

Crises and Opportunities for Community Violence Intervention

Lessons and recommendations from the history of federal public safety grantmaking

Executive Summary | Author: John Maki | May 2024



This policy brief is intended for community and government leaders looking for strategies to sustain community violence intervention (CVI) programs, as they plan for the impending expiration of early-pandemic-era federal funding. Drawing lessons from the history of federal public safety grantmaking, it argues that this situation not only presents challenges in assessing these programs and finding sustainable resources for the most promising ones. It also offers an opportunity to examine and improve the laws, policies, and practices that shape government grantmaking.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

State-level: Government and community leaders should reform state grantmaking structures to support and enhance community violence intervention programs

- **Assess and overhaul state-government grantmaking** laws, policies, and practices
- **Evaluate and sustain promising CVI programs** and other gun-violence reduction initiatives supported by federal COVID-stimulus funding and other temporary grant programs
- **Identify sustainable resources** to support and strengthen program outcomes

National-level: CVI providers should create a national coalition for community violence intervention programs to build federal support and provide assistance to programs at the state and local levels

- **Advocate for a standing formula fund for CVI programs** modeled on the Department of Justice's major formula funds

Overview

This brief is dedicated to developing a framework to help community and government leaders assess and identify potential resources for promising community violence intervention (CVI) programs and other gun-violence reduction initiatives currently supported by federal funds set to expire in the next few years. The framework underscores the importance of bringing together efforts to support grant-funded programs and reforming government grantmaking laws, policies, and practices. The brief is organized into the following sections.

Section I provides an overview of recent federal support for CVI programs and the threats these efforts face.

Section II delves into how prevailing assumptions about government grantmaking limit its effectiveness and suggests a reevaluation to unlock its creative potential by fostering collaborative partnerships between grantors and grantees.

Section III distills lessons from the history of federal investments in state and local safety initiatives to inform ongoing efforts to support CVI programs. This includes forming a nationwide coalition comprising CVI providers at the state and local levels, along with the establishment of a dedicated federal formula fund specifically for CVI programs.

Section IV concludes the brief offering an outline of recommendations and implementation steps to guide future actions.

I. Crises: Fiscal cliffs, doom loops, and other impending threats to gun violence reductions programs

In 2020, as the pandemic and social and economic unrest swept across the United States, communities experienced substantial increases in violent crime, with the nation's largest cities seeing homicide rates escalate by an unprecedented 30 percent.¹ While this spike marked a general shift from two decades of mostly declining crime rates, it had especially severe impacts on populations that had long suffered from disproportionately high rates of violent victimization, particularly homicides. Before 2019, for instance, Black Americans were almost 12 times more likely to be victims of firearm homicides than Whites and a little more than 4 times more likely than Latinos. From 2019 through 2022, while almost all ethnic and racial groups in the United States experienced increases in firearm homicides, the rate for Black Americans increased by almost 50 percent, from 20.5 to 30.4 per 100,000 people.²

This historic spike in violent-crime rates inspired advocacy, policy analyses, and collaborations across the country. From the grassroots of the hardest-hit communities to the Executive Office of the President, a movement of advocates led by [Invest In Us](#) and [Fund Peace](#) coalesced around calls for the federal government to fund a broad range of programs to reduce gun violence and address its racial and ethnic disparities. This included arguments to invest in community violence intervention (CVI) programs, a term that refers to a body of

¹ Rosenfeld, R., Thomas, A., & Lopez, E. (2021). Pandemic, Social Unrest, and Crime in U.S. Cities 2020 Year-End Update. Council on Criminal Justice. Washington.

build.neoninspire.com/counciloncj/wp-content/uploads/sites/96/2021/07/Year-End-Crime-Update_Designed.pdf

² Simon, T. R., Kegler, S. R., Zwald, M. L., Chen, M. S., Mercy, J. A., Jones, C. M., & Stone, D. M. (2022). Notes from the field: increases in firearm homicide and suicide rates—United States, 2020–2021. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 71(40), 1286.

cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7140a4.htm

community-centered, multidisciplinary strategies that engage individuals and groups to prevent and interrupt violence.³

As a result of this advocacy, the federal government took a series of legislative and administrative actions to support gun-violence reduction programs. The most notable example of these efforts was the American Rescue Plan Act's (ARPA) [State and Local Recovery Funds](#) (SLR Funds). Through this program, Congress allocated \$350 billion to the executive branches of state and local governments, requiring that they obligate their funds by the end of 2024 and spend them by the end of 2026. In SLR Funds' mandate, ARPA granted an exceptional level of discretion to state and local governments to use their allocations to support responses to the public-health crises caused by the pandemic. As outlined in SLR Funds' administrative rules and emphasized by a substantial body of non-governmental technical support, analysis, and advocacy, this discretion included the power for state and local governments to support not only criminal-justice based interventions, but also "[to advance CVI strategies](#)."⁴

Since 2020, violent crimes have substantially declined. Community and government leaders now face a new set of problems, including finding alternative sources of funding for federally funded CVI programs.

In addition to pandemic-stimulus funds, Congress mandated two five-year programs in the [Bipartisan Safer Community Act of 2022](#) to address gun violence. The [Byrne JAG State Crisis Intervention Program](#) is mandated to support initiatives like extreme-risk protection orders (ERPOs) to prevent people at risk of perpetrating gun violence from accessing firearms. Additionally, the [Community Violence Prevention and Intervention Initiative](#) is dedicated to supporting CVI initiatives, specifically focusing on programs that serve people at high risk of both perpetrating and falling victim to gun violence.

