

10 innovators who are raising the bar in the fight against COVID-19

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For all the dark moments we've collectively experienced in the COVID era, city halls' responses to the pandemic have been both enlightening and inspiring. Faced with unprecedented health, economic, and social challenges, city leaders across the U.S. and around the world have found thousands of creative solutions to problems they could have never imagined a year ago.

Along the way, they've made use of all the tools of innovation: collaborating with partners to amplify their impact; testing, learning, and adapting solutions in an iterative way; listening closely to what residents need to design programs that work for them; and using data to understand problems and measure the impact of responses.

In every city, there are local leaders who deserve our appreciation for the hard work they've put in already this year — and will no doubt continue to put in as COVID-19 cases continue to surge. Here, Bloomberg Cities recognizes 10 of them — innovators whose dedication and creativity have shined through the pandemic and continue to inspire us.

When the pandemic suddenly put thousands of San Antonio residents out of work, Verónica Soto wanted to make sure they didn't also lose their homes because of unpaid rent or utility bills. Collaborating with other city leaders, she supercharged an existing housing assistance program with an infusion of \$76 million, staffing help from libraries and other temporarily dormant departments, and a push to move a paper application process online. A program that previously received about 50 applications a week now has approved nearly 20,000 since April. Low-income residents are eligible to receive up to two months' rent and utilities paid through the program as well as up to \$300 in direct cash assistance to help with other expenses. "It isn't a perfect system," Soto said, "but we had to move quickly because the need is so great."

As the first coronavirus wave crested in April, it became clear that getting it in check would require building a small army of "contact tracers." Brendan Hellweg has played a critical role in doing that locally in Baltimore, managing a collaboration of many partners in and out of City Hall known as the Baltimore Health Corps. The effort will hire 300 people — focusing on people who've lost work due to the pandemic — to investigate case histories of people who have COVID-19, identify their contacts, and coordinate care and support for those who are sick or in quarantine. Already more than 200 staff have been hired, and recruiting for Spanish-speaking staff is accelerating as data makes clear the disproportionate toll COVID is taking in Baltimore's Latinx communities. "Producing rapid, high-quality outreach to attract Spanish-speaking applicants to the Health Corps is

challenging,” Hellweg said, “but it’s crucial to serve thousands of our Spanish-speaking residents.”

For those who’ve lost loved ones to the pandemic, the difficulty of holding or attending funerals has made emotional healing hard to come by. The cumulative loss — 238,000 dead in the U.S. alone — is also difficult to process. Detroit’s Rochelle Riley came up with a powerful way for her city to remember and grieve — and, importantly, a way for them to do it safely. She first asked residents to send in photos of those they’ve lost to COVID. Then she used those photographs to make billboard-sized prints — 907 in all — that were posted along a two-mile stretch of roadway on Detroit’s Belle Isle park. In August, Detroiters drove by the photos in a series of 15 funeral processions that, for many, was their only chance to say goodbye and get a sense of closure. “What I planned [was] a funeral as if I were planning it for one person,” said Riley, who was friends with a number of people whose pictures were part of the display. “Everything that we would do for any funeral we would do for this funeral.”

In a time of economic hardship when homelessness could be on the rise, Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner has set the opposite goal. He wants to use this moment — and the city’s access to federal aid — to bring the number of people experiencing homelessness in Houston closer to zero. Marc Eichenbaum is Turner’s point person on the initiative. Working in close collaboration with a number of community partners who deliver homeless services, he’s pieced together funds from a dozen sources to move 2,700 people into housing and support another 2,000 to prevent people struggling with rent from hitting the streets. The program launched in October and has already housed 115 individuals, a monthly pace that is expected to double as it scales up. “This is not the time to be paralyzed and in fear of risk,” Eichenbaum said. There’s opportunity to “look for the long-term play here.”

In early April, data began to bring into focus the disproportionate toll COVID-19 is taking on people of color. Almost immediately, Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot created a Racial Equity Rapid Response Team to address racial disparities and put Candace Moore and Dr. Sybil Madison in charge. Working with a number of community groups and healthcare institutions, the team has targeted communities of color for COVID-19 testing and educational outreach and distributed more than 8,000 boxes of food, 300,000 bottles of hand sanitizer, and 1 million face masks. The effort has served as a model for many other cities that have formed racial equity task forces of their own. The goal, Moore said, is not just to “flatten the mortality curve in Black and Brown communities,” but also to “create the infrastructure from which we can build future work.”

