

A Lifetime Commitment to Violence Prevention: Alameda County's Blueprint

OVERVIEW

(A complete draft is available at
www.preventioninstitute.org/alameda.html)

Working DRAFT
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ALAMEDA COUNTY VIOLENCE PREVENTION PRINCIPLES

Violence is preventable: Violence is a learned behavior that can be unlearned or not learned in the first place. Therefore, violence is preventable. Alameda County can be a safer place.

Violence prevention is local: This Blueprint is grounded in the understanding that local violence prevention activities are critical and County government should support these local activities. To truly serve in a supporting role, County government must both be aware of city and community concerns and needs and also be responsive to them. This Blueprint puts a structure in place based on interdepartmental, interdisciplinary partnerships within County government and between County government and other stakeholders. In recognition of the value of local efforts, the County will not compete with local stakeholders for funding. Rather, the County will endeavor to attract resources that will support local efforts.

Honor what's working: The County is home to excellent efforts that address multiple forms of violence. This Blueprint builds on effective, existing efforts to establish priorities based on need and prevention research, align resources, and maximize efforts.

Diversity must be respected: The diversity of the County is a great strength and it must be respected. This includes ensuring that the recommendations in this Blueprint are implemented with cultural competence and sensitivity. What might be appropriate with one age group or a particular ethnic/racial community may need to be modified for another. Cultural values, beliefs, and traditions should be taken into account in shaping policies, programs, and information.

Prevention is not the same as containment and suppression: This is a violence *prevention* Blueprint and prevention is a vital part of public safety. The combined recommendations foster violence prevention skills, nurture safe neighborhoods, and shift norms about acceptable behavior *before* the onset of violence and the need for intervention. While acknowledging the invaluable contribution of law enforcement efforts, this Blueprint recognizes that law enforcement efforts, by mandate, are largely aimed at containment and suppression and further, that law enforcement alone cannot prevent violence. This is because the underlying contributing factors –poverty, hopelessness, oppression, mental illness, substance abuse, victimization history, etc.– are beyond the scope of law enforcement efforts. Rather, they span the mandate of multiple stakeholders. Law enforcement has an important prevention role to play including advocating for prevention resources, data collection, making appropriate referrals, and building a perception of safety. Further, the recommendations within this Blueprint will help free up law enforcement to focus on the most urgent, dangerous, and persistent problems.

We are all stakeholders: Either directly or indirectly, violence affects everyone in Alameda County. We all have a stake in ending it, and there is a role that each of us can play. It is incumbent on violence prevention leaders to find a way to meaningfully engage us all in the solutions, including those most afflicted by violence such as youth and adult residents in highly impacted neighborhoods.

Violence prevention is a long-term effort: The factors that contribute to violence did not develop in a short period of time, and they will not disappear immediately. We need a lifetime commitment to preventing violence. We also need interim indicators to track reasonable progress.

INTRODUCTION

[Violence] is not the problem of one neighborhood or group, and the response and solutions are not the responsibility of one sector of the community or of one agency, professional group, or business. Coming together and owning this problem and the solutions are central.

Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith, Harvard School of Public Health

Alameda County is energetic, diverse, and creative. However, like many other counties in the nation, we experience serious violence problems. Violence takes multiple forms, including child and elder abuse, intimate partner violence, date rape and sexual assault, suicide, youth and community violence, and hate violence. Comprehensive approaches have proved successful in preventing violence across the country.

Although there are numerous valuable violence prevention initiatives in Alameda County, there has been no coherent strategy by which to organize them systematically. Furthermore, there is no distinct place within government where the responsibility for violence prevention rests and no identified venue where planning consistently takes place. Stand-alone programs may be competitive and duplicative, usually do not involve all of the necessary constituencies, and, alone, do not have the clout to affect underlying risk factors and change norms. Further, funds cannot be as well spent and it can be hard to determine if initiatives are working.

Few individuals and even fewer families experience violence as a discrete phenomenon. Often, different forms of violence—domestic violence, child abuse, sexual violence, gang violence, suicidal behavior—coexist within the same home or community. Each experience of these types of violence is a risk factor for other forms.