Alongside these legislative initiatives, the Biden Administration took related steps to refine the priorities of existing federal grant and technical-assistance programs. These actions involved clarifying how [funding and other resources](#) from federal agencies can support state and local governments and nonprofit service organizations in implementing gun-violence intervention and reduction programs. To provide institutional leadership and support for these efforts, President Biden issued an executive order in fall 2023 that established a new [Office of Gun Violence Prevention](#) in the White House. Dedicated to helping "[implement and expand upon key executive and legislative action](#)," the Office takes up the call of the Department of Justice's comprehensive strategy to reduce gun violence, to "[build trust and earn legitimacy](#)" through facilitating partnerships between government and the people and communities it serves.

After dramatically spiking in 2020, violent-crime rates began to decrease in most jurisdictions.⁵ And while homicide rates in early 2024 remain higher than pre-pandemic levels, they have also significantly declined.⁶

³ Bureau of Justice Assistance. (2022). Community Based Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative Implementation Checklist. Washington. bja.ojp.gov/program/community-violence-intervention/implementation-checklist

⁴ For analyses of SLR Funds, see Kass, A. & Rocco, P. (2023). Covid Funds for Violence Intervention. covidfundsforviolenceintervention.com; National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform. (2023). Highlights of ARPA Funded Violence Reduction Efforts. Oakland. nicjr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/ARPA-Highlights-Report-2023.pdf; and Brookings Institution. (2022). Local Government ARPA Investment Tracker. Washington. brookings.edu/articles/arpa-investment-tracker

⁵ For analysis of crime during the pandemic, see Council on Criminal Justice series of Crime Trends Reports, available at counciloncj.org/category/crime-trends.

⁶ Council on Criminal Justice. (2023). Trends in Homicide: What We Know, December 2023. Washington. counciloncj.org/homicide-trends-report; Council on Criminal Justice. (2024). Crime Trends in U.S. Cities: Year-End 2023 Update. Washington. counciloncj.org/year-end-2023-crime-trends

Among racial and ethnic groups, Black Americans saw the largest decrease in firearm-homicide rates, dropping by more than 9 percent (30.4 to 27.5 per 100,000) from 2021 to 2022, for instance.⁷

Given upcoming fiscal cliffs that state and local jurisdictions face, stemming from the impending expiration of the recent infusions of federal resources, it's crucial that community and government leaders find resources to support programs that will help sustain these reductions in violence and to protect against new potential challenges. One challenge stems from how the pandemic has shifted work patterns. Based on a weekly updated analysis of representative cities, the average downtown office-occupancy rate is approximately half of its pre-2019 levels.⁸ The diminishing numbers working in downtown offices has led to reduced demand for businesses reliant on office-based clientele, increasing vacancies and closures. If this pattern continues, analysts express concern that it may trigger vicious cycles or so-called “doom loops” for cities nationwide.⁹ In this scenario, closures of downtown establishments could reduce crucial tax revenues needed to support local infrastructure and services. This, in turn, could affect local resources for a wide range of programs and services that are vital for safety and well-being, including CVI programs. Declines in revenue may hinder efforts to address spikes in crime, further discouraging people from working or visiting downtown areas, and thereby intensifying the cycle of decreased revenue and limited capacity to prevent crime and promote community well-being. Critics have rightly argued that this analysis and its deterministic rhetoric underplay the power that people have to alter these dynamics,¹⁰ which is precisely why this analysis warrants the attention of community and government leaders. It's not because the most pessimistic scenarios are certain to come true, but rather because it underscores the urgent need to understand the complex threats to governmental resources and to take actions to address them.

II. Realizing the potential of government grantmaking

There is no doubt that the uncertain conditions in which community and government leaders find themselves present a daunting set of challenges, but they also offer important opportunities. The infusion of federal resources to state and local governments at the onset of the pandemic has highlighted how governmental support can bolster CVI programs and other gun-violence reduction initiatives as they cultivate collaborative relationships among government, grant-funded programs, and communities that build trust and earn legitimacy—essential elements for ensuring people's safety and flourishing.¹¹ At the same time, state and local efforts to use federal funds have raised awareness of the substantial and longstanding difficulties that can come with using government funds to support community programs. These challenges range from community-based

⁷ Simon et al. (2022).

⁸ Kastle. (March 20, 2024). Kastle back to work barometer: Weekly occupancy reports from Kastle access control system data, 12.11.23. kastle.com/safety-wellness/getting-america-back-to-work

⁹ See Van Nieuwerburgh, S. (2023). The remote work revolution: Impact on real estate values and the urban environment: 2023 AREUEA Presidential Address. *Real Estate Economics*, 51(1), 7-48. doi.org/10.1111/1540-6229.12422; Volker Alliance. (2023, January 1). Revenue crises loom for cities with work-from-home outlasting pandemic. New York.

volkeralliance.org/events/special-briefing-future-downtowns. Critics have also pushed back against these predictions.