Before the pandemic, Julio Calvo was scaling up a program in Barcelona aimed at keeping elderly residents connected — to city and to each other — through an app called Vincles. About 2,500 residents were already using the app, which was a winning idea in the 2014 Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayors Challenge, to chat with friends, share

photos, and learn about social activities like cooking classes or reading clubs. So when lockdowns arrived, and seniors were deemed at high risk of COVID-19, Calvo was in a great position to help. He and his team pivoted in order to use Vincles to connect seniors with critical updates on health, public safety, and psychological support. That's included having doctors, nurses, and police officers providing direct answers to more than 4,500 questions posed by the app's users. "It's very reassuring for the elderly," Calvo said, "because they know that if something worries them they can get an answer."

For some people, getting a COVID-19 test can be a scary experience. Leah Tivoli wanted to make sure it wasn't. So when Seattle ramped up its testing regime, Tivoli used principles of human-centered design to make the whole process, from signing up to getting swabbed to learning the results, as easy and reassuring as possible. The new drive-through testing sites met with favorable reviews from residents and, importantly, more than doubled the city's testing capacity. Tivoli is now on temporary loan to King County Public Health to help scale up more testing sites in Seattle's southern suburbs. "We need to see social acceptance of testing," she said. "It needs to become a very normal, accepted thing to do."

Back when people were still getting used to the idea of having to keep six feet away from each other, Denver's Eulois Cleckley and his team came up with a creative way to help them adjust. They closed down streets across the city to through traffic in order to give people room to get outside and walk, bike, or run, and to do so safely. Denver was one of the first cities to do this in the pandemic, accelerating a "slow streets" movement that is building across the U.S. and around the world, and opening eyes to ways of giving people more room on city streets and cars less. Now, Denver residents are petitioning to make the changes permanent. "To me, it provides an opportunity to learn that it's OK to bike in the street, it's OK to walk," Cleckley said. "It might be a new mode of transportation that people otherwise would not have contemplated prior to COVID."

When food supply chains snapped in the early days of the pandemic, Alicia Moon's innovation team looked into what Detroit residents were having the hardest time finding emergency food aid. One especially vulnerable group, they learned, was people who had COVID-19 and had to quarantine at home. Many of them didn't have family or friends nearby and didn't know where to turn for help. Moon's team joined forces with several partners in and out of city government to put together a weekly food delivery service for this population. It's served well over 100,000 meals to residents, offering them a lifeline when they need it most. The city's Parks & Recreation Department has since taken over administration of the program and is now planning what will be included in special meal boxes for Thanksgiving and December holidays. "Food can mean more to a family than sustenance," Moon said. "It also brings us together and builds bonds of connection, which feel even more critical at this time."

Mayor Lori Lightfoot vowed to reimagine violence response and end sole reliance on police, but outreach groups at heart of plan still struggle for funding
By Dan Hinkel, Madeline Buckley, Gregory Pratt and Jeremy Gorner

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As a candidate and then mayor, Lori Lightfoot has spoken often of her ambition to fully reinvent Chicago's approach to combating its stubborn violence problem.

Key to those plans are anti-violence organizations, including those that intervene in disputes or toss lifelines to people likely to kill or die. She said last year that those outreach groups were "fundamentally critical to what we're doing," as she seeks to treat violence as a public health crisis.

"We will make sure they have the resources they need to be successful," she said.

More than 16 months into her term, however, Lightfoot's plan to fundamentally change Chicago's approach by relying on those groups has not developed. The administration's spending on them is a vanishingly small part of this year's budget, and anti-violence advocates have criticized her relatively modest funding of those initiatives during one of the bloodiest years in recent history.

The administration has touted its \$11.5 million in spending this year on conflict intervention, counseling and employment help for people at risk, as well as services for victims and funding for the city's public safety office.

City Hall officials have described those initiatives as focusing on the city's most violent neighborhoods. And Lightfoot has said repeatedly she is turning away from the strategy of past mayors, which she has described as using only the police to stop violence.

But her attempt to shift to a different path has been incremental at best. The city's spending for these alternate approaches to violence is less than 1% of the city's share of the Police Department budget this year — which is about \$1.7 billion. In June alone, the city spent more than four times as much on police overtime.

Two weeks ago, the mayor committed to leaning more on groups other than the police in a sweeping report on her plans to suppress bloodshed. That's a vision for the future, but the present day finds Lightfoot in a familiar position for a Chicago mayor — mostly using police to try to turn around a violent year. The city is on pace for more than 750 homicides, which would make it one of the worst years of the last quarter-century.

