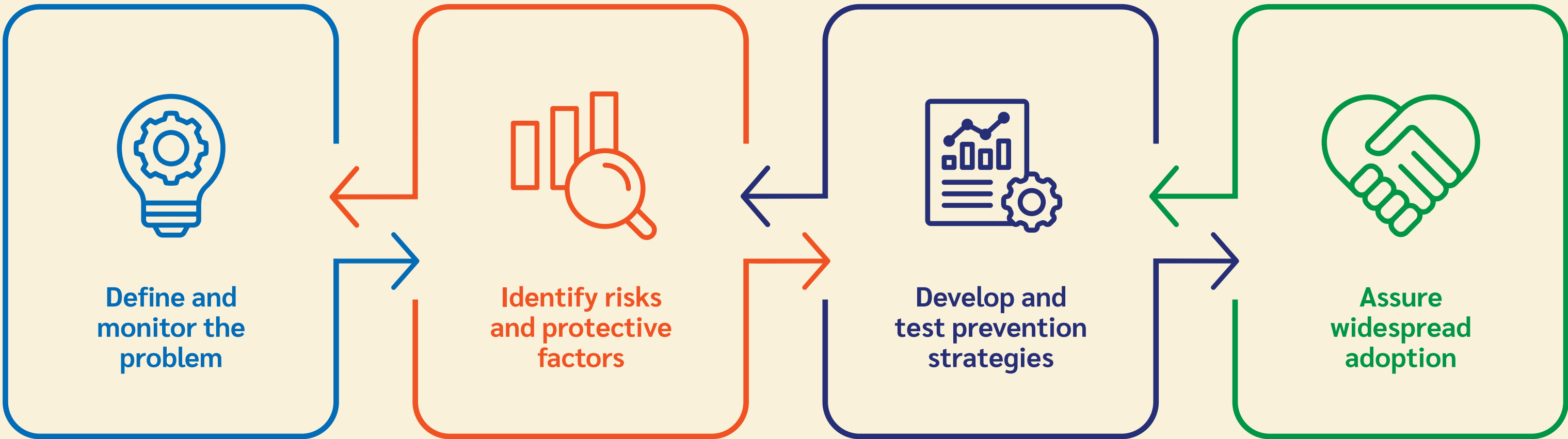
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What Is a Public Health Approach?

A public health approach is defined by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) as a four-step process for addressing health problems and promoting well-being in populations. It emphasizes understanding the root causes of problems, implementing evidence-based interventions, and evaluating their effectiveness. Rooted in the scientific method, a public health approach draws on a multidisciplinary base of knowledge from various fields. The steps include:

The Public Health Approach



Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/violence-prevention/about/about-the-public-health-approach-to-violence-prevention.html>

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Step 1: Define and Monitor the Problem

The first step in preventing violence is to understand the “who,” “what,” “when,” “where,” and “how” associated with it. Grasping the magnitude of the problem involves analyzing data such as the number of violence-related behaviors, injuries, and deaths. Data can demonstrate trends related to how frequently violence occurs, where it occurs, and who the victims and perpetrators are. These data can be obtained from police reports, medical examiner files, vital records, hospital charts, registries, population-based surveys, and other sources.

Step 2: Identify Risk and Protective Factors

It is important to understand what factors protect people or put them at risk for experiencing or perpetrating violence. Risk and protective factors help identify where prevention efforts need to be focused. Risk factors are characteristics that increase the likelihood of a person becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence. Protective factors are characteristics that decrease the likelihood of a person becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence. Risk factors do not cause violence, nor does the presence of a risk factor mean that a person will always experience violence. Victims are never responsible for the harm inflicted upon them.

Step 3: Develop and Test Prevention Strategies

Findings from the research literature and data from needs assessments, community surveys, key collaborator interviews, and focus groups are useful for designing prevention strategies. An evidence-based approach to program planning uses these findings to develop or identify prevention strategies, which are then evaluated rigorously to determine their effectiveness.

Step 4: Assure Widespread Adoption

The strategies shown to be effective in step three are then implemented and adopted more broadly. Communities are encouraged to implement strategies based on the best available evidence and to continuously assess whether the strategy is achieving its goal of preventing violence, as well as remaining a good fit within the community context. Dissemination techniques to promote widespread adoption include training, networking, technical assistance, and evaluation.

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Why A Public Health Approach Matters: From Reactive to Rooted

Viewing violence through a public health lens shifts how we define the problem and what solutions we pursue. This shift is more than theoretical. It directly shapes the kinds of programs, partnerships, and policies that community foundations choose to support.

Traditional Lens	————> Public Health Lens
Violence is caused by bad individuals	Violence is a symptom of unmet needs and systemic harm
Focus on criminal justice solutions	Focus on healing, prevention, and opportunity
Invest in law enforcement and surveillance	Invest in community infrastructure, housing, mental health, and education
Response happens after violence occurs	Prevention starts before harm happens
Emphasis on accountability through punishment	Emphasis on accountability through support and transformation



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How Public Health Framing Shifts Strategy

- 1. Funding Community Infrastructure, Not Just Crisis Response:**
 Instead of only supporting hospital-based violence intervention after shootings, foundations might also invest in housing stability, youth employment, or restorative practices in schools.
- 2. Supporting Ecosystem Builders:**
 Community foundations can fund organizations that don't just serve clients—but build networks and collective power. These might include street outreach programs, youth-led initiatives, or trauma recovery centers.
- 3. Aligning With Health Systems and Public Policy:**
 Foundations can convene hospitals, public health departments, and grassroots leaders to create shared strategies. Some have supported efforts to integrate CVI programs into Medicaid reimbursements or city health budgets.
- 4. Investing in Healing and Belonging:**
 Community safety is about more than the absence of violence. A public health approach prioritizes emotional wellness, social connection, and cultural belonging. That means supporting healing-centered spaces, cultural events, or community storytelling.



📍 Community Example

In Milwaukee, the public health approach informed the development of its first city-wide community safety plan, known as the [Blueprint for Peace](#). The Greater Milwaukee Community Foundation served on the steering committee for developing the Blueprint and aligned its grantmaking priorities with the 6 goals and 30 priorities that emerged from the 12-month planning process. Grant applicants were required to identify how their proposed projects aligned with the specific goal(s) and strategies in the Blueprint.



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Community Foundations as Public Health Partners

Adopting a public health lens doesn't require community foundations to become something they're not. Instead, it invites them to see their current work differently. When violence is understood not as an isolated criminal issue but as the result of layered, preventable conditions, everything changes.

For many foundations, the shift begins with learning the language and principles of public health to better connect the dots between their grantmaking and community safety. Once that shift is made, it becomes clear: the same investments that support thriving communities also reduce the risk factors for violence.

For example, a community foundation might fund:

- Emergency assistance for funeral costs after a shooting (response)
- Street outreach or hospital-based violence intervention (prevention)
- Long-term investments in mental health, youth development, or housing stability (root cause work).

These aren't competing priorities—they're complementary layers of a holistic strategy.

“You go to a gun violence convening and ask, ‘Why is this happening?’—everyone has a different answer, a different institution to blame, or a different reason. We had to create space to understand the public health framing and social determinants of health. That required time and effort in learnin.”

Dr. Kenlana Ferguson

Michigan Transformation Collective

Understanding violence as a public health issue makes visible how nearly every grantmaking area—education, housing, health, racial equity, economic mobility—is already contributing to safety and well-being. The public health lens also demands more intentionality. It calls on foundations to name safety as a goal, align their investments accordingly, and communicate how their work supports both prevention and healing.

This is what it looks like for a community foundation to act as a public health partner: not by running health programs or shifting away from core priorities, but by recognizing that the path to a safer, healthier community runs directly through the work they are already doing—and by showing up more boldly and clearly in that role.

