

**ADVANCING CVI:**

# INVESTING IN CAPACITY BUILDING, WELLNESS, AND PROFESSIONALIZATION

Conference Summary Report: Field Insights,  
Shared Challenges, and a Pathway Forward

SUBMITTED BY THE COMMUNITY BASED PUBLIC SAFETY COLLECTIVE



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The CVI Action Plan convening, *Advancing CVI: Investing in Capacity Building, Wellness, and Professionalization* was held at a critical moment for community-based public safety. Across the country, community-led safety efforts are navigating a convergence of challenges, including a tightening funding landscape, higher expectations for proof and performance, and a workforce carrying unprecedented levels of responsibility with limited resources and structural support. At the same time, the field is experiencing increased visibility and recognition, as major cities report reductions in violence nationwide, without the long-term investments needed to sustain the work or protect the people doing it.

Community-based public safety is rooted in resident-led efforts like the Gang Peace Movement of Los Angeles in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when individuals directly impacted by violence brokered truces, built relationships across long-standing conflicts, and stepped into the work of protecting their communities. This was not funded work or recognized by institutions. It was volunteer-driven, relationship-based, and grounded in credibility that could not be taught in any classroom. It was public safety, created by the public. Like Los Angeles, early violence interruption efforts arose in Chicago, New York and other urban centers. Out of this work came a generation of peace builders and violence interventionists who would go on to shape what we now understand as Community Violence Intervention. Today, in cities large and small, community-based public safety organizations are working to reduce violence, interrupt cycles of harm, and support healing in neighborhoods.

While this work has grown over the last three decades, significant gaps remain. Practitioners are being trained. National strategies are increasingly evidence-informed. Results are being measured. The field has also fought for recognition at the policy level. The passage of the

Bipartisan Safer Communities Act signaled a shift. For the first time, there was meaningful federal investment in community-based approaches to safety. But as quickly as those inroads were made, they began to narrow. Political priorities shifted and funding became uncertain. The same field that built itself without support once again found itself navigating instability. The question before us is no longer whether community-based public safety works. The question is whether we will build the institutions necessary to sustain it. Institution building is the work now. The legacy of [Newark](#)<sup>1</sup> shows what is possible when communities lead. It also reveals a long-standing gap. For decades, the field has been asked to deliver outcomes without the infrastructure required to sustain them. Organizations are managing complex funding streams, multi-sector partnerships, and growing teams without the back-office systems, fiscal capacity, and organizational infrastructure needed to support that scale. This is why this CVI Action Plan Convening, *Advancing CVI: Investing in Capacity Building, Wellness, and Professionalization* was critical to the field of community-based public safety.

The CVI Action Plan identified six core focus areas shaping the future of the field. As the third convening in this series, this gathering centered on *capacity building, wellness, and professionalization*. It was intentionally designed as a space for shared reflection and honest dialogue across regions with a particular focus on what it takes to scale community-based public safety organizations and strengthen CVI ecosystems. Practitioners, organizational leaders, intermediaries, researchers, funders, and public partners came together to examine the conditions required to sustain this work and what the field needs next to grow.

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<sup>1</sup>Newark Community Street Team Evaluation Summary, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Luskin School of Public Affairs, 2025



**Key Takeaways** - The following insights emerged consistently across sessions, facilitated discussions, and informal conversations.

- Community-based public safety is delivering real impact, but the infrastructure supporting it has not kept pace with expectations placed on the field
- Workforce development
- The push to professionalize the field has brought both opportunity and risk, with many organizations asked to upgrade and formalize systems without adequate resources or protection.
- Strong ecosystems and peer networks are a critical source of resilience, yet coordination and shared infrastructure remain underdeveloped across regions.
- Narrative power matters. How community-based public safety is framed directly shapes policy decisions, funding priorities, and public understanding of what community-led safety truly means.
- Leadership development must be strengthened across roles and organizational levels, from frontline supervisors to executive leadership, to ensure sound governance and mission-aligned growth throughout the field.
- Wellness models, infrastructure, and programming are expanding, but remain insufficient to meet the scale and complexity of need across the field.
- Participants were clear that the challenges facing community-based public safety are urgent, but not insurmountable.



### **Urgent Challenges**

- Funding instability that disrupts continuity, staffing, and community trust
- Workforce burnout driven by trauma exposure, role overload, and inadequate compensation
- Increasing demands for documentation and proof without commensurate support
- Fragmentation across organizations and regions that limits shared learning and collective power



**What the Field Needs Now** - Participants consistently named the following as essential conditions for the future of the field:

- Stable, flexible, multi-year funding that aligns with the realities of community-based work
- Investment in organizational infrastructure, not just program delivery
- Workforce care strategies that move beyond individual wellness to address structural harm
- Evaluation approaches that are participatory, right-sized, and rooted in community-defined outcomes
- Stronger coordination and partnership across the ecosystem to reduce isolation and duplication

The path forward will require continued innovation at the community level, and meaningful shifts in how institutions, funders, and partners resource and engage community-based public safety.