Given the complexity of issues, policies, and systems that promote or prevent violence, success beckons for an action plan that coordinates, supports, and strengthens a range of efforts. By strengthening community assets and reducing the community risk factors for violence, this Blueprint can help protect all community members from experiencing the many forms of violence that exist. Because the cost of delay is too high in terms of risk, pain, suffering, and premature death, its focus is to address problems *before* violence occurs. This is called primary prevention. This Blueprint emphasizes community-wide or ‘environmental’ outcomes and addresses all forms of violence in the county, spanning across all ages and communities.

Violence prevention is not only the responsibility of those agencies mandated to address violence and related issues. Violence is a problem that, in varying degrees, affects everyone in Alameda County. Productivity is diminished in the workplace not only by workplace violence, but also when workers experience it outside the workplace, such as battering. The county's reputation as having a lot of violence affects business prosperity and property values and deters would-be residents, employees, and businesses from locating here. Abused children have more difficulties learning and may miss more school. Therefore, in addition to directly affecting thousands of lives, the indirect affects are nearly immeasurable. This Blueprint is a framework to identify the range of roles and partnerships in which all of these stakeholders can engage and activities that will prevent violence in all its forms.

OVERVIEW OF GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Goals

The goals of this Blueprint are threefold:

- 1) To decrease the presence of risk factors that contribute to violence and increase the presence of resilience factors that are protective against violence at the individual, family, and community levels.
- 2) To increase accountability for violence prevention related outcomes, foster violence prevention leadership in the County, increase coordination of violence prevention efforts, and enhance understanding of effective violence *prevention* approaches, programs, and policies.
- 3) To decrease the level of all forms of violence throughout the County over time.

Objectives and Recommendations

In order to achieve the goals, this Blueprint delineates four objectives and each objective has an associated set of recommendations that are designed to achieve the objective.

Objective 1: Promote positive child and youth development

Recommendations:

1. *Violence prevention skill development:* Adopt evidence-based, developmentally appropriate curricula in child care settings, preschools, schools, and youth detention facilities aimed at fostering social-emotional development, resolving conflicts, violence prevention skills, violence-free relationships, bullying-free campuses, and racial relations and understanding diversity.
2. *Mentoring:* Establish and support mentoring programs that link young people at risk of violence or school drop-out to their communities, such as adopt-a-school initiatives.
3. *Positive environments:* Foster preschool, child care, school, classroom, after-school, detention, and extra-curricula environments in which violence is intolerable, children and youth feel safe, and trust and communication is strong.
4. *Meaningful activities:* Develop and expand recreational, artistic, and civic opportunities for all young people.
5. *Career paths:* Establish opportunities for all young people to learn about multiple career paths through information exchange, internships, and apprenticeships and bolster literacy and vocational skills to maximize entry into desired careers and fields.
6. *Trauma reduction:* Provide appropriate mental health and case management services to children and youth who have been traumatized, particularly through witnessing or experiencing violence.

Objective 2: Ensure supported and functioning families

Recommendations

7. *Parenting skills:* Integrate parenting skills and child development classes into pre- and post-natal healthcare and other settings for parents.
8. *Risk assessment:* Develop diagnostic systems and practices for identifying families in which child abuse, elder abuse, and/or intimate partner violence is occurring or may occur.
9. *Support services:* Provide appropriate services for families in which violence is identified as a potential risk or problem including counseling, therapy, case management, anger management, home visiting, and substance abuse treatment.
10. *Male responsibility:* Infuse fatherhood and male responsibility programs into settings with men and boys whereby men teach males about gender norms and gender roles with an emphasis on preventing sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and dating violence.

