

TCWF Evaluations

THE CALIFORNIA WELLNESS FOUNDATION

A Decade of Effort, A World of Difference:

The Policy and Public Education Program of The California Youth Violence Prevention Initiative

Executive Summary

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Table of Contents

1. [Recalling the Time](#)
2. [Methods](#)
3. [Framework](#)
4. [Reducing injury and death due to firearms](#)
5. [Increasing the level of youth resources](#)
6. [Applying the Framework](#)
7. [Barriers to Cooperation](#)
8. [Legacy of PPEP and the VPI](#)
9. [Conclusions and Lessons Learner](#)
10. [References](#)

Recalling the Time

California and the nation were marked by violence at the start of the VPI. The nation was stunned as it watched the Stockton Schoolyard Massacre in 1989, the freeway sniper and drive-by shootings making news at the beginning of the decade, Southern California's civil unrest following the Rodney King verdict in 1992, and the 1993 workplace shootings at the Petit and Martin Law Firm at 101 California Street, San Francisco.

The latter half of the decade brought a spate of high profile school shootings on suburban campuses throughout America, culminating in the bloodiest of all at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. These shootings not only riveted the nation, but specifically focused attention on the problem of youth violence among suburban kids. This tragedy was followed shortly by another shooting at a suburban Los Angeles-area day care, where providers and nursery school children were targeted by a gunman with a semiautomatic weapon. Footage broadcast across the country showed small children being led hand-in-hand to safety. Taken in sum, these shootings galvanized public grief and anger over the problem of gun-related violence, and helped to focus public and policymaker attention on the search for solutions.

Still, for a variety of reasons, California's political environment at the time the VPI was being conceived could hardly have been less receptive to launching a large social program:

- The state's economy was stagnant;
- Much of the public shared growing fears of crime, violence, and immigration; and,
- Voter-sponsored ballot initiatives, including Prop. 187 reducing services for immigrants, Prop. 184 instituting the "Three Strikes" penalty clause mandating a 25-year-to-life sentence for even minor third felony convictions, and Prop. 209 eliminating affirmative action in the state, were about to emerge.

Nonetheless, official attention toward the prevention of youth violence was sharpening:

- Major medical and public health journals were dedicating special issue volumes to the problem of violence, its effects, and its prevention;
- The National Academy of Sciences published a four-volume report dedicated to the public health and biomedical aspects of the problem; and
- In 1991, the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention -- the lead federal agency for injury control -- drew from the public health model and began to fund and conduct research into the epidemiology and prevention of interpersonal violence.

In sum, the late 1980s and early 1990s were a particularly difficult time in California, especially if you were a young person of color living in an urban area. Firearms were ubiquitous while opportunity was not, and youth had few friends in powerful places. In addition, mean-spirited statewide initiatives primarily affecting people of color and reflecting a "circle the wagons" attitude among the voting public were just in the offing. However, it was also the case that the pendulum was about to swing, or at least inch back a bit.

Methods

The goal of this research is to examine PPEP's efforts to advance two major policy goals

targeted at reducing violence among youth, and to consider the range of factors that have fostered and limited grantees' efforts during the past decade. In so doing we used various methods of data collection, including:

- In-depth interviews (46 interviews with 43 people) ranging in length from less than one-half hour to several hours, each;
- Reviews of media coverage for accounts of grantee activities and to aid in constructing the policy stories; and
- Examination of a range of archival data provided by grantees, the Foundation, and other official State records of policy information.

Most interviews were audiotaped and subsequently transcribed by a professional service, resulting in approximately 1045 pages of text. For the few interviews that were not audiotaped, careful and detailed notes were taken by the interviewer; such interviews tended to be brief. All of the interviews were conducted by one or more of the three principals on the project.