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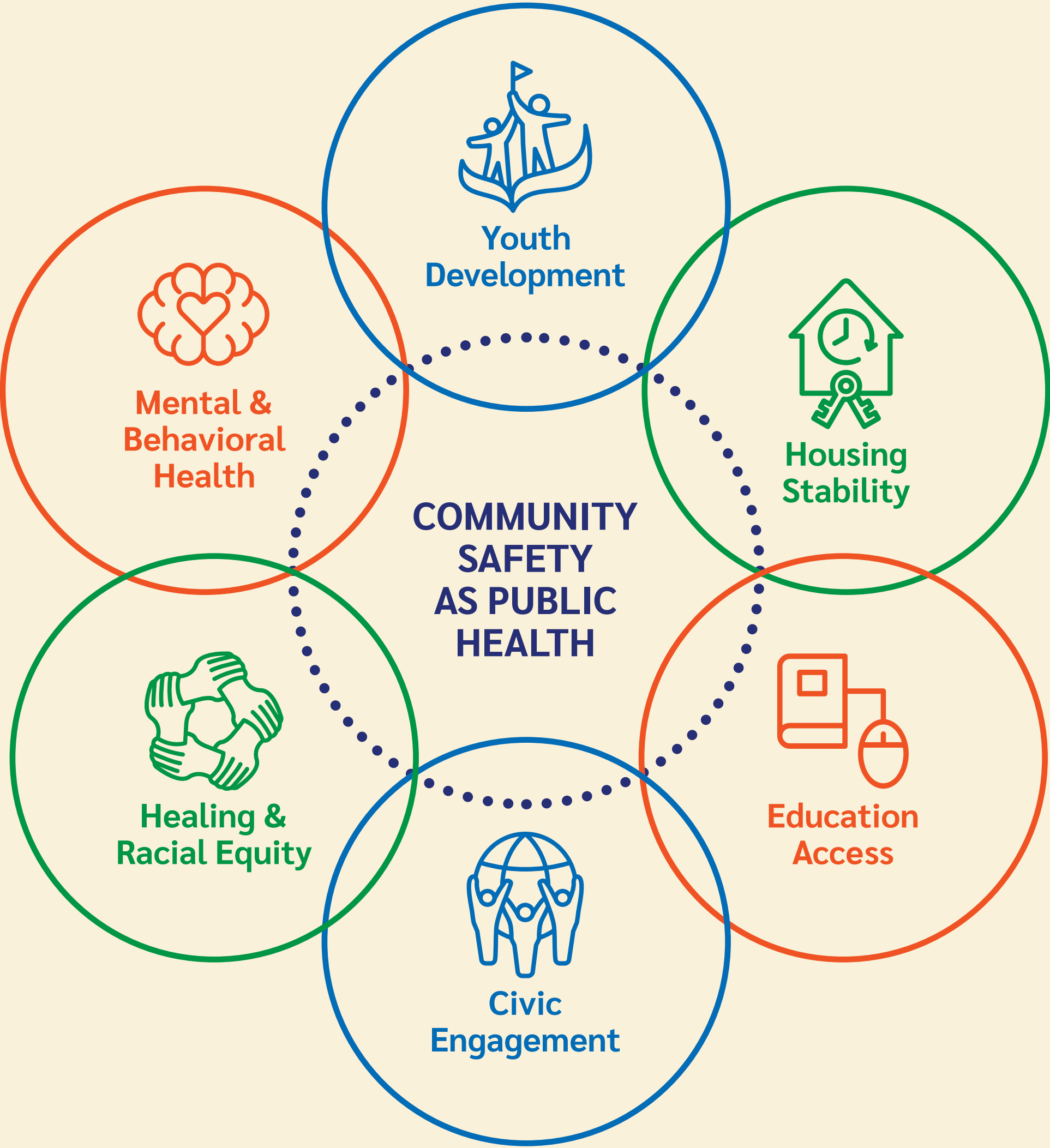
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Community Safety as Public Health: It's Already in Your Strategy

When violence is understood as a public health issue, it becomes clear that nearly every grantmaking priority- whether it's housing, mental health, youth development, or racial equity- plays a role in reducing risk and building safety. This framing helps foundations align their existing work with a deeper, more integrated strategy for community well-being.



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Community safety is not just about *what* we fund; it's about *how* we lead. Foundations cannot fully support community-rooted approaches to safety without examining how equity and power manifest in their own practices, partnerships, and decision-making processes.

This section explores how community foundations can move from intention to action in centering equity, lived experience, and shared power.

“I didn’t know how to write grants or do data spreadsheets. I brought me into this field—me, with the same code I had in the streets: don’t ask nobody for nothing.”

Yafinceio Harris (Big B)
Peace During War

Centering Lived Experience

Community foundations are often several degrees removed from those most impacted by violence and structural harm. Closing that distance is not just an equity imperative—it’s essential to doing this work well.

Foundations that are advancing community safety work grounded in equity are:

- Funding organizations led by and accountable to impacted communities
- Creating space for healing and leadership development among those who have experienced violence
- Recognizing community expertise as equal to academic or professional credentials

Centering lived experience means more than inviting input—It means reshaping who holds the power to define problems, propose solutions, and allocate resources.

Designing With, Not For

Too often, philanthropy defaults to designing strategies in-house or with select partners and then pushing those strategies out to the community for implementation. In equity-centered community safety work, that approach doesn't hold.

Designing *with* community means:

- Involving impacted residents and grassroots groups from the start
- Creating feedback loops and decision-making roles, not just advisory ones
- Being transparent about what's open to influence and what's not

It also means slowing down to build trust and invest in relationships, not just deliverables.

“ I am proud that we are wrestling with community safety questions with our residents– not just from a gun violence reduction perspective, but really asking: what do you need to feel safe?”

Dominique Steward
Crown Family Philanthropies

Participatory Approaches in Practice

Equity requires shared power, not just shared goals. Community foundations advancing community safety are experimenting with participatory approaches that shift who gets to decide, design, and define success.

Examples of Participatory Approaches

- **Participatory Grantmaking:** Impacted residents or community advisors participate in decision-making about funding priorities and awards
- **Community Advisory Boards:** Ongoing bodies that co-design programs, vet strategies, or guide evaluation
- **Community-Led Design Sessions:** Facilitated gatherings where community members shape priorities or program models before they're finalized
- **Compensated Lived Experience Roles:** Residents with direct experience of violence or harm are paid as strategists, facilitators, or trainers
- **Youth-Led Engagement:** Young people most affected by community violence are supported to lead outreach, storytelling, or advocacy efforts

Questions to Consider:

- Who are you designing with, not just for?
- Are you compensating community time, wisdom, and labor equitably?
- Are your processes set up to support participation or manage control?

You don't have to implement every approach at once. Start small, be transparent, and build trust over time.

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Avoiding Gatekeeping and Scarcity Thinking

A key barrier to shared power is the mindset of scarcity: the belief that there are limited resources, only a few “ready” groups, or that funders must tightly control quality and outcomes.

This can lead to:

- Overreliance on a small group of grantees
- Underfunding of grassroots, BIPOC-led, or informal networks
- Unnecessary complexity in application or reporting processes

Community foundations can disrupt this by:

- Expanding the table of who receives funding and support
- Simplifying processes and providing capacity-building or fiscal sponsorship
- Reframing risk as relational (trust-based), not just procedural

“You have so many natural resources—like access to business development, mentorship, connections to help people build infrastructure.”

Jennifer DeLaCruz

*Office of Violence Prevention Services
for the Michigan Department of Health
and Human Services*

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Creating Cultures of Shared Power

Finally, equity in community safety work must be reflected inside the foundation, not just outside. That means examining internal culture and decision-making by asking:

- Who is in the room when decisions are made?
- Whose knowledge counts?

How is staff empowered—or constrained—to build relationships and take risks?

Some foundations have created community advisory boards, participatory grantmaking models, or compensated leadership roles for impacted residents. Others are starting with internal education and equity learning journeys.

“Fund differently. Don’t be afraid to support organizations that are fiscally sponsored or just getting started.”

Ashley Carter
Michigan Justice Fund

There’s no one right model, but there is a shared principle: Community safety cannot be advanced through extractive or top-down approaches. Equity must be lived out in process, not just named in vision.