¹⁰ See, for example, Karma, R. (2024, March 22). Whatever happened to the urban doom loop. *The Atlantic* theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2024/03/urban-doom-loop-american-cities/677847; Fonseca, R. (2024, January 18). How doomed is San Francisco? Some say rumors of the city's downward spiral are greatly exaggerated. *Los Angeles Times*. latimes.com/california/newsletter/2024-01-18/how-doomed-is-san-francisco-some-say-rumors-of-the-citys-downward-spiral-a-re-greatly-exaggerated-essential-california. Note the researcher who used the term “doom loop” in the context of post-covid pandemic city economies, Stijn Van Nieuwerburgh, remarked at the end of 2023 that “New York City appears to be recovering to a better extent than most large U. S. cities.” Venugopal, A. (2024, January 1). “Doom loop professor says things are actually looking up for New York City. *Gothamist*. gothamist.com/news/doom-loop-professor-says-things-are-actually-looking-up-for-new-york-city

¹¹ For a recent overview of some of the research on the relationship among trust, legitimacy, and safety, see National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2022). *Developing Policing Practices that Build Legitimacy*. Washington. doi.org/10.17226/26678

How can jurisdictions' experiences with using federal funds to support CVI programs help build sustainable support for promising programs and, in so doing, cultivate trust and earn legitimacy?

organizations struggling with government grant requirements to the complexities that government agencies face working with organizations that lack experience in receiving government grants.¹² To avoid these obstacles, it's not uncommon for even well-established CVI organizations to forgo applying for federal funds based on their assessment that they would have to hire a team of staff to oversee the data and financial-reporting requirements.¹³ These kinds of challenges make it difficult for grantmaking agencies

and grant-funded organizations to collaborate and realize the full potential of grant-funded programs to improve safety and well-being. Just as importantly, they can also cause communities to grow cynical about the competencies and intentions of government leaders, which can jeopardize the trust and undermine the legitimacy that governments need to engage the communities they serve.¹⁴

The impending end of ARPA and the uncertainty of future federal support for CVI programs thus raise a critical question for community and government leaders: How can jurisdictions' experiences with using federal funds to support CVI programs help build sustainable support for promising programs and, in so doing, cultivate trust and earn legitimacy? This question points to a two-pronged approach. Community and government leaders should seek to assess the impact of federally funded CVI programs on violent crime and other outcomes related to community safety and well-being, aiming to identify resources for the most promising programs. At the same time, leaders should also look for ways to examine their state's grantmaking experiences with an explicit goal of improving what this brief will call government "grantmaking structures," that is, the collections of laws, policies, practices, processes, and assumptions that government agencies use to administer grant funding.

This two-pronged approach of assessing and refining government grant-funded programs and grantmaking structures may seem self-evident, but it's hard to find examples to draw and learn from. While there is a growing body of research and best practices that community and government leaders can turn to to assess and support promising CVI programs, there is no equivalent evidence base to assist them in assessing and refining government grantmaking structures.¹⁵ This problem runs deeper than a mere lack of research and best practices. Even though federal, state, and local government grants constitute a large share of overall government spending—with federal grants accounting for more than 30 percent of states' budgets nationwide, and around 5 percent of the federal government—grantmaking is not typically regarded as a distinct discipline or field within government that receives the kind of substantive attention from researchers and policymakers

¹² For a broad overview of some of these challenges, see Pronita Gupta, P., & Maxson, J. (2023, June 14). Getting Federal Dollars to Communities: An Action Agenda. *Nonprofit Quarterly*. nonprofitquarterly.org/getting-federal-dollars-to-communities-an-action-agenda

¹³ This is based on interviews with a CVI organization that wishes to remain anonymous and the author's experience overseeing federal-government grants.

¹⁴ On the relationship between legal cynicism and safety, see Kirk, D. S., & Matsuda, M. (2011). Legal cynicism, collective efficacy, and the ecology of arrest. *Criminology*, 49(2), 443–472. doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.2011.00226.x; Kirk, D. S., & Papachristos, A. V. (2011). Cultural mechanisms and the persistence of neighborhood violence. *American Journal of Sociology*, 116(4), 1190–1233. doi.org/10.1086/655754; LaFree, G. (1997). Social institutions and the crime bust of the 1990s. *Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology*, 88, 1325. doi.org/10.2307/1144258; Morenoff, J. D., Sampson, R. J., & Raudenbush, S. W. (2001). Neighborhood inequality, collective efficacy, and the spatial dynamics of urban violence. *Criminology*, 39(3), 517–558. doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.2001.tb00932.x; and Sampson, R. J., Raudenbush, S. W., & Earls, F. (1997). Neighborhoods and violent crime: A multilevel study of collective efficacy. *Science*, 277(5328), 918–924. doi.org/10.1126/science.277.5328.918

¹⁵ For efforts to improve government grantmaking, see, e.g., National Criminal Justice Association. (n.d.) Strategic Planning Toolkit. Washington. ncja.org/strategic-planning-toolkit

comparable, say, to criminal justice or public health.¹⁶ Indeed, unless it's to commend the appropriation of grant funds or to criticize the decisions of grantmaking agencies, elected officials, policymakers, and community stakeholders seldom acknowledge government grantmaking or fully recognize the impact that grantmaking-agency staff can have on their efforts to enhance individual and community-level outcomes.

The kind of attention given to government grantmaking indicate some key assumptions that shape its understanding and administration. Take, for example, the fact that state-government grantmaking agencies that administer federal funds are usually referred to as “pass-throughs.”¹⁷ This is a particularly revealing term. It underscores how government grantmaking in general is assumed to be an essentially simple transaction that should enable legislators to use taxpayer funds to purchase outcomes like public safety. This assumption helps explain why grantmaking structures attract so little substantive interest or curiosity. For if government grantmaking were actually reducible to what this brief will call the “pass-through framework,” there would be little for community and government leaders, researchers, and other stakeholders to investigate or be curious about. When government grantmaking is understood through the passthrough framework, the most important question for community and government leaders to raise is, how can they hold grant makers and grantees “accountable”? This typically means ensuring that there are restrictions and reporting requirements in place that attempt to tightly control government grantmaking policy and practice.