Objective #3: Foster safe and vibrant neighborhoods

Recommendations

11. *Firearms*: Reduce the availability and usage of firearms through policy and norms change.
12. *Conflict resolution*: Create pro-active dispute resolution structures and support at the neighborhood level.
13. *Gang prevention*: Reduce gang violence through appropriate services, programs and outreach to those at risk of gang participation and to those already involved.
14. *Alcohol availability*: Decrease the density of alcohol outlets and advertising in neighborhoods afflicted with high crime and violence.
15. *Drug markets*: Shrink drug markets by simultaneously decreasing the demand side through appropriate economic development, health and human service efforts and decreasing the supply side through targeted criminal justice approaches.
16. *Restorative justice*: Implement restorative justice programs with community organizations and the justice system.
17. *Reentry*: Create more viable connections between communities and inside detention facilities, provide incentives for hiring ex-felons, and support transition from detention to the community through mental health services, substance abuse treatment, job training and employment services, and supports for family members.
18. *Employment*: Tie job training and placement programs for community residents to neighborhood beautification/maintenance, infrastructure and commerce development, and female economic empowerment.
19. *Physical appearance*: Improve the physical appearance of neighborhoods by fostering arts programs and community gardens, improving park and neighborhood maintenance, and removing graffiti and blight.
20. *Healing*: Support communities to heal from community violence and help translate fear and anger into action to prevent future violence.

Objective # 4: Ensure program and government effectiveness

Recommendations

- I. *Strategy and coordination*: i) Create an Alameda County Violence Prevention Coordinator position; ii) Establish and maintain a public-private Leadership Council; iii) Establish an informal channel for distributing information.
- II. *Training, communications, and information*: iv) Enhance violence prevention skills through interdisciplinary training and conferences; v) Provide information about effective and promising models and approaches; vi) Establish campaigns designed to shift norms about violence, build understanding that violence is preventable, and foster hope that violence will be prevented.
- III. *Resource alignment and allocation*: vii) Identify gaps and priority areas (e.g. specific populations or locations) and align and allocate existing resources to serve major priority needs and gaps; viii) Establish stable funding sources to support effective violence prevention efforts in the county and develop resources for special projects and efforts.
- IV. *Assessment and evaluation*: ix) Establish data systems that are coordinated and enable effective tracking of associated risk and resilience factors and violence indicators and milestones, and that will enable good decision-making across departments and agencies while informing policy; x) Ensure that county departments and agencies and service providers are held accountable for violence prevention efforts in the county.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is violence?

The World Health Organization defines violence as: the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.¹

What causes violence?

There is no single cause that accounts for violence. Rather, underlying risk and resilience factors contribute to violence or its prevention. For example, society teaches the use of force to resolve conflict and fosters a sense of entitlement and right of control over others with less power without compensatory models. Those conditions or characteristics that put an individual, family, or community at higher risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence are risk factors. Those that are protective against violence are called resilience factors. A growing body of research demonstrates the interrelationship between risk and resiliency², the ability of resiliency to mitigate the effect of some risks,^{3,4} and the importance of focusing on both factors.⁵ Alameda County’s violence-related risk and resilience factors are summarized in the table and detailed descriptions and related data are available in Appendix A.

Risk Factors*	Resilience Factors*
1. Poverty and economic disparity	1. Economic Capital
2. Illiteracy and school failure	2. Meaningful opportunities for participation
3. Alcohol and other drugs	3. Positive attachments and relationships
4. Firearms	4. Good physical and mental health
5. Negative family dynamics	5. Social capital
6. Mental illness	6. Built environment
7. Incarceration/reentry	7. Services and institutions
8. Community deterioration	8. Emotional and cognitive competence
9. Discrimination & oppression; power & control	9. Artistic and creative opportunities
10. Media violence	10. Ethnic, racial, and intergroup relations
11. Experiencing and witnessing violence	11. Media/marketing
12. Gender socialization	

Isn’t violence a problem of a relatively small number of individuals?

Intimate partner violence, child and elder abuse, sexual assault, dating violence, youth and community violence, homicide and suicide, hate violence, and police brutality, are all examples of violence that directly harms far too many people in Alameda County, including many of our children, parents, siblings, neighbors, friends, and colleagues. Further and indirectly, violence is an issue that affects us all. Violence takes its toll on victims’ family members, friends, and neighbors. Additional widespread impacts include fear, the reputation of being an undesirable place to live or work, its impact on the business climate, and its heavy financial burden. Violence affects everyone in Alameda County.