Interview questions included topics such as:

- Details of individuals' personal involvement, or involvement of their agencies, in the VPI;
- Stories and experiences related to collaboration with other individuals and organizations;
- Use of VPI resources to educate policymakers and advance policy goals;
- Differences between working on firearms issues and youth resources issues; and
- Other topics related to the operation of the VPI and its perceived impact, both locally and nationwide.

We begin our analysis with accounts of VPI efforts on the two primary policy goals: reducing injury and death due to firearms (i.e. the "firearms" goal), and increasing resources for youth (i.e. the "youth resources" goal), to recall not only some of the major activities of the Initiative, but also the wealth of accomplishments achieved over the past decade. In selecting these stories, however, we will leave others untold. We have chosen to recount stories that are particularly illustrative of the ways grantees and others came together to work toward the reduction of youth violence in California. Thus, what we present here are exemplars, not exhaustive accounts of activities involving PPEP grantees.

Framework

As we considered the complexity of the Initiative and the grantees' many efforts in pursuit of the larger policy goals, a simple and compelling framework of highly interactive elements emerged from the interview data. This framework evolved the content of our extensive interviews and reviews of archival data, and various academic

and professional literatures on social movements , public health , and political communication . It is virtually impossible at times to determine which of these components is predominantly in play; indeed, at any one time grantees' efforts may be illustrating all four elements at work. Nonetheless, taken in sum we believe these four factors capture the strengths of the PPEP grantees in achieving their goals, as well as some of the challenges they faced in doing their work throughout the life of this Initiative.

The components of our framework for understanding the PPEP are:

Policy Goals -- knowing what needs to be done. This means having a clear sense of what needed to change and expressing this necessary change in terms of policy goals that:

- Allow people to have a shared understanding of what needs to be achieved.
- Reflect a causal view of the problem (i.e. what needs to be changed to make it better) and the degree to which social change, rather than primarily behavior change, is the target. As such, policy goals reflect a particular view of the world, as well as a particular view of the problem.

Issue Framing-- knowing how to talk about it. This means developing strategic framing of the issue that transcends traditional "territorial" differences in the violence prevention arena, redefines an issue so it can be understood in a different way and new approaches can be tried, and allows "non-traditional" partnerships in the solution process. Issue framing:

- Conveys not only facts but also values, and thus is central to communication and public opinion. For example, depending on how youth violence is framed the message may be the "demonizing of youth" or the "responsibility of society," contributing either to policies that promote punishment or promote caring.
- Allows activists to challenge society's view of who is responsible for the problem, who is responsible for treating it, and the range of available options for addressing it.

Political Opportunity -- finding opportunities to implement policy change. This means identifying and, when necessary, creating political opportunities that:

- Increase the likelihood that policy options will find "champions" willing to accept responsibility for advancing these options and that these policies will find sufficient support.
- Breed further political opportunities as momentum builds, victories are won, and a collective sense of efficacy increases among grantees.

Mobilizing Resources – being able to deliver. This means developing and activating resources that can take advantage of political opportunities and create an infrastructure to support social change:

- Directly links being able to strategically activate available resources – including personnel, funding, information, materials, and clout – in order to create and capitalize on political opportunities. PPEP grantees grew increasingly more adept at mobilizing resources in ways that increased their chances of achieving political and policy success.

Reducing Injury and Death Due to Firearms

At the start of the Initiative, PPEP grantees sought to reduce firearm injury and death by focusing their attention on state policy and the potential of a ban on Saturday Night Specials (SNS). In 1994, however, control of the Assembly went to the Republicans effectively shutting down political opportunity at the state level. With state-level policy change no longer an option, grantees shifted their attention to changing local policy. They believed that significant changes at the local level would ultimately force Sacramento to act. Public opinion also appeared to support local regulation of firearms. A survey conducted for public education grantee Martin & Glantz revealed that a majority of Californians favored a number of gun policies, including local regulation of firearms.