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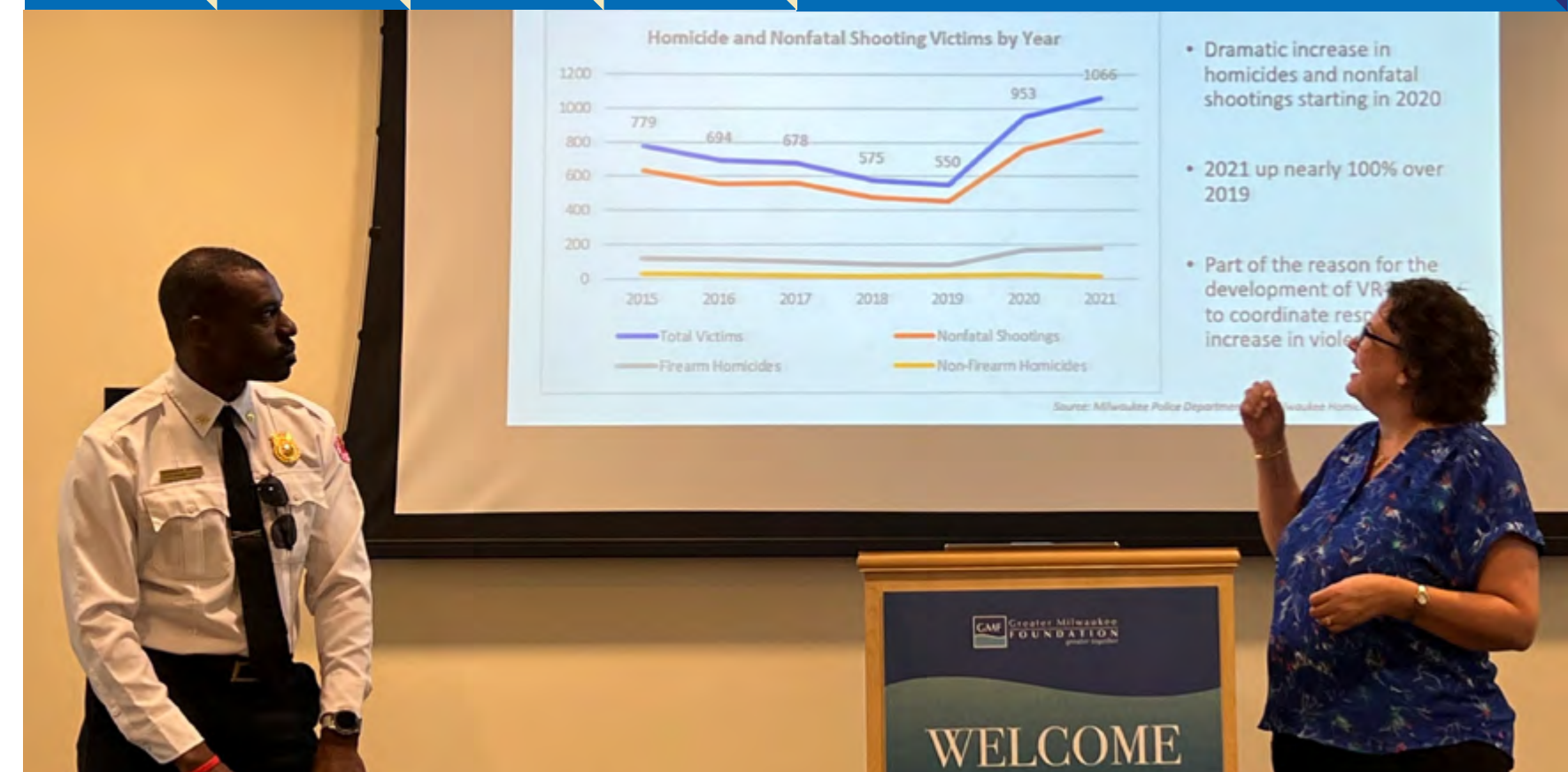
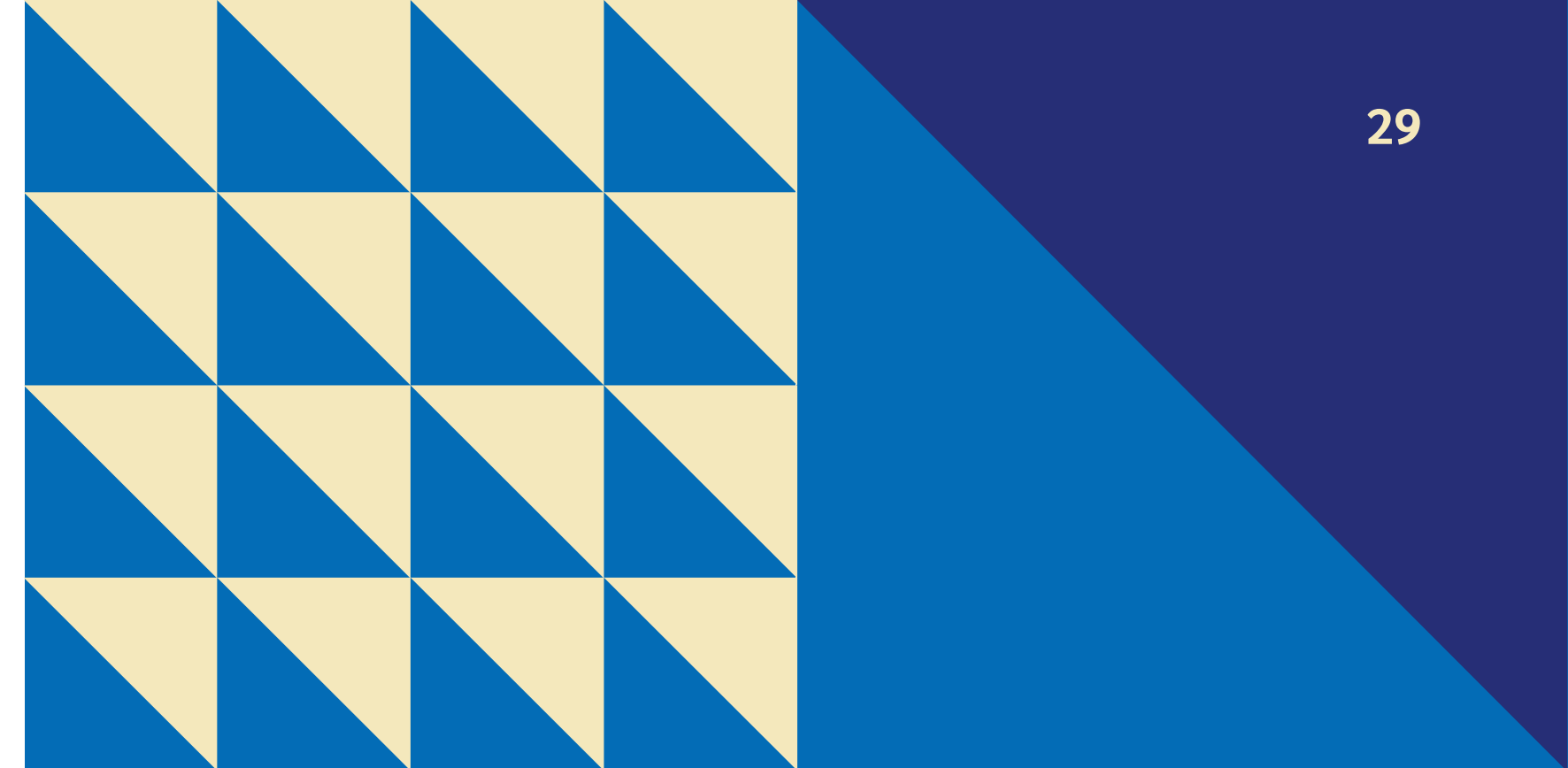
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Power-Sharing Practice Checklist

Use this list to reflect on how equity and shared power manifest in your foundation’s safety work. As you use this checklist to reflect on your practices, don’t aim for perfection; aim for movement. This checklist can help spark conversations and guide your next steps.

Practice	Are We Doing This?
We compensate community partners for time, labor, and expertise	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress
We involve impacted residents in strategy development, not just review	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress
Our decision-making tables include diverse community voices	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress
We have simplified grant processes to reduce barriers to access	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress
We fund organizations led by those most impacted	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress
We’ve built feedback loops into our programs and partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress
Staff are supported to build authentic, trusting relationships with community	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress

Strategic Approaches to Community Safety



Community foundations across the country are increasingly supporting community safety work in different ways. Some are just beginning to understand the issue and explore their role. Others are investing significant time, trust, and resources to launch or sustain effective community safety programs and infrastructure. There is no single formula, but there are patterns, strategies, and lessons to learn from.