Is violence preventable?

Violence is in fact preventable, but its prevention requires an investment of resources, people, leadership, and commitment. Violence is a complex problem that requires a comprehensive solution and participation from multiple sectors and stakeholders. The need for such an approach

is underscored by the National Crime Prevention Council's study: *Six Safer Cities*. The description of city crime prevention efforts informs a countywide prevention effort.

Several cities in the United States have distinguished themselves in the fight to reduce crime over the past decade. These cities have surpassed national decreases and dramatically reduced crime through collaborative partnerships and the use of targeted policy and program strategies to address priority crime and quality of life concerns. At the heart of successful implementation of community-wide approaches is a deliberate process of bringing together formal and informal leaders to establish priorities for action. The process these cities engage in includes diagnosing local crime problems, assessing community assets and resources, forming coalition and partnership-based networks, and integrating crime control and prevention strategies into a balanced approach. At a fundamental level, such activities reinforce bonds among partners, holding each accountable for helping co-produce more comprehensive policies, innovative resource development tactics, and specific programs that recognize the fundamental role of prevention-oriented strategies.⁶

What is violence prevention?

Violence prevention is a comprehensive and multifaceted effort to address the complex and multiple root factors associated with violence including, but not limited to, poverty, unemployment, discrimination, substance abuse, educational failure, fragmented families, domestic abuse, internalized shame, and felt powerlessness. Efforts build on resilience in individuals, families, and communities. Violence prevention is distinct from violence containment or suppression. Violence prevention efforts contribute to empowerment, educational and economic progress, and improved life management skills while fostering healthy communities in which people can grow in dignity and safety. Finally, efforts realign institutions to be more inclusive and receptive in responding to community needs. Violence prevention efforts targeted toward young children work to prevent experiencing or witnessing violence when young as well as to reduce the risk of future perpetration or victimization of violence.⁷

Who is responsible for violence prevention?

Everyone living and working in Alameda County has a role to play in preventing violence. However, elected officials and those with mandates and resources must be held accountable to ensure effective use of resources to prevent needless injury and death and to minimize the need for after-the-fact services (incarceration, hospitalization, trauma services, protective custody, domestic violence shelters, etc.).

Why do we need a violence prevention strategy?

Alameda County violence prevention efforts have been hampered by an absence of coherent leadership, a lack of accountability for violence prevention outcomes, no established venue for necessary and ongoing coordination, and misconceptions about what effective violence *prevention* entails. Therefore, while the county is spending precious resources, there is no way to know if they are being directed in the most important places, whether or not they are being maximized, and how we might be more effective. The complexity of violence underlies the need for a strategic approach, which is the key to determining priorities, maximizing discrete efforts and ensuring that they build on each other. The term strategy refers to an analysis of the issue,

delineating a final goal, defining what steps need to be taken and by who, and finally, executing the plan. It leads to better outcomes by promoting approaches that are well coordinated, responsive to local needs and concerns, and build on best practices and existing strengths. Further, the *process* of strategy development builds a shared understanding and commitment and enables participants to work out the relationships needed to enhance the likelihood of success. Strategy development won't solve violence problems but it will put Alameda County onto a roadmap for doing so. Having a good plan is also attractive to funders. For example, one California city of about 150,000 people developed a plan which attracted over eight million dollars in funding over three years for infrastructure development and programming.

Hasn't this already been done?

Alameda County does not have an overall plan to prevent violence and has not developed one over the last two decades, at least. Some cities have plans and many different stakeholders throughout the county are working different pieces of the puzzles. This Blueprint is designed to support local plans and align existing efforts for more impact. In the past, some stakeholders have tried to bring multiple players together through unified planning processes. However, they lacked either the mandate or the authority to drive a coherent effort spanning the necessary jurisdictions and disciplines. This Blueprint was developed with broad input and buy-in and initiated, tracked, and supported in the highest levels of county government.

What types of violence does the Blueprint address?