Initially, grantees believed that state law preempted all local firearms regulation. However, a legal memo by Eric Gorovitz suggested that communities did, in fact, have significant latitude to regulate guns. In January 1996, the small, progressive city of West Hollywood tested state law by passing an ordinance to ban the sale of SNS, relying heavily on Gorovitz's legal argument to do so. In addition, they capitalized on other VPI resources, including VPI-funded research on the safety of SNS. The city was immediately sued by the California Rifle & Pistol Association (CRPA). However, after a two-year legal battle in which grantees provided significant legal background and support, the courts upheld West Hollywood's ordinance. The door was now open for other communities to regulate firearms without the threat of costly litigation.

West Hollywood's actions were bold and they were quickly followed by those of the East Bay Public Safety Corridor Project (EBPSC), a regional collaborative of 16 cities. In July 1996, after consulting and working with grantees, EBPSC announced that collaborative cities would each pass four ordinances regulating firearms. The effect of EBPSC's actions was to open the floodgates. With so many cities passing ordinances at once, the legal and financial risk to any one city was greatly diminished. Moreover, grantee Legal Community Against Violence (LCAV) was offering to help secure pro-bono legal assistance for any city that was sued. By 2000, more than 110 cities and counties had passed 300 ordinances regulating firearms.

Policy victories at the local level were accompanied by significant changes in the make-up of the Legislature. Term limits moved a number of local policymakers who had worked on firearms ordinances up to the Legislature. They brought with them experience that showed that firearms regulation was a winning political issue. In particular, firearms legislation both enjoyed broad-based support and carried no additional costs for taxpayers. Moreover, it was an issue that made policymakers look good: they were taking

meaningful action on the issue of violence and standing up to the National Rifle Association.

Ultimately, the burgeoning grassroots gun control movement, combined with changes in the political composition of the Legislature and the election of a Democratic governor, opened the door to significant changes in state firearms policy. In 1999, Governor Davis signed five major pieces of gun legislation, and he has since signed a number more. Recently, however, Davis has made it clear that he is wary of going too far, signaling that he is no longer interested in firearms regulation. With political opportunity again shut down at the state level, grantees and other gun control advocates have moved back to the local level. This time, however, their focus is banning .50 caliber sniper rifles rather than SNS.

Increasing the Level of Youth Resources

During the past ten years, PPEP grantees have sought to increase California's investment in youth violence prevention by advocating for specific changes in state policy. In particular, they have pursued changes in two broad areas: 1) elevating the status of youth violence prevention as an activity of state government, and 2) increasing the level of state funding for youth violence prevention programs. In pursuing these policy changes, grantees have confronted and negotiated a number of political, practical, and economic realities, including historically high levels of violent crime at the onset of the VPI, pervasive public sentiment favoring "get tough" policies, successive governors' convictions that a strong law enforcement approach to the problem was key to their political success, and most recently, the worst budget deficit in California's history.

Grantees worked to increase the level of state funding for youth violence prevention programs. They mobilized key resources, including their knowledge and skills regarding policy development and the policy process, and their professional connections and networks within the state government. Grantees' success depended, in part, on changes in California's political climate, flexibility in their own strategy, and the ultimate decision by Governor Davis to make a substantial investment in violence prevention programs. In the wake of "Three Strikes" and other "get tough" policies, legislators interested in violence prevention as an alternative to the law enforcement approach had greater license to pursue such policies. In addition, grantees shifted their focus from competing for corrections dollars and trying to shift funding out of corrections and into prevention. Instead, they pursued dollars for violence prevention as a separate issue. In this regard, they used polling data to educate legislators about supportive public opinion regarding increasing violence prevention resources for youth. Finally, broader legal and political pressure on Governor Davis resulted in his decision to reverse his veto of violence prevention funding. In the summer of 2000, the Governor signed the Schiff-Cardenas Violence Prevention Act, representing the single largest allocation of state funds to youth violence prevention programs in California's history.