Pressure has built to change public safety spending, as activists incensed by police brutality have demanded that Lightfoot give less money to cops and more to services

that could address the root causes of violence. And leaders of anti-violence groups and some aldermen have called for the city to route more money to nonprofit initiatives. Anti-violence advocates have asked for \$50 million a year but said that even that wouldn't match up to the scope of the problem.

That push for more money is working against stiff fiscal headwinds, as the city faces a \$1.2 billion budget gap, brought on by the economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

Meanwhile, even the city's current funding for the groups has spurred skepticism from some aldermen who worry organizations aren't held accountable for results, and the anti-violence efforts underway generally remain unproven, without clear evidence they can stop bloodshed in the long term.

Leaders of anti-violence organizations — which have often looked to philanthropy for funding — said the city and other governments will need to step up soon to fund nonprofit efforts if they're going to have a serious long-term impact.

"If we as a city committed to doing this, we could be in a very different place, not overnight but in a couple years," said Arne Duncan, a former U.S. secretary of education who now runs an anti-violence group. "We gotta commit to doing this."

Asked whether the city is spending enough on the groups, Susan Lee, deputy mayor for public safety, provided no firm answer, pointing to the city's budgetary predicament and suggesting other potential sources of money. She told the Tribune the price tag of addressing Chicago's violence is "something that the entire city and the entire region really has to contemplate together."

"It's not just the city. It's also the county, it's also the state, it's also philanthropy and corporate sector," she said.

Plans, but little funding

In a position paper issued during her campaign, Lightfoot criticized Mayor Rahm Emanuel for lacking "a real, comprehensive plan to make a sustainable reduction in the violence." As mayor, her oft-repeated goal has been to make Chicago the safest big city in the country.

2020 has not gone according to plan. Through Friday, Chicago had suffered 604 homicides, a 51% jump from the same time last year, police statistics show.

Lightfoot — a former chair of the Chicago Police Board — has responded by taking a hands-on tack with her police brass. She has held weekly accountability sessions with police leaders and sometimes sent stinging messages about their performance, leaving no question that she's paying close attention.

While policing dominates the conversation about stopping violence, Lightfoot has also promoted her commitment to alternate approaches. Late last month, she put out a 103-page “Comprehensive Plan to Reduce Violence in Chicago.” Anti-violence groups figure prominently in the plan, and one of the long-term goals is to “expand investments in violence prevention services.”

City Hall officials have said they put \$11.5 million this year into “community-based public safety” efforts focused on Chicago’s most violent neighborhoods. More than half that went to Metropolitan Family Services, a nonprofit organization that got \$6 million to fund and coordinate the efforts of 11 groups performing street outreach on the South and West Sides.

But not all of the \$11.5 million is going to such organizations. The figure also includes \$1.1 million budgeted this year to expand the city’s public safety office, which is tasked with coordinating anti-violence efforts.

The city has also put money from state and federal sources toward programs that have some anti-violence role.

The question of what counts as anti-violence funding also is open to interpretation, and budget documents don’t clearly spell out what money is going toward stopping bloodshed. The city, for example, has long funded after-school and jobs programs that could be seen as working against violence, though the Lightfoot administration did not count that outlay as part of the \$11.5 million.

Still, City Hall officials have touted the 2020 spending as an increase, particularly for anti-violence street outreach programs. This year, the city spent \$7.5 million on those programs, including the \$6 million that went to Metropolitan Family Services. Figures compiled by the city show that in 2019 the Emanuel administration put \$1.5 million toward similar efforts, which the Lightfoot administration continued.

The question of how to spend tax dollars on public safety has been front-and-center nationally in the four months since George Floyd died under the knee of a Minneapolis police officer, spurring protests nationwide centered on calls to “defund the police.” In Chicago, those calls are rooted in the Police Department’s long history of abuse and misconduct against African Americans.

Lightfoot has rejected calls to substantially reduce police funding. Neither she nor other City Hall officials have said exactly how much money they envision going to anti-violence groups in 2021.

Other cities have made longer-standing commitments to alternate approaches to violence.

For more than a decade, Los Angeles has partnered with community groups involved in its anti-gang program. That city— which has had roughly 350 fewer homicides than Chicago this year — committed \$25.9 million in this budget to community organizations, as well as data and research contractors involved in that effort, a city spokeswoman said.