Stakeholders often underestimate the positive and negative impact government grant-making can have on efforts to reduce community violence.

Promoting governmental accountability is crucial. However, community and government leaders should question if the passthrough framework actually provides them with the kind of understanding they need to promote more accountable and effective government grantmaking. Consider, for instance, how the passthrough framework conceptualizes legislative grantmaking mandates. If this framework accurately depicted how government grantmaking accurately works, it would mean that legislative mandates would have to provide grantmaking agencies with

transparent and precise spending instructions that enable staff to simply execute the legislators' intentions. To put it simply, grantmaking mandates do not work this way. Instead, they tend to require complex work and subject-matter expertise from grantmaking staff. This complexity arises from the political and substantive nature of most government grants. To garner support from a majority of state and especially federal legislators, grantmaking mandates are designed to benefit their constituents. The broader and more adaptable a mandate is, the easier it becomes for legislators to understand how it addresses their particular needs. On a substantive level, government grantmaking frequently focuses on problems and outcomes that legislative mandates can point to but cannot fully explain in appropriation language. Thus, rather than initiating a simple straightforward passthrough process, legislative grantmaking mandates typically start a complex process of interpretation, which is necessarily administered by grantmaking staff.

¹⁶ See Thiess, R., Theal, J., & Watkins, K. (2023). *Pandemic Aid Lifts Federal Share of State Budgets to New Highs*. Philadelphia: Pew Charitable Trusts.
pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2023/08/28/pandemic-aid-lifts-federal-share-of-state-budgets-to-new-highs

¹⁷ See, for example, Grants.gov. (2016, August 30). *What is a government grant and pass-through funding?*
grantsgovprod.wordpress.com/2016/08/30/what-is-a-government-grant-and-pass-through-funding

There is no such thing as a pure pass-through

While state grantmaking agencies are often referred to as “pass-throughs,” this term gives a misleading picture of the reality of government grantmaking. In practice, there is no such thing as a pass-through because agency staff always shape the funding opportunities and the outcomes grantees are able to achieve.

Take, for example, one of the core mandates of ARPA’s SLR Funds, which specifies that state and local executive branches can use allocations “to respond to the public health emergency or its negative economic impacts, including assistance to households, small businesses, and nonprofits.”¹⁸ While this mandate clearly identifies a broad purpose and potential grantees, the core policy concepts it implicates, especially what it means “to respond to the public health emergency” caused by COVID, could not be easily understood or implemented by federal, state, and local implementing government agencies without a rigorous and complex process of interpretation. The inherent difficulty of this work explains why it took the staff of the Department of the Treasury, the federal agency tasked with overseeing the SLR Funds under ARPA, several months to engage in internal discussions and meet with subject-matter experts and stakeholders about what a public-health emergency means and what are appropriate ways to respond to it before codifying final regulations for state and local government grantmakers.

Beyond ignoring the challenging and complex work that is required to interpret grantmaking mandates, the pass-through framework also obscures the significant roles played by the staff of government agencies and grant-funded programs. From an administrative perspective, the actual process of making and implementing grants can never simply be reduced to a single mandate. Grantmaking mandates implicate a host of factors and a broad range of administrative choices, from interpreting and implementing associated laws, policies, and regulations to managing the legacy of past grant experiences, grantmaking agency culture and staff competencies, and political dynamics that mediate the funding process. Similarly, grant-funded programs can influence the government agencies that fund them in various ways. The most high-profile forms of this kind of power include influencing the executive appointments of agency leaders and lobbying state legislators on laws and appropriations that influence agency operations. Lower-profile, but equally significant, influence comes from the working relationships between grant programs and agency line staff, who have the power to shape how programs are monitored and funded.

This overview shows how the pass-through framework paints a misleading picture of how government grantmaking actually works. Contrary to the way the pass-through framework envisions government grantmaking, the staff of government agencies and grant-funded programs are never mere instruments tasked with fulfilling legislative grantmaking mandates. Their efforts and, more fundamentally, the relationships and insights they cultivate, play substantive roles in shaping the outcomes they achieve. Of course, for their work to realize its full potential, they must have sufficient funding and staffing to carry out their respective roles. A sufficient level of resources is also essential for them to build trust with each other, which, in turn, can enable them to collaborate and earn the trust of the people and communities they serve and promote governmental legitimacy. In these ways, grantmaking and grant-funded-program staff constitute an indispensable resource

¹⁸ United States Federal Register. (2022, January 27). Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds. [federalregister.gov/documents/2022/01/27/2022-00292/coronavirus-state-and-local-fiscal-recovery-funds](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/01/27/2022-00292/coronavirus-state-and-local-fiscal-recovery-funds)

which exists alongside of the funding they program. But as long as the understanding of government grantmaking is reduced to the pass-through framework, community and government leaders will struggle to fully appreciate or harness the dynamic role and positive potential inherent in the relationships between the staffs of grantmaking agencies and of the programs they fund. Instead, the pass-through framework will encourage community and government leaders to notice this administrative influence only when something goes (or seems to go) wrong. Examples of this kind of negative attention include audit findings that point out agency failures to comply with relevant policies, instances of fraud or abuse, or other kinds of criticism that highlight the restrictive role that government grantmaking structures impose on grant programs and the outcomes they are expected to produce. This attention tends to inspire government leaders to add new requirements and restrictions to government grantmaking structures or to demand different actions from and changes in agency leadership. While these actions are taken in the name of holding government agencies accountable, and may be necessary given the particular situations they are addressing, this all-too-common approach assumes, usually without questions, that the best way to achieve this purpose is to always make grantmaking conform to the pass-through framework. Tellingly, government leaders rarely question if these efforts are effective at achieving their intended purposes. It's difficult to find examples where leaders look for ways to promote accountability and improve grantmaking-agency and program performance by eliminating unnecessary requirements or by directly asking staff of grantmaking agencies and programs how changes in laws and policy can support what they need to do their jobs. This is a profound missed opportunity.