# INTRODUCTION

The CVI Action Plan convening, *Advancing CVI: Investing in Capacity Building, Wellness, and Professionalization*, engaged 147 community based public safety practitioners, nonprofit leaders, trainers, funders, and municipal agencies for a powerful two and a half-day strategy session focused on strengthening the infrastructure of community violence intervention (CVI).

Held in Newark, New Jersey, this national convening explored what it takes to build and sustain the systems, structures, and people that power community-led public safety. Through dynamic plenaries and interactive workshops, attendees engaged in deep conversations and problem-solving around:

- **Capacity Building** and what it truly means to scale sustainability in our organizations
- **Fiscal Infrastructure**, including nonprofit finance, audits, and back-office systems
- **Workforce Wellness**, with attention to trauma-informed supervision, healing practices, and organizational culture
- **Standard Operating Procedures** and emerging national protocols for frontline workers
- **Leadership Development**, emphasizing the role of discernment, boundaries, and training in building healthy, mission-aligned organizations



Together, these sessions created a rare national space to assess where the field stands and inform the path forward. This report is intended to:

- Document field-level insights emerging from the convening
- Identify shared challenges and barriers impacting community-based public safety efforts
- Inform next steps for organizations, practitioners, funders, intermediaries, researchers, and public partners

The findings and reflections captured here are grounded in participant voices, facilitated dialogue, and qualitative and quantitative inputs gathered before, during, and after the convening.

# CONVENING HIGHLIGHTS

## WELCOME & OPENING REFLECTIONS

The convening opened with a powerful welcome from Mayor Ras Baraka, who reminded us that Newark has become a national model for community-led safety. The mayor's remarks set the tone for a gathering deeply grounded in healing, innovation, and transformative public safety.



*“Under your leadership, Newark has shown what’s possible when public safety is rooted in community.”*

*- Aqeela Sherrills*

## PLENARY HIGHLIGHTS

**The Future of CVI Requires Infrastructure**, Aqeela Sherrills (Community Based Public Safety Collective) laid out a compelling case for strengthening the backbone of CVI: infrastructure, professionalization, and wellness. His keynote challenged attendees to invest in systems that allow frontline leaders to thrive, and organizations to grow.

**Resourcing the Future: A Funders Plenary**, Neha Raval (Just Trust), Timmeke Perkins (Annie E. Casey Foundation), Beth Powers (Schusterman Foundation) and Will Simpson (Victoria Foundation) shared insights on sustaining the field. They discussed new approaches to philanthropy, shifts in narrative, and how to align investments with community-defined impact.

**Intersections**, This plenary explored the convergence of CVI with homelessness and immigration. Dr. Lena Miller (Urban Alchemy), Alex Sanchez (Homies Unidos), and Chase Wright (Hungry Hill Foundation) emphasized that effective public safety strategies must acknowledge the broader context of marginalization and displacement.

## PANEL HIGHLIGHTS

### **Strong Foundations for CVI Organizations,**

This session dug into what it takes to build and sustain a strong CVI organization, sharing real-world insights on finance systems, governance, and leadership pipelines.

**Wellness Self-Practice,** This session offered an experiential immersion into self-practice wellness techniques and strategies that participants can use during high-stress moments, throughout the workday, and as part of their daily routines. Instructor Kheperah Kearsse guided attendees through stretching exercises, breathwork, movement practices, and hydration strategies, including healthy juices and infused water. The session focused on practical tools to release tension, regulate the nervous system, and reduce overall stress in real time.

**Wellness Programming: Supporting Our Staff,** Facilitators emphasized that self-care, and healing are not the same. Self-care strategies may help one manage stress in the day-to-day, while healing is generally a long-term processing of grief, trauma and harm. They called for organizational wellness planning, trauma-informed supervision, and redefining what care looks like in the workplace. Themes included: Human check-ins as daily practice, coaching staff to access benefits, leader's modeling boundaries and transparency, and building CVI-specific therapist networks.

*“Unhealed scarcity mindset will have you hoarding resources and working in silos.”*

- Wellness Panelist

**Data by Us, For Us,** This panel explored how the field can reclaim its relationship with data. Topics included:

- Community-driven evaluation
- Participatory action research
- Qualitative storytelling
- Data ownership and mistrust

**Training & Technical Assistance (TTA): The Blueprint,** Panelists reflected on the importance of TTA at every level of organization from frontline staff to executive leadership. The panel surfaced gaps in training alignment and the need for systems that support a culture of continuous learning.

