

Chicago funders on gun violence: 'We do not have time to waste' - Polk Bros. Foundation

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Chicago funders on gun violence: 'We do not have time to waste'

This article by Ellen Alberding (Joyce Foundation), Gillian Darlow (Polk Bros. Foundation), David Hiller (McCormick Foundation) and Julia Stasch (MacArthur Foundation) originally appeared in Crain's Chicago Business on May 23, 2018.

In 2017, Chicago suffered 3,550 shootings and 650 homicides, an improvement on the previous year, but still a tragic and unacceptable level of violence that destroys lives and harms communities. As summer begins—historically when the city sees a spike in violence—Crain's and the Partnership for Safe & Peaceful Communities, a coalition of more than 30 Chicago funders and foundations, including MacArthur, Joyce, Polk Bros. and McCormick, examine in a five-part series some proven and promising approaches to reducing gun violence.

Chicago is facing dual crises of rising gun violence and a decline in police legitimacy, and many Chicagoans have stepped up to respond.

Families, community and religious leaders, civic and church groups, and others are working to make blocks and neighborhoods safer throughout the city. Businesses and local nonprofit organizations are reaching out with jobs and services for individuals at risk of violence. Reforms are underway at the Chicago Police Department. Chicagoans realized that continuing to do the same thing, hoping each year would be better than the last, is no longer acceptable.

We, as Chicago funders and foundations, must play our role, too. The Partnership for Safe & Peaceful Communities grew out of an effort in 2016 to support the operations of the Police Accountability Task Force, which examined how the police department can improve the way it serves all Chicagoans. The partnership is investing more than \$40 million in complementary strategies to meaningfully reduce gun violence over the next two to three years. A 25 percent decrease in homicides by the end of 2019 would restore the 20 years of progress on violent crime Chicago experienced prior to the 2016 spike in crime.

Members of the partnership are coordinating our individual investments with a focus on four key strategies:

- Providing services like jobs and cognitive behavioral therapy to those most at risk of gun violence.
- Increasing the effectiveness and legitimacy of the Police Department through improved officer training, better police-community relations and greater public involvement in police accountability measures.
- Strengthening gun laws to reduce the availability of illegal firearms.
- Supporting grassroots organizations for summer events and projects across 19 Chicago community areas to foster stronger community bonds, crowd out violence and promote constructive engagement with law enforcement.

Each strategy is rooted in data, research and common sense. Each reflects the best thinking of experts in the field of crime research, men and women in uniform, and a cross-section of Chicago's residents and community- and faith-based leaders. Based on the successful

implementation of programs in other cities, such as the Los Angeles-based GRYD Foundation, we made the strategic investment decision to adapt these approaches locally.

We are committed to working in new ways, with new partners and connecting organizations across the city that are focused on social change. Those of us with resources must act. In the current era of sweeping national and disruptive change and declining trust in key institutions, foundations like ours can be less risk-averse than government, which invests public dollars, or the private sector, which must answer to shareholders. We can be flexible and experiment. We are learning to be more responsive and less directive, evolving in real time as conditions change.

There is no one solution to gun violence. That is why we are aligning our resources on several innovative strategies to address this issue through evidence-based programs, community engagement and policy change. We do not have time to waste.

We came together around an urgent need to focus on the financial, social and human cost of gun violence, which has an immediate effect on victims, families, and our communities, and threatens the city's long-term vitality and prosperity.

Moreover, Chicago foundations and funders continue to focus on addressing the root causes of gun violence, including economic and racial segregation.

Our hope is that through the partnership, as well as the work of others, we will see three positive shifts: a continued, sustained decrease in gun violence; an increase in police legitimacy; and even more people, businesses, nonprofits and civic leaders working together to restore peace and safety to our city's neighborhoods.

Read More from this 5-Part *Crain's Chicago Business* Series

Part 1: 'We do not have time to waste'

Part 2: Strengthen state gun laws

Part 3: Coupling jobs and therapy

Part 4: Professionalize street outreach

Part 5: How block parties and urban gardening deter gun violence