This section highlights several types of approaches that foundations are using to support community safety work grounded in healing, health equity, and public health.



Structural Approaches: Shifting How the Work Gets Done

These strategies focus on building or reshaping infrastructure for long-term, sustainable impact.

Community foundations are:

- Creating new funds or collaborative vehicles for investing in community safety (e.g., the Community Safety Fund at The Chicago Community Trust)
- Serving as fiscal sponsors for grassroots groups or networks not yet incorporated or with limited infrastructure to manage government contracts, or large philanthropic grants.
- Developing new governance models—such as co-led advisory boards or participatory grantmaking tables
- Offering back-office or administrative support to help grassroots organizations focus on mission, not paperwork
- Aligning donor-advised funds toward long-term safety investments
- Partnering with public entities to establish donor advised funds to support efficient distribution of funding

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Programmatic Approaches: Funding What Works on the Ground

Foundations are also supporting a range of community-rooted programs and interventions, including:

- Community violence intervention (CVI) programs, including street outreach, hospital-based intervention, or trauma-informed approaches to services focused on care and recovery from violence
- Youth engagement and leadership programs focused on healing, arts, and opportunity
- Community healing circles and spaces for survivors, residents, and frontline workers
- Training and workforce development for people with lived experience to enter the field
- Restorative justice practices in schools, neighborhoods, and reentry programs
- Developing or updating comprehensive, community centered violence prevention plans to identify multi-year priorities and strategies for increasing community safety and well-being

These programs need unrestricted, flexible funding to adapt to community needs.

“Scaling CVI is more than street outreach; it’s the wraparound—behavioral health, workforce, and school partnerships—at community scale.”

Tawa Mitchell

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Investment Approaches: Leveraging Public and Private Dollars

Some community foundations are beginning to see investment strategy as a tool for safety, especially when aligned with government or private sector partners, such as by:

- Co-investing with city or county funds to launch community safety initiatives
- Using mission-aligned investments to support housing, mental health, or community development
- Backstopping risk for grassroots partners so they can take bold positions or innovate
- Helping public systems test new models by funding pilot projects

“Evidence brought government to the table. Success is line-item dollars for CVI, not one-time windfalls.”

Esther Franco-Payne
Executive Director, Partnership for Safe and Peaceful Communities

Multi-Pronged Strategies: Holding Complexity

Many foundations are not choosing **just one strategy**. They’re building layered approaches that include:

- Internal culture change and equity work
- External narrative change and public voice initiatives
- Donor education and organizing
- Policy influence and public accountability
- Grassroots partnership and leadership development

These strategies **evolve over time** and require flexibility, reflection, and relationship.

“We’ve made early investments in groups that were fiscally sponsored. We’ve seen some grow from rapid response grants to receiving \$100,000 or \$200,000.”

Ashley Carter
Michigan Justice Fund

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Starting Points: Early to Advanced Approaches

No matter where your foundation is starting, there is an entry point. Committing to taking a public health approach to violence prevention doesn’t need to start with a multi-million dollar investment tomorrow.

Early-Stage Strategies	Advanced Strategies
Host a learning session on community violence intervention through a public health lens	Fund long-term, community-led strategies
Offer small, rapid-response grants	Create a dedicated fund or pooled investment
Convene stakeholders to map needs	Co-design a cross-sector citywide strategy
Sponsor narrative work or healing events	Integrate community safety into every program area
Align one DAF or funder partner	Shift institutional policies and donor norms

While the previous table offers a spectrum of approaches from early to advanced engagement, community foundations don’t have to follow a perfectly linear path. In fact, many strategies happen simultaneously.

A foundation might be:

- Making its first flexible grant to a street outreach group (early stage),
- While partnering with local public health departments on upstream prevention,
- And exploring long-term narrative change strategies through community media investments (advanced stage).

The goal isn’t to “graduate” from one stage to the next, but to deepen your alignment with community, equity, and systemic change, wherever you’re starting. Some community foundations begin with narrative change or cross-sector convening before they ever make a grant. Others move from responsive funding into strategy co-creation over time. What matters most is being honest about where you are, transparent with partners, and intentional about growing your role in ways that align with community needs.

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Kalamazoo Community Foundation (KZCF)

From Seeding to Shared Ownership: Supporting the Kalamazoo Blueprint for Peace

As gun violence incidents in Kalamazoo more than doubled between 2018 and 2020, and following the leadership of community members who declared gun violence a public health crisis at the city and county level, the Kalamazoo Community Foundation joined the inaugural CFLeads Gun Violence Prevention Network cohort in 2021. They hosted internal and external learning sessions, listened to outreach workers and youth leaders, and began exploring how philanthropy could support a county-wide strategy grounded in community voice.

Piloting: In 2022, KZCF supported a range of early-stage efforts—from community-led healing events and narrative projects like Beyond Bullets with NowKalamazoo, to flexible grants for grassroots groups to attend trainings, experiment with new programming, and build connections. This loose coalition began forming the foundation for what would become the Kalamazoo Blueprint for Peace, modeled after Milwaukee’s citywide strategy.

Deepening: By 2023, KZCF had partnered with city leaders, public health officials, outreach workers, grassroots organizations, and community members to co-create the Kalamazoo Blueprint for Peace. As a trusted, neutral convener, they supported staffing infrastructure and held space for cross-sector collaboration. Their investment helped catalyze broader alignment, and

their public credibility helped elevate community voices at the state level.

Transitioning: Rather than holding or housing the work long-term, KZCF transitioned leadership of the initiative to the Michigan Transformation Collective, a grassroots organization better positioned to carry the vision forward. KZCF’s role evolved to that of a funder, connector, and amplifier, continuing to contribute to community safety not by owning the strategy, but by resourcing and making space for community leadership to flourish.

This journey wasn’t perfect or prescriptive, but it was grounded in trust, experimentation, and a commitment to staying in relationship with community. The work continues, led by those most connected to its purpose.

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Community foundations do not need to lead every initiative, fund every program, or become the central hub for community safety work. In fact, doing so can **unintentionally replicate the very dynamics we're trying to disrupt: consolidating power, crowding out grassroots leadership, or slowing momentum with bureaucracy.**

Instead, community foundations can play critical, context-dependent roles that complement the work of community partners, public systems, and other funders. The most effective community foundations understand their unique positioning and practice their role with humility, clarity, and adaptability.

This section outlines the many on-ramps available to community foundations with ways to support community safety beyond grants alone. From resourcing community-led work to shaping public narratives and building trust across systems, these are the real tools of community leadership as it relates to community safety.

“Community foundations are one of the best places where this social change work can happen. They are place based. They have relationships, they have the knowledge and have the capability to respond quickly in times of crisis.”

Ellen Gilligan

The Evolving Role of Community Foundations

Across the country, community foundations are stepping into broader, deeper roles in the community safety ecosystem. No longer limited to transactional funders, they are:

- Field builders that connect sectors and amplify community solutions
- Narrative shapers that challenge fear-based frames and promote healing
- Civic leaders who hold a long-term vision and cross-sector relationships

For example:

- Chicago Community Trust launched [The Chicago Fund for Safe and Peaceful Communities](#) to align philanthropic resources and pool funding.
- Cleveland Foundation co-created neighborhood safety strategies with residents and public systems.
- Kalamazoo Community Foundation used its convening power and credibility to bring together grassroots advocates, city officials, and donors in a shared learning process.

These examples show that community foundations don't have to lead everything, but they do have to lead differently.

Roles Foundations Can Play

Community foundations can play different roles at different times. The key is not to “own” the issue, but to adapt your role based on the moment, the need, and the relationships you’re building. Collaboration moves at the speed of trust, and community foundations should *partner by example*.



Investor

Provide flexible, early, or gap funding to community-driven work. Offer fiscal sponsorship or fund pilot projects that public systems can’t yet support.



Advocate

Leverage your voice to shift public policy and influence systems. Educate donors and the broader community. Support policy coalitions or fund analysis and communications.



Convener

Create space for community groups, systems leaders, and stakeholders to build alignment and trust. Hold learning spaces, not just planning sessions.



Trusted Partner

Stay in the background while lending resources, relationships, or reputational support to community-led efforts.