*“Workforce development is leadership development. We have to divest ourselves of the habit of bifurcating the concept of leadership development and workforce development... it's not different”*

**Honoring Legacy: Tribute to Commander Aquil Basheer,** One of the most powerful moments was the tribute to Commander Aquil Basheer, whose legacy shaped the field. Reflections poured in from across the ecosystem:



*“He didn't just lead programs or institutions, he shaped lives, mentored quietly, and showed up without fanfare.”*

- Convening Attendee

**Site Visit: Healing Hands at NCST,** Participants visited Newark Community Street Team's trauma center, witnessing how CVI work is deeply rooted in healing, trust-building, and frontline innovation.

# METHODOLOGY & DATA SOURCES

This report synthesizes qualitative and quantitative insights gathered before, during, and immediately following the CVI Action Plan Convening: *Advancing CVI: Investing in 10 Capacity Building, Wellness, and Professionalization*. The goal of this section is to clarify how insights were generated and how findings reflect the experience of participants across the CVI ecosystem.

## DATA SOURCES

Findings in this report draw from the following inputs:

**1. Post-Convening Participant Survey** - A structured post-convening survey was administered to participants following the event

- Total respondents: 25
- Survey completion rates ranged between 22–25 responses per question

The survey included:

- Session impact ratings (plenary and breakout sessions)
- Assessment of convening priorities
- Reflections on specific program components (e.g., Healing Hands event, Tribute to Commander Aquil Basheer)
- Open-ended qualitative feedback
- Venue and logistical feedback

Key quantitative indicators included:

- **95.65%** of respondents reported that their Day 2 breakout session was impactful to their work
- **82.61%** indicated the convening addressed “Training and Support for CVI Professionals”
- **78.26%** indicated it addressed “Building Organizational Infrastructure”

- **64%** strongly agreed and **24%** agreed that the convening was useful for their work
- **60%** strongly agreed and **24%** agreed that the convening met their expectations

**Data Limitations** - Survey participation was limited, as findings reflect the perspectives of those present and willing to respond. The data:

- Represents a specific moment in time
- Captures immediate post-convening impressions rather than long-term impact

Additionally, while satisfaction and usefulness indicators were high, several qualitative responses highlighted opportunities for clearer audience targeting, differentiated tracks by leadership level, and deeper skill-building components. These observations have been incorporated into recommendations for future convenings.

**2. Facilitated Session Documentation** - In addition to survey responses, insights were drawn from:

- Facilitated breakout discussions
- Panel notes and reflections
- Synthesis of plenary discussions
- Preparation meetings with speakers and facilitators
- Informal practitioner dialogue captured during networking spaces



### 3. Other Program Components

Experiential elements of the convening were also considered data sources. For example:

- **70.83%** of survey respondents attended the Healing Hands site visit with the Newark Community Street Team
- Among those who attended, a majority strongly agreed that it provided connection, storytelling, and an opportunity to witness community-led safety strategies in action
- **96%** attended the Tribute to Commander Aquil Basheer

Open-ended reflections on the tribute revealed strong themes of legacy, mentorship, accountability, and movement continuity. These reflections were incorporated into broader field-level analysis around leadership development within public safety.

**Analytic Approach** - Qualitative data was reviewed to identify:

- Session impact
- Alignment between stated convening priorities and participant perception
- Areas of strong consensus
- Areas of divergence or critique

Qualitative responses were analyzed, with attention to:

- Patterns and trends
- Role-based differences in experience
- Tensions between capacity-building for emerging organizations and advanced technical skill development for more established agencies/ leaders
- Opportunities surfaced by participants to inform future convenings

## PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

*“The tribute to Commander Aquil Basheer was deeply moving... It called me back to purpose, humility, and the long view of movement work.”*

*“We need different tracks for executive, management, frontline and technical assistance that continues after the convening.”*

*“Beautiful convening, but site visits and workshops shouldn’t compete. Give each their space.”*

*The Commander was very important and impactful in my journey into the world of Intervention. His teachings guided my approach, especially as a woman. Even after I moved on he always made himself available to advise and uplift me.”*

# CORE FINDINGS: WHAT WE LEARNED

The findings below reflect recurring themes that emerged across plenaries, breakout sessions, facilitated dialogue, and survey feedback.

**1. Infrastructure & Sustainability** - The field has matured faster than its infrastructure. As community-based public safety gains national momentum and demand increases, many organizations are being asked to function like long-standing mid-sized institutions while operating with start-up level support. This misalignment creates organizational fragility, as many groups are forced to prioritize outputs without the time, resources and space to adequately scale the work and organization together.

## ***Key Findings***

- Many CVI organizations deliver strong, effective programming, while operating with limited back-office infrastructure.
- Capacity gaps most frequently cited include finance systems, compliance, HR infrastructure, audit readiness, and succession planning.
- Funding volatility creates cycles of expansion and contraction that destabilize staffing, programming and long-term sustainability of organizations.
- Organizations are often expected to scale rapidly without receiving the general operating support necessary to do so.