The Violence Prevention Blueprint for Alameda County strives to address all forms of violence that affect the communities within the county. These include homicide and suicide, child and elder abuse, intimate partner and domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and rape, youth and community violence, hate violence, and sanctioned violence, such as police brutality. The Blueprint is structured this way because the various forms of violence are interrelated and effectively preventing one form of violence necessarily requires attention to other forms.

Who developed the Alameda County Violence Prevention Blueprint?

The Blueprint was developed by a diverse group of stakeholders from across the county (see appendix C) representing city and county elected officials, county departments and agencies, city program staff and police chiefs, legislators, community based organizations, and youth. Participants met regularly over the course of nine months to discuss structure and content issues and reviewed materials in between. Further, their work was informed by interviews and focus groups with additional elected officials, law enforcement, youth, community-based and grassroots organizations, agency and department staff and leadership, and others. Finally, the Blueprint was informed by research and practitioner wisdom from around the country.

Prevention Institute authored the Blueprint and facilitated the development process. Based in Alameda County, Prevention Institute is a nonprofit, national center dedicated to improving community health and well-being by building momentum for effective primary prevention. Primary prevention means taking action to build resilience and to prevent problems before they occur. The Institute's work is characterized by a strong commitment to community participation and promotion of equitable health outcomes among all social and economic groups.

Why do we need a Violence Prevention Coordinator?

A Violence Prevention Coordinator provides a focal point for violence prevention in the county as well as the staffing to conduct necessarily cross-cutting activities that will reduce duplication and improve quality, such as the provision of training, information, and campaigns; resource development; engaging the necessary stakeholders; implementing strategy; assessing progress; and fostering coordination. There are multiple violence prevention efforts underway in the county and many departments and agencies working on particular parts of the problem. Further, there are multiple local efforts driven by the schools, cities and municipalities, and community-based and grassroots organizations. However, there is no central intelligence to the entire effort. People don't know where to turn when they have a question or need resources and information, departments wanting and needing to collaborate must initiate partnerships from scratch, training is haphazard and varies, and there is no unified voice speaking out about violence prevention. Further, raising money to support violence prevention takes place without the added value of a strategic plan and without understanding priorities. Funders have grown frustrated with the large amounts of money invested throughout the county without really being able to know if it is the best investment for the county's needs. Finally, there is no concerted effort to engage the range of necessary stakeholders in systematically addressing violence in the county. A Violence Prevention Coordinator will facilitate coordination, conduct training, provide information about models and best practices, coordinate data efforts, make recommendations about resource alignment and allocation, and develop funding sources.