Putting CFLeads Tools into Practice: Foundation Roles in Community Safety

No foundation can or should play every role at once. That’s why CFLeads developed tools to help you reflect on how you’re showing up in the ecosystem and where you may need to grow. While frameworks like [Going All In](#) or the [Five Competencies for Community Leadership](#) can feel abstract, in the context of community safety, they provide a practical roadmap for foundations to lead with clarity, equity, and accountability. Here’s what they look like in action:

The Five Competencies for Community Leadership help community foundations achieve positive community outcomes by:

- Engaging residents
- Leading collaboratively
- Influencing public policy
- Addressing structural/systemic issues
- Marshaling resources

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The Five Competencies for Community Leadership in Action

Community Leadership Competencies	How It Shows Up in Community Safety
 Engaging Residents	Designing community strategy sessions in multiple formats (in-person, virtual, mobile), training and compensating facilitators, and meeting people where they are, whether at neighborhood centers, housing complexes, or online.
 Leading Collaboratively	Using the foundation’s positional power to create a neutral space where grassroots leaders, public health officials, and even public safety can co-design a shared strategy together.
 Influencing Public Policy	Supporting local campaigns for safe housing ordinances or advocating for public investment in community-led community safety work on the ground.
 Addressing Structural Issues	Taking a public health approach and funding work that tackles root causes, such as economic instability, housing, or trauma, rather than just symptoms.
 Marshaling Resources	Offering donor education on community safety and moving DAFs toward long-term, flexible investments.

“You may not have all the answers. But you’re providing a location. You’re providing a neutral space to convene. Community foundations understand how systems work... They can make calls and get folks to the table in ways community-based organizations often can’t.”

Jennifer DeLaCruz
Office of Violence Prevention Services for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

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The *Going All In* framework challenges foundations to:

- Insist on racial equity
- Amplify community voice
- Influence public policy and systems

Going All In in Action

Element	How It Looks in Practice
Insist on Racial Equity	Understanding how structural racism drives the root causes of gun violence—housing insecurity, economic disinvestment, trauma—and showing up with strategies that disrupt those systems, not just funding identity-based work.
Amplify Community Voice	Creating real pathways for community members, like youth and street outreach leaders, to speak directly to decision-makers, rather than speaking on their behalf. For example, supporting community members to travel to the state capitol to meet with lawmakers themselves instead of speaking for them.
Influence Public Systems	Leveraging your foundation’s credibility and relationships to support long-term community efforts, like organizing residents to influence city budget decisions. This includes convening system leaders, but more importantly, creating conditions for community members to drive the agenda and reshape how systems show up.

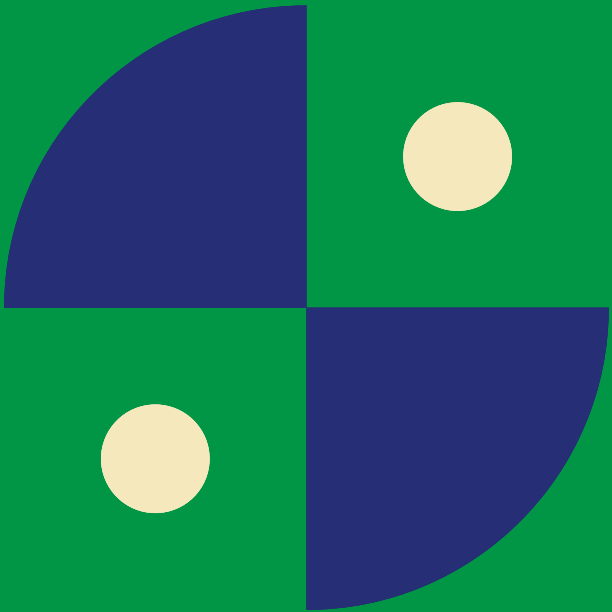
A Note for Lean Foundations

You don’t need a large team or a million-dollar initiative to contribute meaningfully to community safety.

Small staff? Start small. Choose one role to play or one on-ramp to commit to. For example:

- Use your positional power to open doors for community partners
- Host one co-learning session with grassroots leaders and public health
- Offer your staff’s time and facilitation skills to a collaborative table already forming

Every contribution counts. Even a light-touch effort, like sharing local data, building donor awareness, or connecting people across sectors, can lay the groundwork for larger change.



Working Across Systems: Your 30,000-Foot View Matters

Because they are nonpartisan, place-based, and enduring, community foundations are uniquely positioned to build bridges across systems and often hold the 30,000-foot view needed to see the bigger picture.

Foundations can:

- Build relationships with public health departments, law enforcement, city agencies, and schools
- Align philanthropic work with public investments
- Convene stakeholders across government and grassroots sectors
- Support systems change and public accountability without getting pulled into partisan divides

Foundations can serve as connectors, not controllers, making systems work better for the community by aligning their efforts with community-defined safety goals.

You can also support public systems by:

- Funding infrastructure that local government can't (e.g., pilot programs or data tools)
- Sharing reputation and trust to elevate initiatives
- Creating space for systems and residents to build trust in new ways

“You don’t have to know everyone doing CVI in your community—but you can start asking the questions. And you might be the only one who can get everyone to the table.”

Jennifer DeLaCruz

Office of Violence Prevention Services for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

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Shaping the Narrative: The Power of Public Voice

Community foundations can also play a major role in reframing how safety is understood in their communities. Narratives shape policy, funding, and often who is seen as “worthy” of protection.

Ways foundations can support narrative shift:

- Fund storytelling and healing-centered media work
- Partner with local journalists or community media outlets
- Sponsor youth-led or survivor-led narrative initiatives
- Challenge carceral frames and elevate holistic, community-rooted safety language
- Invest in public art, oral histories, and cultural projects that imagine safety beyond policing

“Fundamental to the work of Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation is racial healing and narrative change, and that’s always the starting point in the work we’ve done. The manifestation of an unhealed community is gun violence.”

Dr. Kenlana Ferguson
Executive Director of the Michigan Transformation Collective



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You can also help align messaging across sectors by:

- Creating shared language with health, housing, education, and justice stakeholders
- Supporting community members to tell their own stories, not just be the subject of someone else's
- Talking about "increasing opportunity, belonging, and healing," rather than "reducing gun crime"
- Educating boards and donors using equity-grounded narratives



Community Example

Beyond Bullets - NowKalamazoo

A narrative change initiative supported by the funders and community partners to reframe community safety through human-centered storytelling:

- Centering lived experience: Stories like "[Proof of Life](#)" follow childhood friends navigating grief, sharing the personal impact of gun violence
- Supporting frontline voices: Coverage like "[Paying the experts who stop gun violence](#)" highlights how community violence interrupters with lived experience are trained, compensated, and integrated into public systems
- Shifting the public narrative: [Beyond Bullets](#) offers deeper storytelling about survival, resilience, and systemic context, moving away from crime statistics as the sole focus.



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Navigating All of These Roles with Accountability

These roles are not theoretical. They come with real power, real tension, and real responsibility.

As your foundation defines its role in community safety:

- Stay accountable to the community, not just your board or peers
- Be transparent about your limitations
- Acknowledge when you are not the right convener, or when someone else should lead
- Keep coming back to equity, voice, and systems change

You don't have to do it all. Whatever on-ramp you choose, do it with integrity.

Many On-Ramps to Community Safety

You don't have to do everything or start from scratch. Community foundations can step into community safety in multiple ways:

- **Convene & Connect:** Bring together cross-sector partners (public health, public safety, grassroots groups, hospitals, schools) to align strategies and build trust.
- **Shift the Narrative:** Support local media, community storytellers, or youth to reframe safety in terms of healing, prevention, and opportunity, not just crime.
- **Influence Policy & Systems:** Fund or co-design local policy campaigns. Use your reputation and access to bring community voices to decision-makers.
- **Incubate Ideas:** Offer early support for pilot projects, fiscal sponsorship, or unrestricted funds to grassroots efforts that public systems can't yet fund.
- **Share Data & Insights:** Commission or synthesize local data to reveal trends, root causes, and community-led solutions.
- **Amplify Community Voice:** Create platforms for residents, survivors, and youth to lead and speak for themselves, not be spoken for.
- **Resource the Work:** Fund operational needs, infrastructure, and leadership development—not just programs or outcomes.
- **Stay in the Work:** Build long-term partnerships, take risks, and remain in relationship beyond a grant cycle.