Lee, the deputy mayor who previously did anti-violence work in Los Angeles, objected to comparing the cities' spending, as their initiatives differ in the work they fund. But she acknowledged that Los Angeles and New York City have “been on this path of doing a coordinated citywide comprehensive approach for much longer than Chicago.”

Beyond funding questions, leadership on the issue is in flux. City Hall announced Lee’s resignation earlier this month, two days after Lightfoot’s anti-violence plan came out and after Lee had been on a job a little more than a year. It is unclear who will take her place when she leaves this month, and her resignation emerged the same week as the announced retirement of the deputy police superintendent tasked with leading reforms to the troubled Police Department.

While Chicago is turning to anti-violence organizations, it is not funding the best-known effort of that kind in the city’s recent history: Cure Violence, formerly known as CeaseFire.

Researchers credited CeaseFire — which used ex-gang members interrupt conflicts — with reducing violence, and the program was the subject of the acclaimed 2011 documentary “The Interrupters.” But police voiced distrust of a program that relied on people with gang ties and criminal pasts, and in 2007 the state auditor criticized its financial practices.

Still, in 2012 the Emanuel administration responded to a surge in violence by forging a one-year \$1 million contract with the group. But the deal was not renewed. The program has only one site in Chicago, on the South Side, which is supported by philanthropy, said CEO Dr. Gary Slutkin. Though it is headquartered in Chicago, the program operates more extensively in other cities.

While the group has a limited presence on Chicago’s streets, some people once connected with the organization now work with other local anti-violence initiatives.

Getting started anyway

Even with limited government funding — and amid a pandemic that has forced some in-person activities online — the work goes on.

Late last month, job coach Christian Cambray sat before a webcam in a classroom and led a cognitive behavior therapy session for about half a dozen men enrolled in Rapid

Employment and Development Initiative, or READI. The program, supported by philanthropy, combines therapy with job training and placement. Cambray was trying to help the men regulate their emotions — to calm down when angry or find peace amid a traumatic flashback.

Cambray demonstrated, breathing deeply and suggesting the men count backward. He asked one participant to call forth “pleasant imagery and visualization.” The man said he saw himself in Mexico at his father’s ranch, hearing roosters and smelling tortillas.

The participant said, “I feel calm, relaxed.”

READI, like other programs, serves men with troubled pasts and criminal records who might struggle to finish school or find work. Participant Jamel Fields, for example, said he was expelled from school in eighth grade for bringing a gun, and he’s done prison time for armed robbery. He spent six months in isolation, he said. Counseling has helped him deal with the trauma, he said.

“I still have nightmares from prison,” he said.

Fields is currently working on a GED diploma, and hopes to find a job in welding or construction.

Researchers are still studying the program’s effectiveness but a preliminary evaluation over 20 months showed that men who participated in some part of the program were nearly 40% less likely to be shot or killed than men at similarly high risk for violence, according to the group.

READI, whose main operations are not city-funded, is one program supported by donors who met in 2016 to discuss their options as shootings spiked. As a result, about 50 donors and private foundations in the past four years has raised about \$90 million to study and fund violence prevention, some of those involved said. The idea was to get the initiatives off the ground, study their impact and hand off promising programs to the city to fund and coordinate.

The heads of major foundations told the Tribune they know the budget crunch means they can’t hand off their efforts this year. John Palfrey, president of the MacArthur Foundation, said the city was “radically underfunded in this aspect of public safety compared to other cities when the mayor took over” and would likely need more time to build up enough funding.

“The work shows promise but it’s not where it needs to be and also given the financial situation of the city, the municipal support isn’t there yet for this work,” he said. “So we’re hanging in there.”

There is promise in nonprofit groups taking on street violence, academics told the Tribune. However, there is little quality research on the long-term impact of specific efforts because they have rarely been sustained over time and evaluated rigorously, those researchers said.

Still, some evidence supports nonprofit solutions to violence. For example, a 2017 study in the journal *American Sociological Review* found that every 10 additional organizations “focusing on crime and community life” in cities of more than 100,000 people across the country led to a 9% reduction in the murder rate from 1990 to 2013.

Robert Sampson, a Harvard University social sciences professor who has studied crime in Chicago, called for city governments to “trust the residents more.” He noted news reports that the founder of South Side anti-violence group Mothers/Men Against Senseless Killings had warned police in advance of potential violence at a funeral in July. The department posted cops nearby but 15 people were shot anyway.

“The residents in communities are very sharp and know what’s going on,” Sampson said.

