NCST IN THE COMMUNITY

EVALUATION AND PROOF OF CONCEPT
NCST Evaluation Proof of Concept Brief

UCLA

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The term "Proof of Concept" has been applied in many settings with multiple applications. It was first used in 1967 in an arena far from community violence intervention – as part of prototype testing in engineering and astronautics. However, the thinking behind this term has had application to multiple sectors, from filmmaking to software development. It has long been defined as the process of gathering evidence to demonstrate if a project or an intervention is feasible. However, in the realm of CVI, Proof of Concept is understood more broadly as the process of gathering evidence, in this case data, to prove the validity of a specific program or a series of interventions. It is this broad terminology that informed the UCLA evaluation of NCST.

> In considering the findings from both quantitative and qualitative data described throughout this report, it is clear that for NCST,
> Proof of Concept has been achieved.

In determining Proof of Concept, the evaluation of NCST was designed to examine the impacts, outcomes, and challenges that have emerged over the last decade of experience with this authentically community-founded and based public safety organization. Over the course of the last two years, two teams of researchers from UCLA have deeply evaluated this model, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods to analyze crime data as well as study the viewpoints of NCST staff, Newark residents, and myriad community partners. The preliminary research

questions that guided the evaluation are discussed in Chapter Seven (Qualitative Research Findings) of the full report. These questions have served as the "true north" of the evaluation for both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. It is clear that the combined efforts of NCST leadership and staff, the residents of Newark, the community partners, and the Public Safety Round Table have all coalesced to create a model that can be taken to scale to transform communities across America.

Ultimately, as the evaluation worked to rigorously and holistically assess the NCST model and its impact, it also aimed to create a blueprint for this model that could be taken to scale in other settings. The evaluation plan, detailed in Chapter Five (Overview of the Current NCST Evaluation) of the full report, was established in collaboration with NCST. Over the 24-month study, the goal of the evaluation has been to assess whether the NCST model currently works and – if NCST is determined to be effective – how the key elements of this model affect the Newark community residents, particularly in the South and West Wards, where crime has always been concentrated.

By following the research plan, it was understood that the evaluation must first determine the overall program effectiveness of NCST, thus establishing then fortifying the Proof of Concept. Additionally, once the quantitative and qualitative research demonstrated the impact of the NCST model there was added value for the achievement of Proof of Concept, particularly centered on professionalizing and validating CVI.

In multiple settings, Proof of Concept has been used to professionalize an emerging field of work in systematic and consistent ways. It legitimizes the field's practice and provides it with authority, credibility, and intentionality. This is true for the field, practice, and practitioners of CVI. The adoption of standard operating procedures, a defined and intentional model of practice, and infrastructure to document and collect

evidence all work together to formally validate the field of CVI as a necessary collaborator in the national narrative pertaining to public safety. Additionally, historic funding of CVI at federal and state levels over the past five years has shepherded the opportunity for unprecedented professionalization of the field. Again, the achievement of a Proof of Concept is vital to the continuation of this work.

Achieving Proof of Concept: The Challenge to Research

Any meaningful Proof of Concept depends on recognized research methodology. Drawing upon comprehensive research on CVI evaluation methods and community-engaged research practices, this Proof of Concept addresses many of the fundamental data-related challenges facing CVI organizations: how to build data collection and data management systems that balance academic rigor with community knowledge, capture both incremental and/or personal progress and population-level change, and maintain the trust and privacy of participants while also maintaining accountability to funders.

Proof of Concept is neither automatic nor easy to come by. The crisis of measurement in the CVI field is exacerbated by numerous challenges. First and primary among them is the extent to which data collection methods are fragmented or disconnected, coupled with resource constraints. For example, physical (paper) data collection forms are sometimes still utilized for intake assessments, data from partnering organizations such as hospitals or schools might only be available in variable electronic formats, and the data entry necessary to align disparate systems of collection is time consuming and error prone. Organizations are chronically underfunded, and the primacy of direct practice needs repeatedly overshadows an organization's capacity to both implement and sustain data collection and data management efforts.

Second, despite interventionists and outreach workers possessing irreplaceable expertise about their communities, current evaluation practices often systematically exclude their voices. For example, academic researchers frequently define neighborhood boundaries that do not reflect lived community experience. The complexity of replicating place-based interventions is challenging enough, but at the heart of CVI work is its emphasis on intentional, local adaptation to meet the specific needs of individual communities. This can create tension between evaluators, who focus on fidelity in implementation for purposes of both evaluation and replication, and organizations, who rightfully serve the needs of community first and foremost. And often, when community partners contribute extensively to

The capacity-building, collective efficacy, and social capital-building that results from CVI work – which is truly grounded in and established by community – are difficult to operationalize, quantify, and attribute causality from programming, but nonetheless critical to document. CVI is challenging in that it is micro work focused on individual interactions, needs, and actions with the understanding that individuals comprise the community: the macro impact of collective change. Improving one variable (housing, employment, trauma recovery) for an individual then ripples through the family, the home, the block, the neighborhood, and beyond.