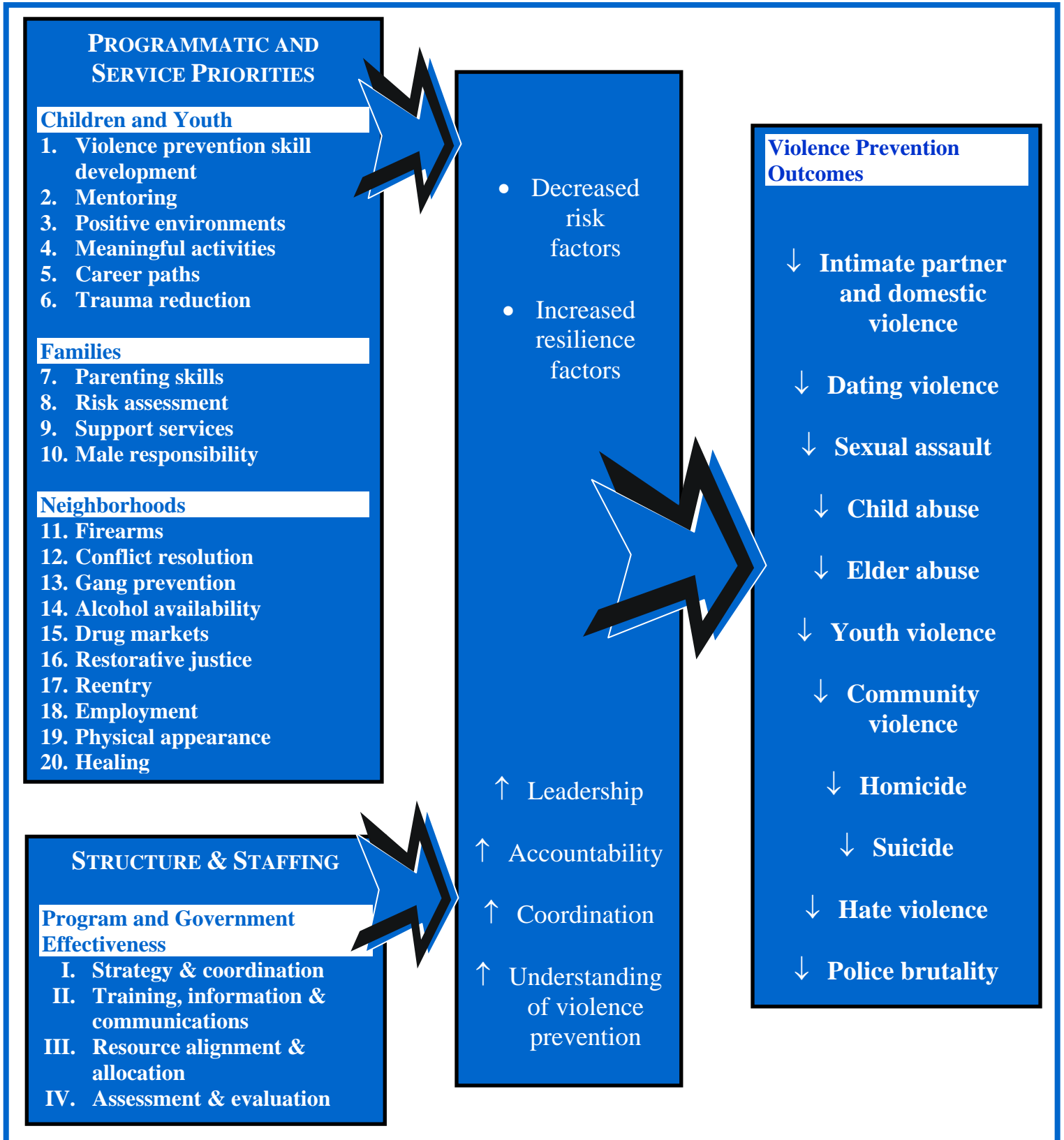
Why are we doing this in a time of budget deficits?

Even in good financial times, there is never enough money to address all of the county's need. That being said, one of the most fiscally prudent things we can do in both good and tough times is to ensure that our resources are being put to good use. Preventing violence can save money in the long-run by reducing the costs of law enforcement, healthcare, and foster care. Further, this plan is about aligning the existing resources in the County that are already being spent on violence prevention and making sure that they are being used in the most effective manner. Finally, plans such as this one are attractive to outside funders; they can feel confident that their money is being put to good use and that there is a structure to use the funding in the way it was intended. In flush budget times we may too often be content with the status quo, but budget deficits force us to make tough decisions and propel us to make needed changes. Prioritizing violence prevention is right for Alameda County.