## ***Implications for the Field***

- Investment in organizational infrastructure and capacity building must be treated as a violence prevention strategy.
- Multi-year, flexible funding is essential to reduce organizational risk cycles.
- Shared services models and back-office intermediaries may help mitigate capacity disparities.
- Succession planning and governance development should become normalized priorities for the field.



**2. Workforce & Wellness** - Community violence intervention depends on a workforce that is prepared, supported, and protected. Many frontline practitioners enter this work with long-term exposure to violence, incarceration, victimization, and trauma. While that experience can serve as an asset within the work, it also requires intentional organizational design. Organizations must be scaled to support the workforce through structured hiring, onboarding, supervision, compensation, and internal policy design. Community violence intervention depends on a workforce that is prepared, supported, and protected.

### **Key Findings**

- Practitioners consistently described high levels of trauma exposure and emotional labor.
- Staff retention challenges are linked to compensation instability and workload strain.
- Wellness programming often focuses on individual coping strategies like self-care rather than systems-level offerings like adequate compensation and benefits, trauma informed supervision models, and workplace culture that uplifts boundaries and rest. The field desperately needs both.
- There is growing consensus around establishing minimum standards for pay, benefits packages that directly address the needs of the field, and trauma-informed hiring and supervision.

### **Panelist Reflection:**

“What workforce development is fundamentally about, is putting as much energy into people, into human beings, as possible, that is workforce development.”

- Toby Saunders



### **Implications for the Field**

- Minimum compensation and benefit standards should be advanced as a collective priority.
- Trauma-informed supervision must move from theory to institutional practice.
- Wellness strategies should address workload, staffing ratios, and policy design, not only individual self-care.
- Funders and public agencies must align contract structures with workforce realities.

**3. Ecosystem Coordination** - The field's strength lies in its relational foundation, yet funding structures often incentivize fragmentation. Ecosystem health depends on coordination, trust, and shared standards. Without intentional alignment, duplication increases and collective power diminishes.

### ***Key Findings***

- Regional ecosystems with strong coordination structures demonstrate greater stability and policy influence.
- Competition for limited funding can undermine collaboration and shared learning.
- Intermediaries and technical assistance providers play a critical role in bridging capacity gaps.
- Participants expressed interest in clearer pathways for peer learning and national alignment.
- There is an appetite for affinity spaces by leadership level (frontline, management, executive) to support differentiated learning.

### ***Implications for the Field***

- Regional backbone organizations can strengthen ecosystem resilience.
- Shared training standards and national protocols can increase coherence.
- Convenings should consider differentiated tracks and affinity spaces.
- Collaboration incentives should be embedded in funding design.



**4. Power, Narrative, and Policy** - The field is entering a new phase of visibility. Increased recognition brings opportunity, but also heightened scrutiny and risk. Without protective policy design and narrative clarity, professionalization may increase vulnerability rather than security.

### ***Key Findings***

- Public narrative significantly shapes funding flows and policy decisions.
- Community-based public safety is often celebrated during positive outcomes but scrutinized disproportionately during setbacks.
- There are ongoing tensions between lived expertise and institutional authority.
- Professionalization brings credibility but can also create pressure to conform to models not designed for community-rooted work.

### ***Implications for the Field***

- Narrative strategy must be treated as infrastructure, not communications.
- Policy advocacy should focus on permanent investment structures, not pilot cycles.
- Professionalization must be accompanied by worker protections and governance safeguards.
- The field must define its standards before they are defined externally.



# FIELD-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

The insights surfaced during this convening point to a clear conclusion. Community-based public safety is effective and growing, but its sustainability depends on deliberate structural alignment. The following are recommendations for future-proofing the field:

## Conduct Organizational Infrastructure Self-Assessments

**Recommendation:** Deploy a field-wide infrastructure assessment tool to help organizations identify capacity gaps in finance, governance, HR, and compliance.

## Scale Training & Technical Assistance Infrastructure

**Recommendation:** Establish a nationally aligned training and certification infrastructure that preserves fidelity to foundational CVI standards while allowing for local adaptation, and creates tiered professional development tracks for frontline practitioners, managers, and executive leadership.

## Invest in Shared Back-Office and Fiscal Support Models

**Recommendation:** Pilot shared services models (finance, HR, compliance) for smaller or emerging community-led safety organizations.

## Formalize Regional Ecosystem Coordination

**Recommendation:** Support the development of regional CVI councils or backbone organizations to coordinate funding, policy advocacy, and shared learning.

## Develop Wellness Infrastructure

**Recommendation:** Develop comprehensive wellness infrastructure across CVI organizations that moves beyond individual self-care and institutionalizes trauma-informed supervision, equitable compensation, manageable caseloads, and sustainable staffing models.



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