When grantmaking agencies and grantees have the power and resources they need to work together, they can produce better outcomes and cultivate trust and legitimacy.

This section has argued that government grantmaking is not only more complicated in practice than the prevailing pass-through framework suggests but also, at its best, more collaborative, creative, and open to learning and development. To sustain CVI programs and other violence-reduction initiatives that have been supported through temporary early-pandemic-era federal funding, community and government leaders should seek to realize the potential that inheres in the work of the staff within grantmaking agencies and grant-funded programs. As the recommendations below detail, this should involve assessing the promise of CVI and other

violence-reduction initiatives and the efficacy of grantmaking structures with the explicit purpose of removing unnecessary barriers to government grantmaking and grant-funded programs. These efforts will help community and government leaders determine how they can more effectively leverage and advocate for federal funding opportunities. To support this work, this brief will now turn to an analysis of lessons from the history of federal public-safety grantmaking.

III. Lessons from the history of federal public-safety grantmaking

Since the 1970s, federal grants to state and local public-safety programs have been instrumental in sparking innovations and shaping and sustaining state and local responses to crime and violence. While a few scholars have examined aspects of this history, there has been little effort to mine it for evidence of what has worked and

what has failed to inform and improve government grantmaking structures.¹⁹ As a result, analyses and recommendations for government grantmaking often fail to fully consider their practical realities. Among other things, this failure could lead to pursuing ideas that appear promising in the abstract but are unlikely to work in practice. This brief will not attempt to provide a comprehensive account of federal grantmaking, which would assess different federal agencies that might house CVI programs. Instead, it will focus on key moments in the history of DOJ grantmaking. To be clear, though: this is not an argument that CVI funds should necessarily be housed within DOJ as opposed to other federal grantmaking agencies. While DOJ has housed funding and other support for CVI programs for some time, and while there are arguments to continue building support for CVI within DOJ, there are certainly other agencies that could perform this role. As such, while the following analysis and recommendations are tailored to DOJ, they can be applied to other federal grantmaking agencies.

KEY LESSONS FROM THE LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE ADMINISTRATION (LEAA)

- Federal public-safety grant programs depend on initiatives that prioritize state and local programs and, at the same time, gain the backing of a majority of members of Congress.
- The legacy of federal public-safety grantmaking has established a state-based administrative, research, and planning infrastructure, centered around State Administering Agencies and Statistical Analysis Centers, which is equipped to support future federal-funding initiatives.



The federal government's first major attempt to use grants to support state and local public safety begins with the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA).²⁰ Established in DOJ by the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, LEAA used a new federal formula block grant to fund a wide range of initiatives at the state and local levels, from law-enforcement recruitment and training to crime prevention. This was a significant innovation in federal government and American public safety policy more generally. Like any new government program, LEAA struggled to realize all the expectations that were placed upon it. Over its history, it was criticized for reasons that will be familiar to anyone who works with federal public-safety grants, from its onerous reporting requirements to the insufficiency and instability of federal funding.²¹ While this criticism is justified, it's important not to lose sight of LEAA's accomplishments and what community and government leaders can still learn from its legacy. The most important insights stem from LEAA's relationship to state and local jurisdictions. Rather than concentrating decisionmaking solely at the federal level, LEAA used its formula award to build the capacities of state and local decisionmakers, effectively inventing state-based criminal-justice planning and its corresponding administrative infrastructure.²² For states to receive their allocations of LEAA's federal formula funds, they had to first establish State Planning Agencies (SPAs). The SPAs

¹⁹ See, for example, Newmark, L., Bonderman, J., Smith, B., & Liner, B. (2003). National evaluation of state Victims of Crime Act assistance and compensation programs: Trends and strategies for the future. Report to the National Institute of Justice. Washington: Urban Institute; Dunworth, T. (1997). National Assessment of the Byrne Formula Grant Program (Vol. 3). Washington: National Institute of Justice; Office of Justice Programs. (1996). LEAA/OJP Retrospective: 30 Years of Federal Support to State and Local Criminal Justice: Summary. Washington: Government Printing Office; Feeley, M., & Sarat, A. (1980). *The Policy Dilemma: Federal Crime Policy and the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, 1968-1978*. St. Paul: U of Minnesota.

²⁰ For more information about LEAA and its legacy, see Foster, J. P., & Hughes, C. (2014). Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. *The Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice* Sage Publications, 1-5; Feeley, M., & Sarat, A. (1980). *The Policy Dilemma: Federal Crime Policy and the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, 1968-1978*. St. Paul U of Minnesota; Office of Justice Program. (1996), LEAA/OJP Retrospective: 30 Years of Federal Support to State and Local Criminal Justice: Summary. Washington: Government Printing Office.

²¹ Feeley et al. (1980).