The future of anti-violence groups

Some aldermen have called for more funding for anti-violence groups — along with scrutiny of city spending in that area.

Three aldermen last year introduced an ordinance that would create a city department to prevent gun violence. It would receive at least \$50 million yearly and work with groups in the most violent neighborhoods.

That ordinance has not gone anywhere at the council thus far.

Ald. Chris Taliaferro, 29th, a former police officer and Lightfoot ally who co-sponsored the ordinance, said he hopes the city can find savings in other areas and give more money to well-chosen anti-violence groups.

“Unless we commit more funding to it, I don’t think it’s gonna be as effective as it should be,” he said. “I think putting the responsibility completely on our police department is not going to get us very far.”

Even so, Taliaferro has also introduced a resolution that would call for hearings before the public safety committee he chairs on the money the city has handed out for violence prevention. Taliaferro said he is concerned the groups that have taken in the money are not being held accountable for results.

Leaders of anti-violence groups, meanwhile, continue to press the city. Some also have called for an annual pledge of \$50 million. Eddie Bocanegra, executive director of READI

and a former gang member who served time in prison for murder, said even that amount “barely scratches the surface” of the deep need.

He asked how the Lightfoot administration plans to change its approach.

“I think people are curious to know what is the strategy in the mayor’s office beyond putting more police officers on the ground?” Bocanegra said.

It is unclear how Lightfoot might try to simultaneously address two of the city’s most daunting problems: violence and a fiscal shortfall. The scope of her ambition for public safety in Chicago is clear.

“Violence has touched so many of our communities, and when any one of them is unsafe, our entire city is unsafe,” Lightfoot wrote in the introduction to her plan to reduce violence. “Since my first day in office, I have been determined to change that reality.”

She has yet to show whether she can build the political momentum needed to enact and fund that vision in the years to come.

The Pandemic Has Hindered Many of the Best Ideas for Reducing Violence **By Emily Badger and Quoctrung Bui**

The New York Times
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Reported crime of nearly every kind has declined this year amid the pandemic. The exception to that has been stark and puzzling: Shootings and homicides are up in cities around the country, perplexing experts who normally expect these patterns to trend together.

The president and others have blamed protests and unrest, the changing tactics of police, and even the partisan politics of mayors. But at least part of the puzzle may lie in sources that are harder to see (and politicize): The pandemic has frayed all kinds of institutions and infrastructure that hold communities together, that watch over streets, that mediate conflicts, that simply give young people something to do.

Schools, libraries, recreation centers and public pools have closed. Nonprofits, churches and sports leagues have scaled back. Mentors, social workers and counselors have been hampered by social distancing.

And programs devised to reduce gun violence — and that have proved effective in studies — have been upended by the pandemic. Summer jobs programs were cut this year. Violence intervention workers were barred from hospitals. Group behavioral therapy programs meant to be intimate and in-person have moved, often haltingly, online.

“This work is a pat on the shoulder, a touch on the hand, a handshake,” said Del McFadden, the director of the office of neighborhood safety and engagement for the District of Columbia. “All of those things are different now.”

Mr. McFadden’s office was created after a rise in homicides in Washington in 2015. One yearlong program it runs, called Pathways, provides residents deemed likely to engage in violence with job training, social services and cognitive behavioral therapy that teaches skills for de-escalating conflict. Groups entering the program used to take a white-water rafting trip on the Potomac. But there’s no social distancing in a boat. Mentors would typically take participants shopping for job-interview suits. But that’s hard when stores are closed.

Now violence prevention work is masked, in smaller groups, in public parks, or online.

“We’re all struggling to figure out where are the evidence-based solutions in this work,” said Chasda Martin, the director of programs for an initiative run by the Heartland Alliance called READI Chicago, which combines transitional jobs with behavioral

coaching and services for men at risk of involvement in gun violence in Chicago. In early analysis, a team of researchers at the University of Chicago, the University of Michigan and Cornell studying the program has found that it may be reducing the risk that participants become a victim of a shooting or homicide.

Then came the pandemic. The program's partnering employers couldn't quickly shift to online work. So READI Chicago created its own version of unemployment insurance, paying men who kept up with their coaching online. In that virtual world, the program required participants to blur their backgrounds in group sessions, concealing any hint of location or gang affiliation. In some form, Mr. Martin said, the program had to continue.

"We knew that if we had a bunch of guys sitting around, our hypothesis was that those participants were going to lose their safety net, and they'd engage in criminal activity," he said. "This is the highest-risk population. That propensity is still there."