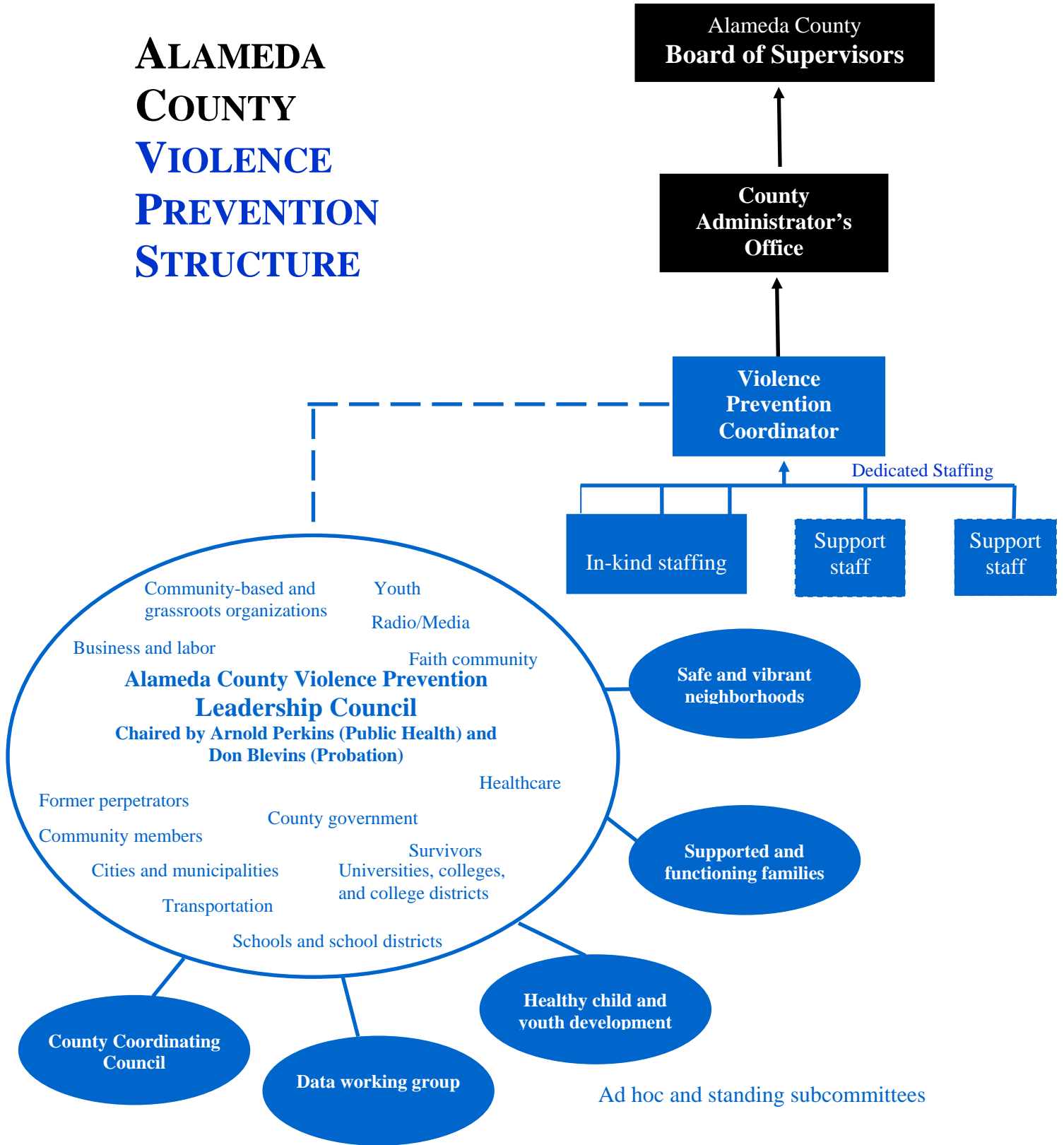
How will this be funded?

After-the-fact responses are expensive. Putting resources into effective prevention is an investment that can save precious resources such as those devoted to trauma and hospitalization, shelters, and criminal justice. However, while in the long-run prevention strategies hold the promise of saving money, they are not free. Resources are needed for staffing and programmatic investments. It is recommended that the Violence Prevention Coordinator be funded out of the county budget to ensure stable funding and to reinforce the message that violence prevention is a major county priority. Additional funding should come from multiple sources including in-kind staffing, departmental and agency contributions, foundation and government grants, Federal and State appropriations, private contributions, and appropriate license and registration fees. In addition, non-county jurisdictions, such as cities and schools can support local efforts.

A LIFETIME COMMITMENT TO VIOLENCE PREVENTION: ALAMEDA COUNTY'S BLUEPRINT



ALAMEDA COUNTY VIOLENCE PREVENTION STRUCTURE



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⁷ Adapted from SB2097, State of California, February 2000