²² Foster, J. P., & Hughes, C. (2014). Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. In Albanese, J. (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, v. 3. Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell.

were responsible for engaging their state and local public-safety stakeholders in strategic-planning processes, using research and data collection to identify their most pressing crime problems and then submitting a plan to LEAA that specified how the SPA would use its allocation of federal funds to address them. The federal, state, and local partnerships that LEAA built through SPAs laid the foundation for the grantmaking infrastructure that state and local governments still use today to administer federal formula funds. Despite these innovations at the state and local levels, LEAA ultimately lost the support of Congress, which let its authorization lapse in 1980.

STATE ADMINISTERING AGENCIES AND STATISTICAL CENTERS: ESSENTIAL RESOURCES FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING, RESEARCH, AND FUNDING

State Administering Agencies (SAAs) are state-level agencies responsible for administering federal funding and technical assistance from DOJ.

While they vary considerably from state to state, all SAAs are tasked with administering DOJ Bureau of Justice Assistance Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grants (JAG). Depending on the decision of their respective state leaders, many SAAs are also charged with administering other formula and discretionary grants from DOJ's grantmaking agencies, including the Office on Violence Against Women, Office for Victims of Crime, and Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS).

With support from BJS, Statistical Analysis Centers (SACs) are state agencies that use data and research to improve their state and local justice systems.

SACs are housed in a variety of settings, including 32 that are co-located with their SAAs. Funded in part by annual discretionary grants from BJS, SACs are dedicated to analyzing and reporting crime and justice statistics to local, state, and federal governments and stakeholders.

For more information on SAAs, see the [National Criminal Justice Association](#); for more information on SACs, see the [Justice Information Network](#) (formerly Justice Research and Statistics Association).



LEAA's brief history offers two major lessons for today's community and government leaders. Just as LEAA focused on building state and local planning and program capacities, current federal funding for CVI is rightfully focused on the essential and hard work of investing in local organizations, many of which had limited or no experience with government grantmaking. At the same time, if leaders hope to secure future federal support for CVI programs, they should not forget the fate of LEAA, which built up state and local infrastructure but failed to win a sufficient number of allies in Congress. While local capacity building requires significant time and resources, community and government leaders should ensure that they are not only keeping their federal legislators informed but also, as this brief will discuss in more detail below, working in concert with CVI organizations across the country who are engaged in similar outreach to maintain broad support in Congress.

The second major lesson for community and government leaders is to take advantage of existing state and federal infrastructure when possible. The administrative and planning functions of the LEAA funded SPAs, for instance, continue to play a vital role in administering funding and supporting research and technical assistance through a nationwide network of State Administering Agencies (SAAs) and Statistical Analysis Centers (SACs). While not every SAA and SAC may be ideally suited to partner with CVI programs, their decades of experience in administering and supporting federal formula awards, along with their longstanding relationships with federal administrative staff and leaders, make them valuable partners. Somewhat counterintuitively, working

within existing government infrastructure can also help protect new CVI programs. It might seem that the best way for the federal government to support non-governmental programs is to fund them directly, thus avoiding an additional layer of state or local government. Additionally, it might appear beneficial for a new program priority to have its own dedicated government agency or office. However, directly funding non-governmental organizations or creating a new governmental entity to support CVI programs can make them more vulnerable to funding cuts and erosion of political support, whereas longstanding governmental entities are better protected against these risks.²³

Along with providing this potential support, SAAs and SACs offer several other advantages. Dedicated to helping state and local stakeholders identify crime problems and determine how government resources can address them, SAAs and SACs can also help community and government leaders see how CVI programs fit within existing state and local public-safety strategies and programming. Among other things, this can help CVI programs potentially leverage existing resources, as well as access other potential federal funding sources including programs that the White House has promoted in its [Comprehensive Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gun Crime and Ensure Public Safety](#). While it's critical that CVI take advantage of all existing resources, it's important to emphasize that there's nothing in the history of federal grantmaking to suggest that this strategy will be sufficient to build lasting support. As the next section highlights, a stable source of funding historically depends on establishing a dedicated grant program.

KEY LESSON FROM DOJ FORMULA AWARDS

- The establishment and administration of DOJ's major formula funds have relied on the development and support of national nongovernmental coalitions of state and local service providers and advocates as well as research, policy, and technical-assistance organizations.



After LEAA was disbanded, not only did DOJ continue many of its state and local grant-funded programs, but Congress soon established the major formula funds that continue to fund public-safety programs across the country. A brief history of how this happened provides an important roadmap, insight into what has worked, for community and government leaders who want to build federal support for CVI programs. In 1984, Congress created the [Office of Justice Programs](#) to oversee a suite of offices, including the [Bureau of Justice Assistance](#), [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#), and [National Institute of Justice](#), that were dedicated to research, data collection, technical assistance, and grantmaking. At the same time, acting upon recommendations from President Reagan's [Task Force on Victims of Crime](#) and advocacy of state and national victim advocates and service providers, Congress enacted the [Victims of Crime Act](#). This established a new state formula award, and eventually a new office within OJP, the [Office for Victims of Crime](#), to administer funding to state-based crime-victim-compensation programs and state and local victim services.²⁴ During the 1980s and early 1990s, many of the same state and national coalition of victim advocates, providers, and criminal-justice leaders built support in Congress and the White House for other federal formula awards, which helped them to protect funds when they were threatened with cuts and create more stable foundations for them. In the [Anti-Drug Abuse Act](#)

²³ See, Kaufman, H. (1976). *Are Government Organizations Immortal?* Washington: Brookings.