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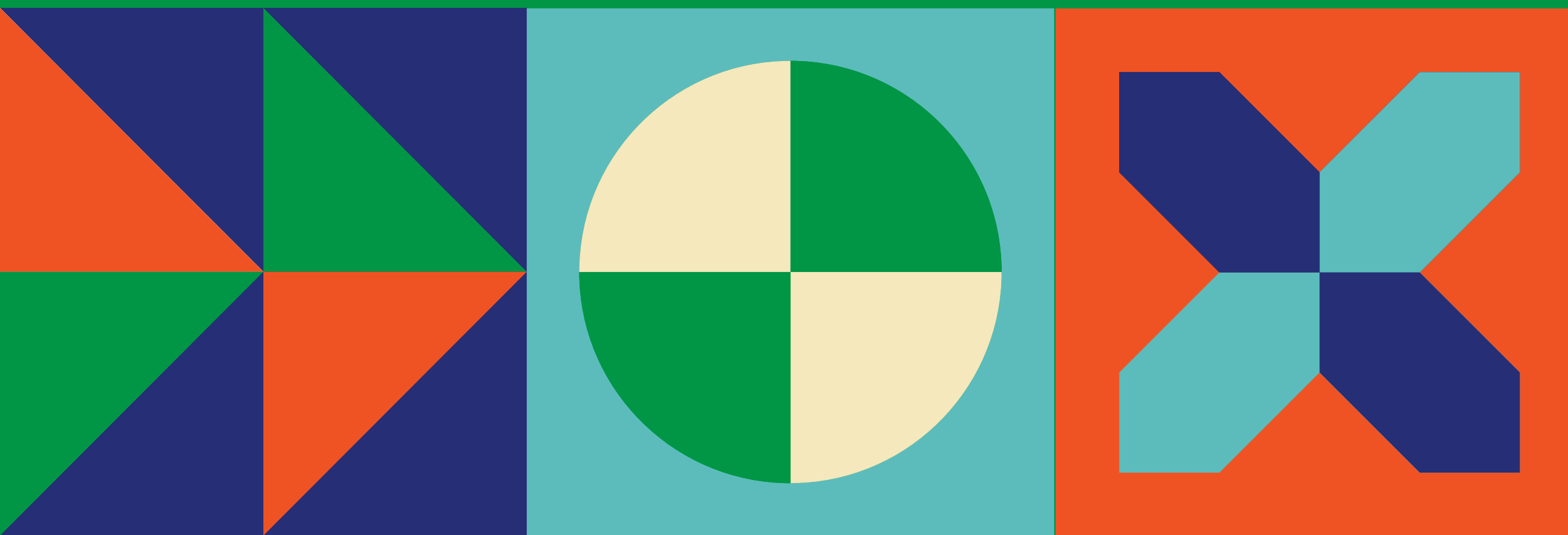
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Navigating Barriers, Defining Success, and Playing the Long Game



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Supporting community safety is long, relational work that challenges traditional definitions of success, power, and accountability. Community foundations that step into this work must be prepared to navigate real tensions, redefine progress, and stay committed for the long haul.

This section explores the complex realities community foundations face when stepping into community safety work. It offers strategies for defining success in ways that reflect both community goals and institutional realities, and emphasizes the importance of cross-sector learning, trust-based evaluation, and long-term pacing. It also surfaces the deep internal and external tensions that can stall or derail progress, with examples of common challenges and field-informed practices that can help foundations navigate them with humility, courage, and care.



Defining What Success Means, Locally and Institutionally

Success in community safety work must be locally defined. That might mean fewer retaliatory shootings in one neighborhood, more opportunities for youth in another, or deeper cross-sector coordination in a city. Community foundations can help shape shared goals by asking:

- What does safety mean to this community?
- Who gets to define what progress looks like?
- What institutional changes must we make to match our external commitments?

At the same time, foundations must wrestle with how success is defined internally. Boards, donors, and leadership may look for clean metrics and linear change, but transformative community safety work often looks nonlinear, relational, and emergent.

Creating alignment between internal expectations and community-defined goals is part of the work.

Shared Measurement and Cross-Sector Learning

Community safety work often involves many stakeholders—schools, hospitals, outreach programs, law enforcement, housing agencies, etc. Each sector uses different data and definitions. Community foundations can play a critical role in helping bridge these silos by:

- Convening cross-sector partners to develop shared indicators that reflect community-defined goals
- Investing in data infrastructure for grassroots groups that don’t have dedicated staff
- Funding storytelling and qualitative data efforts that elevate lived experience, not just numbers

“Our goal in evaluation is to ensure that when we tell our collective story about how public safety has been impacted in Chicago, we can clearly show what government contributed, what the business community contributed, and what philanthropy contributed— and, most importantly, the collective outcomes created through these combined investments.”

Esther Franco-Payne
Executive Director, Partnership for Safe and Peaceful Communities

Trust-Based and Adaptive Evaluation

Evaluation in this space must be as dynamic as the work itself. Traditional metrics often fail to capture relational, restorative, or preventative outcomes.

Instead, foundations can:

- Use developmental evaluation to learn in real-time and adapt strategies
- Invite community partners to co-design evaluation questions and tools
- Shift from compliance to learning that centers reflection, story, and feedback over rigid reporting

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The Importance of Pacing: Long-Term Change vs. Short-Term Wins

Community safety is generational work. Still, funders are often pushed to show results within a single grant cycle or a budget year. Community members may expect visible results right away, while donors may want to see return on investment. Grantees may feel overwhelmed by both. Balancing urgency with patience is one of the hardest parts of this work.

Foundations can play a critical role in pacing by:

- Setting realistic expectations internally and externally, such as being transparent with boards and donors about what can (and can't) shift quickly
- Lifting up both short-term wins (like convening a cross-sector coalition) and long-term goals (like reducing youth disconnection or shifting narrative)
- Supporting partners in navigating the emotional and strategic realities of doing slow, systemic work

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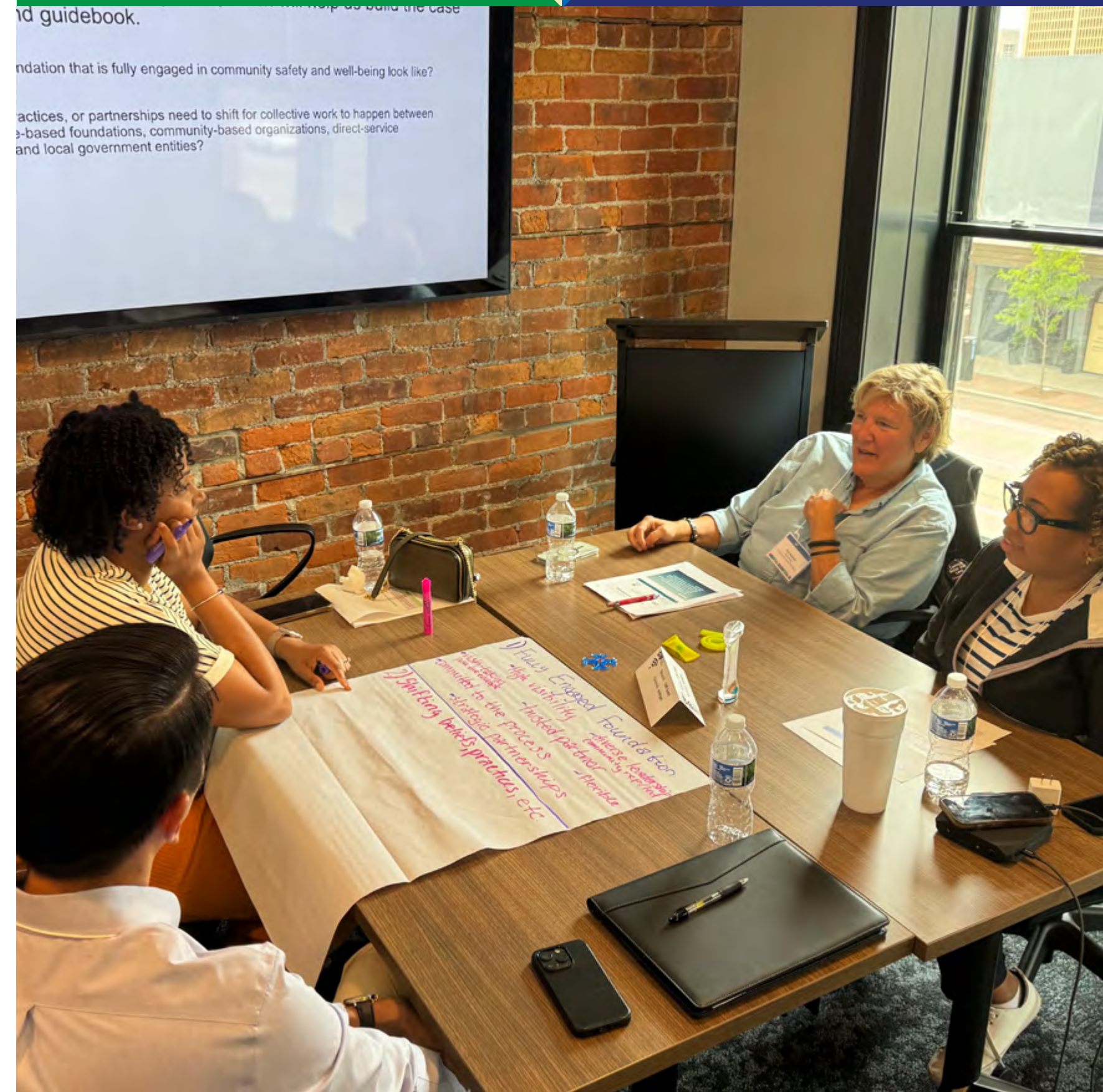
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Common Barriers and Deep Tensions