Some version of that fear — students with no school to attend, long summer days with no summer jobs, young people with nowhere to go — may be part of what is happening this year on a wider scale.

Without jobs, activities or support, many people have also been stuck at home in neighborhoods with histories of violence and continuing conflicts.

"You couldn't create a situation that theory would predict to be more volatile," said John Roman, a senior fellow at NORC at the University of Chicago.

It's impossible to say how much this dynamic has contributed to violence this year. Crime is hard to explain even in normal times. Some of the trends this year are relatively straightforward: Residential robberies declined with people spending more time at home. Shoplifting declined when businesses closed. Stolen cars increased in some cities as novice delivery drivers started leaving their running cars in the road.

But violence is harder to grapple with. And that is especially true this year because it diverges so drastically from other crime.

"Any theory that's really going to be convincing has to explain this unusual pattern," said David Abrams, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania law school who has been tracking crime trends this year.

The behavior of the police has certainly changed. Early in the spring, officers pulled back on their interactions amid social distancing. Later in the spring and summer they faced mass protests — and may have reacted to those protests with slowdowns. But Mr. Abrams said the effect of any policing changes wouldn't be limited to homicides and shootings.

The rise in violence in cities around the country coincided in late May and early June with mass protests after the death of George Floyd in police custody. But that's not necessarily because of a police pullback, or because the protests themselves led to violence (although looting did create an abrupt spike in nonresidential burglaries), said Richard Rosenfeld, a criminologist at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

He has looked at a similar rise in violence around the protests against police brutality in 2015. And he suspects that police legitimacy deteriorates in these moments, even in neighborhoods where trust in law enforcement is already low.

"When confidence in the police wanes and drops sufficiently, then one gets a rise in so-called street justice, in people taking matters into their own hands to settle disputes," Mr. Rosenfeld said. "That contributes to a rise in violence."

Viewed that way, the police themselves are another institution that's fraying, at a time when alternative mediators and authority figures are especially absent.

"The police are the most visible and maybe salient thing that society does to try and achieve public safety," said Jens Ludwig, who directs the University of Chicago's Crime Lab, which has been analyzing some of the violence reduction programs in Chicago. "But it's definitely not the only thing that society does."

One of the paid jobs in the READI Chicago program involves cleaning up and maintaining vacant lots in city neighborhoods. That work halted over the summer, leaving participants without a job. But there's also research suggesting a secondary lost benefit: When vacant properties are cared for, gun violence in surrounding areas declines.

Separately, there's evidence that the presence of nonprofits in a community has helped lower violent crime. There's evidence that hospitals can play a role in reducing violence, when gunshot victims are identified in trauma centers for follow-up interventions. There are randomized control trials showing that summer youth employment programs reduce violent crime among participants, even well after the programs have ended.

"They're clearly keeping kids safe," said Sara Heller, a professor at the University of Michigan who has studied summer jobs programs. "It's not always consistent, but violence is going down, criminal justice involvement is going down. Where we can measure it in New York, mortality is going down, and it seems to be from homicides."

Professor Heller and others argue that it's worth considering the role of these programs right now, even when definitive answers about violence are elusive, because summer jobs, parks departments and mentoring initiatives may seem like line items a city can afford to trim with budget cuts looming. To save money, for example, Detroit has already planned to reduce how often it maintains vacant lots.

“Libraries, parks, rec centers, pools, free internet — those are all crime prevention activities and resources,” said Caterina Roman, a professor of criminal justice at Temple University (who is married to Mr. Roman, the NORC researcher). She suspects that cities that will successfully weather this year’s rise in violence are the ones that invested in these resources for years before the pandemic. And cities that further cut them will increasingly rely on policing strategies alone to reduce violence.

In Chicago, another program aimed at at-risk teens, Choose to Change, has had success reducing violent crime arrests and contact with the criminal justice system. That model relies on mentorship with community advocates and group behavioral therapy designed to address trauma. The program used to hold some of its meetings inside schools, and now that’s not possible either.

“The first thing to go last March when the stay-at-home order was issued here in Chicago for these young people was the stability of school,” said Julia Noobler, the director of metropolitan behavioral health services for Children’s Home & Aid, which runs the program alongside another nonprofit, Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. Though school attendance for the program’s participants wasn’t great even before the pandemic, Ms. Noobler said, “School was there when they needed it.”

Now in virtual meetings, there is a new challenge: finding quiet, private space to get online in homes that may have several generations of family in quarantine.