²⁴ For a general history of DOJ grantmaking, see Congressional Research Service. (2008, January 16). An Overview and Funding History of Select Department of Justice (DOJ) Grant Programs. [everycrsreport.com/reports/RL33489.html](https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL33489.html)

of 1988, for instance, Congress created the Byrne Award, a formula award named after a New York City police officer who was killed in the line of duty. The Byrne Award consolidated and expanded support for criminal-justice programs and state and local funding strategies from LEAA and the [1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act](#); in 2005, it was combined with another formula award, Local Law Enforcement Block Grant, to become today's [Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant \(JAG\) Program](#).²⁵ And in 1994, coalitions of state and national advocates and providers of services for sexual assault and domestic-violence victims worked with federal leaders to enact the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) as title IV of the [Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act](#); among other things, VAWA established the [Office on Violence Against Women](#) to administer [formula awards](#), including by federal mandate to state domestic-violence and sexual-assault services coalitions to provide services.²⁶



DOJ FORMULA AWARDS: A SELECTED OVERVIEW

- The Department of Justice (DOJ) grantmaking offices administer several grant programs for state and local governmental and nongovernmental entities. The enabling statute of each grant program establishes the purposes for which its funds must be used. Funding levels are determined through annual appropriations and allocated according to formulas based primarily on population.
- The [Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant \(JAG\)](#) program, administered by the Bureau of Justice Assistance at the federal level and SAAs at the state level, serves as the primary provider of federal justice funding for state and local jurisdictions, offering financial support for the program areas: law enforcement; prosecution and court; prevention and education; corrections and community corrections, including reentry; drug treatment and enforcement; planning, evaluation, and technology improvement; crime-victim and witness initiatives; mental-health programs and related law enforcement and corrections programs, including behavioral programs and crisis-intervention teams; and implementation of state crisis-intervention court proceedings and related programs or initiatives.
- The [Victims of Crime Grant Assistance \(VOCA\)](#) program, administered by the [Office for Victims of Crime](#) at the federal level and executive agencies at the state level, supports grantmaking to victim-service programs administered by nongovernmental organizations and government agencies.

²⁵ James, N. (2013). Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program. Washington: Congressional Research Service; Dunworth, T. (1997). National Assessment of the Byrne Formula Grant Program (Vol. 3). Washington: National Institute of Justice..

²⁶ Laney, G. P. (2010). Violence against women act: History and federal funding. Washington: Congressional Research Service.

This short overview of DOJ's major formula awards glosses over substantial aspects of their 40-year history. It does not do justice to the battles that advocates, providers, and government leaders fought to secure funding, or how they have endured the chronic instability of annual appropriations that plague government grant programs. This truncated history also does not highlight the creativity, nimbleness, and cross-sector partnerships that enabled these alliances to access and protect the formula funds that supported their work. Nor does it address or suggest a position on deep questions about the kinds of interventions that federal funds are best suited to support, such as whether federal grants should prioritize seed funding for innovative state and local programs through matched-funding and time-limited awards, necessitating that programs find sustainable revenue sources, or if they should instead concentrate on providing more stable programmatic support. However, a more in-depth history or a deeper exploration of federal grantmaking are not necessary to underscore one of the most important lessons for community and government leaders who want to leverage federal funds to support CVI programs today. Whereas LEAA failed to inspire sufficient support in Congress, the continuing existence of DOJ's formula awards is in large part the result of persistent advocacy and partnerships that cultivated champions at both the state and local levels of government. These efforts have been led by coalitions of advocates and providers and national nongovernmental associations. In this respect, the state and national coalitions and associations of victim-services providers and advocates exemplify the kind of presence that CVI funding needs if it hopes to secure stable federal support. These groups are not only supporters or recipients of federal victim-services funds, but they often serve quasi-governmental roles, helping to administer the funds and working with members of Congress and state legislatures in ways that government grant administrators often cannot do on their own.

Organizing a national coalition of state and local CVI providers would certainly present its own set of challenges. And, no doubt, this work would be particularly challenging as much of the federal funding for CVI begins to expire. However, the advocacy that led by coalitions like [Invest In Us](#) and [Fund Peace](#) inspired Congress and the White House to dedicate new funding and take administrative actions to support CVI demonstrates that there's already the leadership and a strong base of support in communities and at all levels of government to draw from. And, as this brief argued above, the recent experiences of administering pandemic-era funding provide community and government leaders with a series of new lessons on how to improve and strengthen government support of CVI. In the concluding section below, readers can find a more detailed outline of practical recommendations they can use to inform and support this kind of process. While this work will necessarily focus on local- and state-level organizations and grant structures, community and government leaders should think about how it can feed a national-level argument, which includes leveraging existing national coalitions and associations. With the ability to speak with one voice at the local, state, and federal levels, community and government leaders will be positioned to take up the major lessons from the history of federal grantmaking and advocate for continued funding for CVI and, if they choose to do so, a dedicated formula fund.

IV. Recommendations and implementation steps

These recommendations articulate high-level goals and actions to build lasting support for CVI programs and other essential gun-violence reduction initiatives. Listing the parties who are best positioned to implement them, the recommendations are followed by implementation steps that provide more detailed guidance.

Recommendation: State government leaders should evaluate federally funded CVI programs, assess state-government grantmaking laws, policies and practices; and identify ways to support and enhance program outcomes.