No foundation is immune to the real challenges that arise when doing equity-centered, systems-level work. Below are some of the most common tensions surfaced by CFLeads participants and practitioners in the field, along with what it takes to name and navigate them:

1. Board Hesitancy and Institutional Caution

TENSION: Boards may be hesitant to engage in community safety work due to its political sensitivity, public visibility, or association with contentious issues like policing, gun control, or youth violence. Even when staff are ready to act, board caution can delay or dilute efforts.

PRACTICE: Ground the conversation in values, not just issues. Offer learning opportunities that deepen board understanding of public health approaches, racial equity, and community-rooted leadership. Frame the work around belonging, healing, and safety for all, which are shared aspirations that transcend partisanship. Start with low-risk investments to build comfort while seeding long-term change.

2. Bureaucracy, Politics, and Funder Restrictions

TENSION: Community safety requires timely, flexible support, but many foundations face internal hurdles like complex application processes, restricted funds, and long approval timelines that make it hard to move quickly or adapt to emergent needs.

PRACTICE: Re-examine internal policies with community safety in mind. Establish rapid response funds or discretionary grant pools. Simplify application and reporting requirements, especially for grassroots organizations. Advocate with donor-advised fund holders and legal counsel to align policies with mission. Build systems that respond to the urgency on the ground, not just the pace of institutions.

“You can’t bring your board a finished strategy and expect alignment overnight. You have to bring them along—and sometimes that means starting with a question, not a plan.”

Ashley Carter

Michigan Justice Fund for the Michigan Department of Health

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3. Bias, Exclusion, and Lack of Intersectionality

TENSION: Even foundations committed to equity may default to funding familiar organizations—those with established relationships, strong grant writing skills, or professionalized language. This can leave out the very people most impacted by violence: BIPOC-led groups, youth organizers, and grassroots leaders operating without infrastructure.

PRACTICE: Expand your circle. Fund organizations that are led by and accountable to impacted communities—even if they’re new, fiscally sponsored, or unincorporated. Provide technical assistance, not just dollars. Recognize that lived experience is a qualification. Build relationships beyond the usual suspects, and let trust guide decision-making.

“We brought along people who were already doing the work for free—and thought together about how we could do this work in the community.”

Dr. Kenlana Ferguson
Michigan Transformation Collective

4. Public Perception and Narrative Challenges

TENSION: Community safety efforts are often undermined by sensational media coverage or political rhetoric that reinforces fear-based narratives. Community foundations may feel pressure to respond to headlines or distance themselves from controversial topics.

PRACTICE: Invest in narrative change as part of your strategy. Support community-led storytelling, local journalism, and platforms that uplift lived experience and resilience. Use your voice to reframe the conversation—shifting from fear and punishment to healing and prevention. Equip grantees with media training and messaging support. Align internally on what you stand for and how you’ll talk about it.

“We didn’t show up to speak for people—we brought them to the Capitol to speak for themselves.”

Jen Heymoss
Michigan Transformation Collective

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5. Repairing Trust with Community

TENSION: Foundations may carry a history of extractive practices, broken promises, or inconsistent engagement, especially in communities that have been historically underfunded, overstudied, or sidelined in decision-making. Even with new intentions, old wounds shape how people show up.

PRACTICE: Trust is earned through action, not intention. Acknowledge past missteps. Be transparent about how and why your approach is changing. Show up consistently, follow through, and build relationships before asking for partnership or input. Understand that skepticism is valid; don't rush to "fix" it.

6. When Repair Does Harm

TENSION: Efforts framed as "restorative" or "healing" can retraumatize communities if they do not account for identity, accountability, or unresolved harms. Foundations risk deepening mistrust if restitution is missing from the equation.

PRACTICE: Before launching restorative projects, co-design with impacted residents. Be transparent about limitations. Resource trusted intermediaries to lead the work. Build feedback loops to identify harm early, and be willing to stop or shift if needed.

7. Navigating Tensions Within the Nonprofit Ecosystem

TENSION: In places where funding is scarce and relationships are fragile, community-based organizations may compete instead of collaborate. Old grievances, trauma, or turf issues can undermine alignment—even among those working toward the same goals. This isn't a failure of leadership; it's a symptom of scarcity, urgency, and systemic underinvestment.

PRACTICE: Acknowledge that fragmentation is often a result of systemic underinvestment, and not personal failure. Foundations can't "fix" these tensions, but they can avoid exacerbating them. Don't try to force unity overnight. Instead, hold space for trust-building, shared learning, and relational repair. Fund collaboration, not just coordination. Be transparent about how decisions are made and resource the time it takes to build collective strategy. Honor the emotional labor it takes for organizations to work across differences, and don't expect harmony without investing in trust. Healing is part of the work.

“Some residents feel heard; others don't. Being 'credible' is earned—through who we fund, how fast we move, and how we show our work.”

Dominique Steward
Crown Family Philanthropies

8. Insiders and Outsiders

TENSION: Communities often distinguish between “insiders” who live and work locally and “outsiders” who parachute in with resources or expertise. Both bring value, but unmanaged, this dynamic creates mistrust and fractured strategies. If not addressed, it can deepen divides instead of strengthening collective impact.

PRACTICE: Use your convening power to bring people together across these lines. Name the tension rather than avoid it. Create space for residents, grassroots leaders, system actors, and external partners to wrestle with difficult questions side by side. Convening isn’t just about planning– it’s about holding space for tough conversations, building mutual understanding, and modeling transparency about roles. Use external credibility and resources to support local legitimacy.

These tensions are not signs that you’re doing something wrong—they’re signs that you’re doing something real. Community safety work pushes foundations to show up differently: to build trust where it has been broken, to invest in relationships over time, and to move at the speed of community rather than the pace of institutions. There’s no single path forward, but by staying in the work, remaining accountable, and adapting as you learn, your foundation can play a powerful role in building a more just and safe future.



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Understanding Violence as a Public Health Issue

[A Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention](#): Explains the CDC's four-step public health approach—defining the problem, identifying risk/protective factors, developing/testing prevention strategies, and ensuring widespread adoption.

[CDC Prevention Resources for Action](#): A curated library of evidence-based prevention strategies for different forms of violence, organized by setting and approach.

[Community Safety Realized: Public Health Pathways to Preventing Violence](#): Outlines a framework for using public health pathways to prevent violence by addressing root causes and fostering community resilience.

[Adverse Community Experiences and Resilience: A Framework for Addressing and Preventing Community Trauma](#): Presents a framework for understanding and addressing community trauma, with strategies to strengthen resilience and equity.