Applying the Framework

Understanding the success, and in some cases lack of success, of PPEP grantees requires understanding the relationships among several variables – political opportunity, policy goals, issue framing, and mobilizing resources.

1. The existence of policy goals essentially provided an answer for the question, “what needs to be done?” There were four highly specific policies under the general goal of reducing access to firearms. While two of these goals were dropped because of a clear lack of political opportunity, banning SNS and promoting local control of firearms gathered considerable support and were excellent vehicles for local organizing. Importantly, banning SNS and advancing other ordinances to make guns safer did not cost any money, making it easier for politicians to support such ordinances...particularly once it became clear that there was substantial public support for these policies.
The youth resources policy goals were not perceived by grantees to be as clear as were those for firearms. There was disagreement over what constituted prevention or whether the focus should be on primary prevention or prevention of any kind. Also, “prevention” translated into “programs” requiring new public funds, whether it was for mentoring efforts, after school activities, or conflict resolution; funds which many thought the state could not afford. Moreover, pursuing the youth resources objectives seemed to require more detailed knowledge of the budget and legislative processes, and appeared to some to be more suited for policy wonks than busy community activists. Moreover, while legislators apparently accepted that fewer guns would mean less violence in the state, there was more skepticism about the effectiveness of prevention programs.
2. Framing the problem and the solution was very important to the success of the VPI. Both youth resources and firearms advocates were effective at taking advantage of the broader public health frame advanced by the VPI. This frame helped to create common ground with uncommon allies, (particularly law enforcement) by: shifting the focus from “youth as perpetrators” to “youth as victims”; integrating research as a rational basis for discussion and policy; and allowing a diverse group of people to talk more easily and forcefully about the need for social change.
3. PPEP was effective in identifying and sometimes creating political opportunities. Political opportunities resulted in different organizing strategies for each goal, with firearms following an approach that mirrored the tobacco movement’s success with passage of many local ordinances leading to statewide laws. In contrast, youth resources reflected an approach in which specific state legislators served as “champions” for the issue and advanced bills. The greatest success with the Violence Prevention Act of 2000 – in which approximately \$120 million was obtained for prevention programs -- involved taking advantage of the desire of the state Legislature to move from an overly punitive approach to the problem, to one based on prevention and a focus on the root causes of violence.
The firearms strategy, by contrast, grew from legal and epidemiological research associated with the VPI that created significant opportunities for new firearms

- ordinances at the local level, and provided a political outlet for policymakers to “do something” about violence. As successes mounted, new political opportunities arose at the state level as it became clearer that limiting the availability of firearms was a popular position that could attract votes. In addition, many political champions at the local level had moved on to Sacramento, creating a new, more supportive environment for policy statewide.
4. Political opportunity, policies that could make a difference, and framing the issue as a public health problem, were all critically important. However, if the VPI had not been able to mobilize resources to apply pressure for change, little would have been accomplished. An expansive array of resources including public opinion polling, research, varied expertise, public education materials, policy and media advocacy trainings, policy briefs and background materials, were used to match resources with opportunities to create change. Having resources, and using them to win victories, reinforced the credibility, legitimacy, and perceived political clout of the VPI. Within the VPI, the availability of resources increased the confidence of advocates and enhanced their sense of being able to make a difference.

Barriers to Cooperation

Grantees engaged in collaborative VPI activities to differing extents. While some were very central to group-initiated, planned, and executed efforts, others felt that the barriers to cooperation were (at least sometimes) sufficient to preclude full engagement. Grantees identified a variety of issues when asked about the process of joining into a large, cooperative effort. Some of the issues raised include:

- 1) Grantees needed skills to facilitate cooperation and to effectively support one another, but some felt that the Foundation could have done more to cultivate those necessary skills.
- 2) Not everyone was on board with the policy focus. Some felt the policy focus had been imposed upon them and that they had little input.
- 3) Some grantees experienced strain regarding who got credit for achievements, as well as in attempting to keep everyone on the same page in terms of message and direction; each of which chipped away at the broader sense of inter-group trust.
- 4) Some grantees felt the policy work was overly focused on guns to the exclusion of other risk factors for violence.
- 5) Some felt that the VPI was too Northern California-focused, not valuing grantees in the southern part of the state.
- 6) Some grantees preferred to do their own work independently, rather than collaboratively.
- 7) Some grantees felt the Initiative lacked a “central unifying force,” while others felt the problem was a lack of focus during the first few years.
- 8) Not all grantees were completely on board with the directions taken by other grantees.
- 9) The size of the state and vast grantee dispersion proved a barrier to collaborative efforts.

Legacy of PPEP and the VPI

The complete legacy of PPEP will continue to unfold. Indeed, the enduring effects of landmark policies, increased funding for new prevention programs, and a diverse network of legislators, policy professionals, activists, and academics all interested in meaningful social change to decrease violence among youth, will surface incrementally both within California and nationwide. That said, it is possible even today to see how PPEP and the VPI have affected the larger effort to reduce violence.

Most obvious, perhaps, are PPEP's contributions to gun safety policies and to legislation that would increase prevention funding for youth. But perhaps less obvious are the many other ways that PPEP and its grantees would leave their "marks" on California and the nation. These impacts can be considered in terms of:

- 1) *Policy Outcomes*: The specific policies enacted and ways of approaching the problem of youth violence at the policy level will have specific effects on the issues they are designed to address, as well as provide models for future policy approaches to social problems.
- 2) *Precedent*: California offers important policymaking and legal precedent. Legislators around the country, but particularly at the federal level, are said to look closely at how a given piece of policy "played" in the nation's most populous state.
- 3) *Infrastructure*: One of the enduring effects of PPEP's efforts will be the establishment of a network of violence prevention groups, law enforcement agencies, policy experts, and researchers, who otherwise might not have had the opportunity to become familiar with one another, work together, and support one another's activities.
- 4) *Penetration of the Power Structure*: A cadre of local and state governmental officials working with the VPI who have now assumed other levels of leadership or who continue in their positions of power will seed the power structure with support of PPEP activities and goals.

Conclusion and Lessons Learned

The Public Policy and Education Program, and the VPI overall, sends a significant message for public health and social change movements around the country. This message is that almost anything is possible, but is never easy. Our research offers a number of important lessons as well as cautionary notes.

- **Money matters in many ways.** Money was important for PPEP grantees because it allowed for the preparatory work that enabled them to respond to political opportunities as they unfolded. This funding also allowed the organizations that had previously been working on these issues to increase their visibility and credibility. Funding also, to some extent, reduced competition among organizations and allowed greater focus on pursuing common goals.
- **Trust is important, and it takes time to build.** Trust, especially in settings marked by extensive diversity and highly urgent and emotional issues, is a

necessary basis for working together. Trust built over time through a series of meetings, successful smaller collaborations, and the development of personal relationships.