→ IMPLEMENTATION STEP: To ensure this assessment is sufficiently staffed and resourced, implementers should look to revenue sources:

➤ Unspent obligated ARPA SLR funds²⁷

Note: While most states have fully obligated their SLR Funds allocations, it's likely that some grantees will be unable to fully program their awards by December 31, 2024, the date by which ARP mandates funds must be obligated. As ARPA gives state and local grantees until the end of 2026 to spend obligated funds, states should find ways to identify and re-obligate unspent funds to support this assessment process, consistent with permissible expenses laid out in Treasury's administrative rules.²⁸

➤ Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) state allocations

Note: Administered annually by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, JAG prescribes seven purposes for state and local governments to use their funds, including "Planning, evaluation, and technology improvement programs."²⁹

➤ General revenue

Note: State general revenue can provide essential support for assessment and planning. While many state legislatures are not accustomed to allocating funds for these essential purposes, state funding doesn't come with the extra layers of federal-government structures and can therefore be easier to program.

➤ Philanthropic support

Note: Private foundations have played a crucial role in supporting assessment, research, and planning, particularly for CVI programs. While private funding holds obvious appeal, it's also limited, especially when compared to the funds that federal, state, and local governments allocate to public safety and related initiatives.

²⁷ To track how local governments have spent AROA funds, see the Brookings Institution's Local Government ARPA [brookings.edu/articles/arpa-investment-tracker](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/arpa-investment-tracker).

²⁸ United States Federal Register. (2022, January 27). Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds. [federalregister.gov/documents/2022/01/27/2022-00292/coronavirus-state-and-local-fiscal-recovery-funds](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/01/27/2022-00292/coronavirus-state-and-local-fiscal-recovery-funds)

²⁹ See Bureau of Justice Assistance. Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program. [bjaojp.gov/program/jag/overview](https://www.bja.ojp.gov/program/jag/overview)

→ IMPLEMENTATION STEP: To administer this assessment, implementers should explore partnering with their State Administering Agencies (SAAs), Statistical Analysis Centers (SACs), and other state pass-through agencies, asking them, among other relevant issues, to examine:

- CVI programs' actual and potential role within the larger context of state and local public-safety and public-health infrastructure.
- How CVI programs can leverage existing federal grant programs and state resources and grant-funded programs.

→ IMPLEMENTATION STEP: To assess the impact and promise of CVI programs, implementers should develop appropriate metrics, consulting with a diverse range of stakeholders, including, but not limited to:

- Government grant-funded programs leadership and staff.
- Government grantmaking agencies leadership and staff.
- Community-violence researchers and related subject-matter experts.

→ IMPLEMENTATION STEP: To assess state-based grant law, policy, and practice (government grant structure), implementers should work with government grant leaders and staff, grant-funded programs and applicants, and other relevant stakeholders to consider:

- Existing staffing levels and agency resources to administer government grants and work effectively with CVI programs.
- Federal requirements for administering federal funding.
- State-government grant-structure requirements that are necessary to comply with federal requirements.
- State-government grantmaking structures that go beyond what is necessary to comply with federal grant requirements, and evidence that these grantmaking structures requirements are necessary to achieve recognized public-policy priorities.
- Unnecessary barriers that hinder community-based organizations' efforts to apply for and receive government grants.

→ IMPLEMENTATION STEP: To create a plan that identifies federal and state resources to support promising CVI programs and targeted improvements to grantmaking structures, enhancing program outcomes and building trust and earning legitimacy, implementers should examine:

- Federal funds that could directly fund CVI programs, including federal funds that could be leveraged to support gun-violence reduction.

Note: DOJ grant programs that could directly support CVI programs include, but are not limited to, JAG and VOCA Grant Assistance programs (see pp 11-12 for more information on these programs, and for an analysis of VOCA Crime Victim Compensation, see the 2024 Marron policy brief, "[Realizing the Promise of Crime Victim Compensation](#)"). Programs outside of DOJ include:

Department of Housing and Urban Development

- [Community Development Block Grant](#) (CDBG) is a formula fund administered at the state level to support "stronger and more resilient communities."

Department of Health and Human Services

- Medicaid provides flexibility that allows states "[to take a proactive approach in both incentivizing high-quality care for victims of violence as well as promoting strategies that prevent violent reinjury.](#)"³⁰

Department of Labor

- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act [Youth](#) and [Adult](#) Programs are formula funds for state and local employment and training services, mandated to assist populations that overlap with CVI program participants.

- State general-revenue investment levels that are necessary to support CVI programs and grant-program administration.
- Changes in state-government grant structure that balance the needs to comply with federal requirements, state policy priorities, and capacities to improve CVI program outcomes and strengthen trust and legitimacy.

Note: Government funders, including the Office of Justice Programs, and private foundations should consider supporting research to assess and determine effective laws, policies, and practices for CVI programs to inform legislative and administrative reforms.

³⁰ Zavala, C., Buggs, S. A., & Fischer, K. R. (2022). States should use Medicaid to support violence intervention efforts. *Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery*, 92(2), e25-e27. doi.org/10.1097/ta.0000000000003471

Recommendation: CVI providers, advocates, funders, and other supporters should explore creating a national coalition for CVI programs modeled on national victim-services coalitions to advocate for federal support and work with programs at the state and local levels.

→ IMPLEMENTATION STEP: To explore feasibility of establishing a national CVI coalition, government agencies and private foundations should consider:

- Grant support for discussions/roundtables with CVI leaders and current and past leaders of state and national victim-services coalitions and associations, to learn about past experiences establishing federal formula funds and distill lessons from this work.

→ IMPLEMENTATION STEP: To create sustainable funding for CVI programs, implementers should consider advocating for a standing formula fund modeled on DOJ's major formula funds.

The [NYU Marron Institute](#) conducts innovative applied research, working with cities to take on critical challenges of urban living.

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About the Author

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