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evaluations, they rarely receive acknowledgement formally in authorship or otherwise. Researchers will counter that gift cards represent acknowledgement, but these fall far short of recognizing the invaluable contribution so many partners make.

Third, current evaluation approaches, coupled with competitive grant cycles, systemically privilege large-scale outcome measures. There is a corresponding need to document what is being undertaken and accomplished by CVI and its practitioners, because focusing merely on outcomes fails to capture the true depth of the work. The capacity-building, collective efficacy, and social capital-building that results from CVI work – which is truly grounded in and established by community – are difficult to operationalize, quantify, and attribute causality from programming, but nonetheless critical to document. CVI is challenging in that it is micro work focused on individual interactions, needs, and actions with the understanding that individuals comprise the community: the macro impact of collective change. Improving one variable (housing, employment, trauma recovery) for an individual then ripples through the family, the home, the block, the neighborhood, and beyond.

Recent reviews of current CVI programs and practices have revealed significant gaps that stand to undermine both effectiveness and sustainability of this model. A recent comprehensive review of 149 CVI evaluations found that 76.4% rely solely on deficit-based measures – tracking failures, such as recidivism, rather than successes.[1] In turn, only 38.9% combine both process and outcome measures, and despite 42.3% of evaluations involving CVI practitioners in some capacity, only 10.7% credit them as authors or co-authors, highlighting a profound disconnect between community expertise and formal knowledge production.[2] These patterns perpetuate harmful

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[1] Girma, M., Schleimer, J., Aveledo, A., Mustafa, A., Rencken, C., Thurston, C., ... & Rowhani-Rahbar, A. (2025). Evaluating Community Violence Intervention Programs: A Scoping Review Synthesizing Methods and Measures. *INQUIRY: The Journal of Health Care Organization, Provision, and Financing, 62*, 00469580251361742.
[2] Ibid.

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narratives about communities experiencing violence while simultaneously failing to capture the full spectrum of CVI impacts or the overall philosophical principles of centering community in this work.

Application to NCST

An understanding of these research practices and the direct or inadvertent harm they may have caused informed every aspect of the UCLA research efforts that proceeded at NCST. The NCST evaluation was strengths-based, community-driven, and a continuation of the broad engagement and community ownership that has characterized NCST since its creation and establishment. In short, the UCLA research followed the philosophical approach and practice of NCST; the Proof of Concept was centered on the community and what it needs to address safety. The involvement of community alongside statistics and staff experience adds to the depth and validity of the evaluation process. This interrelationship is also clear in the logic model the research team developed.

The Proof of Concept Logic Model

Logic models attempt to bridge program planning and program evaluation by making the implicit explicit and the theoretical operational. The following logic model articulates NCST's transformative approach to CVI and provides direction for the scaling of their Proof of Concept to communities beyond Newark. By mapping the pathway from inputs through activities, outputs, outcomes, and ultimately to systemic impact, this framework operationalizes an ecosystem approach that addresses community violence through community healing. It thus serves as both an accountability tool and a roadmap for communities seeking to establish empirically validated, culturally grounded responses to violence, helping communities conceptualize and actualize their own definitions of public safety, health, and justice.

NCST Proof of Concept Logic Model

Establishing a research-validated Proof of Concept is dependent on the synthesis of NCST interventions and related activities with evaluation best practices. This synthesis guides the rigorous examination of internal quantitative data and crime statistics alongside qualitative data surrounding community perceptions and eco-system impact. The present logic model provides the road map for how the process of establishing and validating Proof of Concept was developed. It is critical to note that the logic model and the evaluation that followed was informed by collaboration with NCST staff and Newark community.

Resources / Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
• CVI credibility and external expertise • Community engagement and support • Public-Private alignment (government, NPOs, coalitions) • Policymaker and elected officials' commitment • Community-based participatory research partners with eco-system knowledge • Committed funding • Compliance and accountability • National reputation and support	• Engaging TTA for professionalized CVI implementation • Community outreach • ID and hire local residents • MOUs with schools, hospitals, data sharing • Data collection and database expansion • Fundraising and strategic planning • Compilation of long-term, committed, and *diversified* funding (private, local, state, fed) • Create nonprofit entity with sustain-able infrastructure	• Locally adapted CVI model (responsive to local eco-system) • Holistic, wraparound, supportive services available to the community members • Delineated relationship with law enforcement • Eligibility for diverse funding • Transformative definition of public safety that centers community • Public education re: CVI • Community engagement through roundtable • Reliable data re: efficacy, operation, and decision making • Reliable data to document program changes • Ability to respond to change in community needs and public safety eco-system	• Effective community centered public safety • Crime Reduction • Community perceptions of safe, responsive eco-system • Public knowledge, support for CVI • Understanding of the drivers of crime (poverty, addiction, etc.) • Awareness of and ability to respond to trauma at the individual and community level • Effective interagency and inter org collaboration, resource sharing-complementary not duplicative	• Decrease in crime • Increase in markers of community well-being healthier communities • Resilient communities • Equitable opportunities • Increase in individual and community resilience • Transformation in public safety culture to center on public health • Transformation in the public safety eco-system to ensure community voice and participation is documented and elevated