- **Trust can be lost very quickly.** Trust is quite fragile. A misunderstood communication, failure to follow-up on an issue, and not sharing credit appropriately, are just some things that can damage trust and undermine cooperation.
- **Victories are important.** Policy change is often a process that can take years. Victories provide reinforcement and build confidence among participants, contributing to overall momentum. Victories also increase the public's perception that those working for change have power, thus contributing to political capital which in turn further builds momentum.
- **State and local levels are linked.** The accumulation of successes at the local level made success at the state level more likely. It was just a matter of time before all the skills, resources, and political experience cultivated at the local level would be applied to political opportunity at the state level.
- **Not everyone will participate.** The Initiative was able to build bridges between different interests, but not everyone chose to travel across. While each group had its reasons for deciding whether and how to engage in such an Initiative (e.g. not sharing the policy agenda, feeling they had no input, lacking necessary skills), the lack of participation by some groups translates into a lost opportunity to strengthen the movement for social change.
- **Research is essential.** Legal and epidemiological research accelerated the policy change process by years. The VPI provided extensive data that could be shared with policymakers and used at the local or state levels. This research increased the credibility of advocates by rooting their appeals for policy change in numbers, and not just emotions. Various kinds of research, particularly polling, also increased grantees' effectiveness by providing useful information for developing strategy and organizing constituency groups.
- **Law enforcement is an important part of the team.** In a symbolic, political, and practical sense, the participation of law enforcement in both the firearms and youth resources areas made a material contribution to the success of the Initiative. The involvement of law enforcement was probably one of the linchpins of the VPI: for example, the California Police Chiefs Association produced a "white paper" on junk guns, and the LCAV manual on local ordinances that went out to thousands of local officials was also endorsed by that group.
- **Skill-building and technical assistance work.** Violence prevention advocates in PPEP and the VPI gained a wide range of skills and effectively used technical assistance to further hone those skills. Importantly, the value of such work is linked to the opportunity to use learned skills and technical assistance in a supportive setting, while receiving positive reinforcement for these efforts. And the broader VPI provided just such a setting.
- **Language matters.** Having the right words to talk about difficult issues, such as gun control and youth resources, likely enhances participation. The broader framing of violence as a public health problem fostered significant opportunities

for common ground among advocates and broad participation throughout the state.

- **Program institutionalization is difficult.** The effort to support policy providing an ongoing source of funding to ensure that all the work of the Initiative continues has not yet been fruitful. As so often happens, the focus on this matter was not an initial priority, and was further compounded by the extreme economic difficulties that confronted the state.
- **The ability to develop a flexible strategy and respond to political opportunities is essential for success.** PPEP was presented with an ever-changing array of political opportunities, and had the flexibility and expertise to take advantage of them as they arose. Firearms policies evoked different strategies than did those for increasing youth resources. In both cases, grantee and Initiative flexibility allowed advocates to pursue an ambitious set of policy goals.
- **Taking risks is essential for significant social change.** TCWF took on a significant and controversial public health issue at a time when others were reluctant to. The Foundation minimized its risk by emphasizing the tragic health and consequences of violence in a public health context, allowing for a more objective research approach. Nonetheless, the risk to the Foundation was still substantial, and its willingness to pursue the problem was remarkable.
- **Need to put it all together.** The VPI combined research, training, public and policymaker education, community organizing, policy development, and political advocacy to create change. It took all of these components working together in greater and lesser ways, for the policy goals that were accomplished to be accomplished. In the end, the whole was, in fact, greater than the sum of the parts.

In sum, PPEP and the VPI have left a legacy of success and struggle. PPEP's activities have reverberated around the state, and to some extent the country. What evolved from the VPI, in general, was a sophisticated approach to social change that combined research, community organizing, policy development, education of opinion leaders and policymakers, and the ability to overcome traditional obstacles. The research framework we applied provides insight into how the VPI, led by PPEP, was able to identify political opportunities, offer policy approaches that fit with those opportunities, apply the language and approaches of a public health model to bring people together and create change, and finally to create a body of research-based practical knowledge translated for use by an extremely diverse group of advocates and supporters. The ability to blend these components required substantial funds that TCWF supplied. It also required commitment, trust, insight, and a keen sense strategic sense of what was possible (and a little more), combined with some luck to make sure all the pieces came together in just the right way at the right time.

It will continue to be a challenge to maintain and extend the gains of the Initiative both in terms of funding for youth programs and limiting the availability of firearms. Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese monk and prodigious writer nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, has explained:

The problem is whether we are determined to go in the direction of compassion or not . . . If I lose my direction I have to look for the North Star and I will go to the north. That does not mean I expect to arrive at the North Star. I just want to go in that direction.

The VPI has established the vision, set the direction, and marked the path. There is still much to be done, but those who follow should be sustained by what has been accomplished over the past decade.

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