[Connecting the Dots: An Overview of the Links among Multiple Forms of Violence](#): Shows how multiple forms of violence are interconnected and why prevention strategies should address shared risk and protective factors.

Community Violence Intervention

[What is Community Violence](#): Overview of CVI strategies, their effectiveness, and how they align with public health approaches.

[What is a CVI Ecosystem](#): A comprehensive hub of resources, tools, and networks to strengthen the field of community violence intervention.

Framing Community Safety

[Framing Community Safety: Guidance for Effective Communication](#): Research-backed guidance for framing community safety in ways that build public understanding and support for prevention-focused approaches.

Tools for Change

[WEAVE Toolkit](#): Practical tools for building community engagement, strengthening partnerships, and integrating equity into violence prevention efforts.

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Community Leadership

[The Five Competencies of Community Leadership](#): Five competencies identified by CFLeads that are critical to effective practice. Taken together, they help community foundations achieve positive community outcomes across issues.

[Community Leadership Field Guide for Community Foundations](#): Outlines the core practices, competencies and strategies needed for effective community leadership by community foundations.

[Going All In](#): Makes the case for Community Foundations to go all in on community leadership, highlighting essential areas of focus that will make the most impact on communities.

Funder Resources

[Activating Philanthropic and Business Capital: Strategies to Advance Gun Violence Prevention in the US](#): Strategies for mobilizing philanthropic and private sector investment to advance gun violence prevention in the U.S.

[Sustaining Funding for Community-Based Violence Prevention after the ARPA Cliff](#): Guidance for maintaining funding as temporary COVID-era resources wind down.

[Grantmakers in Health 2024 Survey Summary: Growth in Philanthropic Investment in Firearm Violence Prevention Strategies](#): Insights on the growth of philanthropic investment in firearm violence prevention and emerging trends among health funders.

National Agencies

[Health Alliance for Violence Intervention](#) (HAVI)
A national network advancing hospital-based and community-linked violence intervention programs.

[Community Based Public Safety Collective](#)
Supports community-based public safety organizations with technical assistance, training, and advocacy.

[Cure Violence Global](#)
Implements a health-based, violence interruption model in cities worldwide.

[Community Justice Action Fund](#)
Advocates for community-based investment and solutions to gun violence, with a focus on communities of color.

[Everytown for Gun Safety](#)
National advocacy organization working to end gun violence through policy, grassroots mobilization, and survivor support.

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[Cities United](#)

Partners with mayors and cities to reduce homicides and shootings among young Black men and boys.

[Giffords Center for Violence Intervention](#)

Advances evidence-based strategies for reducing community violence through policy, research, and funding support.

[Brady](#)

Works to end gun violence through litigation, legislation, and public education campaigns.

[National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform](#)

Provides research, technical assistance, and strategy development for reducing violence and improving justice systems.



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The Road Ahead: An Invitation to Community Foundations



Community safety work is complex, deeply human, and shaped by long histories of harm, resilience, and resistance. There are no quick wins here, only meaningful steps forward.

Community foundations don't need to have all the answers before beginning. What's needed most is courage, humility, and consistency:

- Having the willingness to listen
- Showing up, even when it's uncomfortable
- Using every tool—not just dollars—to support safety, healing, and justice.

You won't do this work alone. Across the country, community foundations are experimenting, stumbling, learning, and finding their role. They're supporting youth leadership, seeding public health partnerships, convening across silos, and resourcing grassroots groups. Some are just starting out, while others have been at it for years.

Wherever you are on this path—whether you are just beginning, returning to the work, or pushing further—you are part of something bigger.

Use this guidebook as an opportunity to convene within your community foundation and with local partners to start the conversation. Now more than ever, community safety needs all the resources we can offer; not just traditional funding, but relationship-building, long-term investment, and community leadership. This guidebook is just one offering in the toolkit for investing in community safety, and our invitation is simple: Start where you are. Stay in relationship. Share what you learn. And keep showing up.



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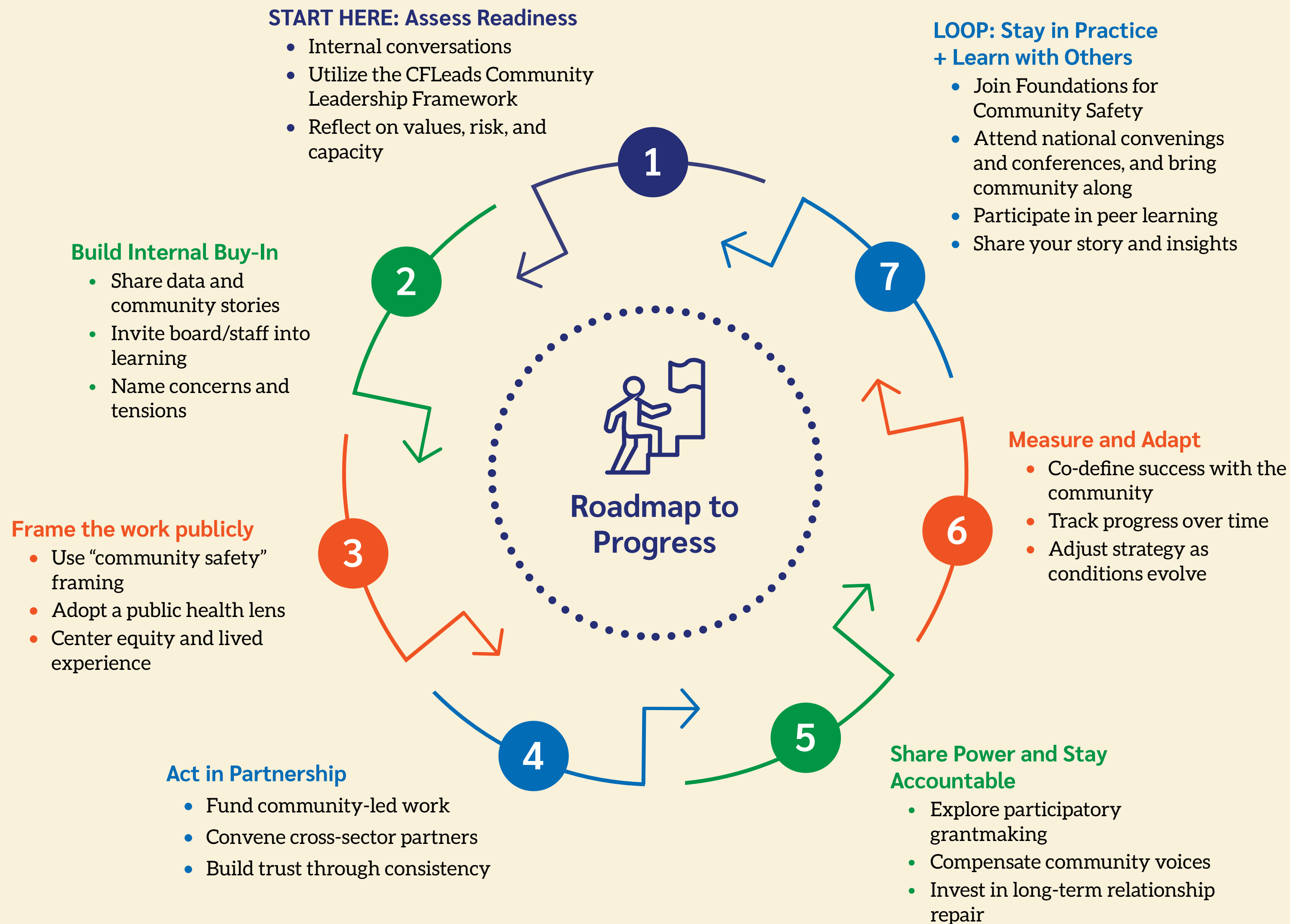
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Their willingness to share both successes and challenges provided essential grounding in lived experience and practice. These convenings built on years of learning in the Gun Violence Prevention Network and created rare space for philanthropy, grassroots leaders, and public partners to think together about what it takes to advance community safety. The reflections gathered in Detroit and Milwaukee not only informed the content of this guidebook but also underscored the urgency of building durable partnerships, shifting narratives, and centering equity in practice.



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To everyone working toward safer, more just communities: this guide is for you and because of you.



To learn more about this work or get involved, please visit cfleads.org/issues-we-work-on/community-safety/



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