As CVI moves from being recognized in urban pockets of implementation to being embraced as a nationwide movement, the need for rigorous evaluation and systematic data collection has never been more pressing. Contemporary CVI programs recognize that meaningful research and data collection must be community-led and culturally responsive, capturing not only violent crime statistics, but also the transformative work of violence interrupters, the nuanced patterns of conflict mediation, and the long-term trajectories of participants navigating trauma recovery. This research and data infrastructure must document the essential work performed by outreach workers whose interventions often occur outside of traditional service delivery settings and at all hours.

Moreover, robust data infrastructure including all aspects of data collection and data management will enable NCST and the CVI programs that take its model to scale to document outcomes beyond violence reduction that truly reflect the holistic nature of this work. This includes tracking improvements in mental health, employment stability, educational advancement, and critically, the community-building and social capital development that results from CVI work grounded in and established by communities. As noted by leading CVI researchers, the focus on violence reduction metrics alone fails to capture the intangible benefits of collective efficacy and community healing that effective CVI produces.[3,4,5]

Building this infrastructure requires sustained investment that has historically been absent from CVI funding streams. Programs need resources not only for data

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[3] Hureau, D. M. (2023). Community violence interventions and the vulnerability of "the violent". *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 120(51), e2318197120.

[4] Girma, M., Schleimer, J., Aveledo, A., Mustafa, A., Rencken, C., Thurston, C., ... & Rowhani-Rahbar, A. (2025). Evaluating Community Violence Intervention Programs: A Scoping Review Synthesizing Methods and Measures. INQUIRY: *The Journal of Health Care Organization, Provision, and Financing*, 62, 00469580251361742.

[5] Costa, J., Adrianzén McGrath, S., & Carrillo, P. (2025). Defining CVI: a critical review of current conceptualizations and their implications for policy, research and practice. INQUIRY: *The Journal of Health Care Organization, Provision, and Financing*, 62, 00469580251366146.

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management systems but also for training staff in consistent documentation practices, protecting sensitive information about high-risk participants, and developing evaluation frameworks that honor both quantitative metrics demanded by funders and the qualitative narratives that capture the transformative power of community-led violence intervention. This dual approach – combining systematic quantitative tracking with qualitative documentation – provides the comprehensive evidence base necessary to secure continued investment and support the field's expansion to communities nationwide.

The Proof of Concept achieved at NCST offers a transformative approach to CVI infrastructure that centers community participation, employs both asset- and deficit-based measures, integrates real-time data collection capabilities, and maintains the highest standards of participant privacy and data security. Additionally, the infrastructure the logic model establishes will enable CVI organizations to track participant engagement across multiple touchpoints, monitor violence interruption activities in real-time, demonstrate cost-effectiveness to funders, and most critically, begin to uplift a more complete story of community healing and transformation. It has informed the work undertaken and completed in the evaluation of the Newark Community Street Team.

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From December 2023 through November 2025, a UCLA evaluation of the Newark Community Street Team (NCST) was undertaken to holistically assess NCST and its impact on violence in Newark, with particular emphasis on the experiences of community residents over time. The study was commissioned by The Community Based Public Safety Collective and funded by the Ford Foundation.

The goal of the study was to assess whether the NCST model actually works and if so, the extent of its impact on the community. As part of this research design, along with determining the effectiveness of NCST, the evaluation was also conceived to demonstrate Proof of Concept and consequently examine how key elements of this model of violence intervention can be sustained in Newark and implemented in additional settings nationally.

The evaluation and research resulted in a comprehensive report that was released in November 2025. In addition, to help make the report accessible to community members and a variety of stakeholders, a series of briefs were developed.

The five briefs include:

An Executive Summary of the NCST Evaluation and Proof of Concept Study

Community Violence Intervention in Context: A Review of the Literature

Quantitative Research Findings: Understanding NCST's Impact on Violence

Qualitative Research Findings: Examining Community Sentiments and Understanding of NCST

Newark Community Street Team Evaluation Proof of Concept

To obtain a copy of the full report, please contact NCST

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