Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) – Developing a Research Roadmap

Stakeholder Recruitment and Engagement Plan

November 2015

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Contents

I.   INTRODUCTION

In furtherance of its mission to conduct evidence-based research to meet policy, operational, and public needs in order to save lives, reduce property losses, and enhance community resilience in the face of rapidly changing threats of extremist violence in the United States, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science & Technology Directorate (S&T) developed a countering violent extremism (CVE) framework (the Framework). The Framework recommends pursuit of research in the following four areas: diverting individuals from radicalization, preventing individuals from carrying out attacks or locations from being targeted, mitigating the impact of extremist events, and developing community and individual resilience to violence inspired by extremism. The goal of the current effort, Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) – Developing a Research Roadmap, is to contribute to further development and implementation of the Framework by incorporating information about the stakeholders it represents. To that end, RTI will conduct research with stakeholders engaged in each aspect of the Framework (diversion, prevention, mitigation, and resilience) to develop an understanding of how each organization defines its CVE mission, how the organizations decide what actions to undertake in furtherance of their goals, and how they interact with other CVE stakeholders. Information obtained through these interactions will form the foundation on which the institutional context for CVE will ultimately be developed. This document details the ways in which the stakeholders will be recruited and participation elicited for this research effort.

II.   STAKEHOLDER RECRUITMENT

Stakeholder recruitment is vitally important to this effort. Violent extremism is a complex issue that touches all aspects of society; neither violent extremists nor their targets are limited by age, gender, geography, ideology, or any other factor. As such, to provide DHS with a holistic view of the CVE landscape, a significant and diverse number of stakeholders must be represented, including: all levels of government; law enforcement; and community groups focused on public health, mental health, education, and religion, among others. It is important to note that the current effort is not focused solely on violent extremism motivated by religious ideology, but rather violent extremism motivated by any ideology.

a. Stakeholder Geography

In 2011, the White House released *Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States*. Since the Strategy's release, the local governments and communities of Boston, Los Angeles, and the Twin Cities were tapped by the federal government to participate in a pilot program designed to foster partnerships between a diverse set of stakeholders. Given the success of the pilot effort, four new 'Second Round' cities – Chicago, Denver, Detroit/Dearborn, and Montgomery County (MD) – have been identified as potential participants. Given the heightened awareness of CVE and focus on partnerships in these cities, S&T recommended using them as an organizational structure for the current effort. Though RTI will focus on these four cities, we recognize that there is valuable CVE programming elsewhere; as such, stakeholders located outside of these cities will not be excluded.

Since a significant number of research efforts have already been conducted in Detroit/Dearborn, likely resulting in research fatigue for local organizations, we will approach stakeholders in that area with caution and sensitivity. We will attempt to limit outreach to organizations created within the last five years.

b. National Stakeholder Outreach

Outreach to national stakeholders will be comprised of two components: federal government agencies and non-governmental organizations that reflect the collective, national voice of similar organizations at the community level. Participants will be selected in close coordination with S&T.

Expected federal government participants include DHS and its component agencies, the Departments of Justice and State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the National Counterterrorism Center. S&T will send federal stakeholders an introductory email with an attached letter. The letter, on DHS letterhead and signed by DHS personnel, will encourage participation in the research effort and will provide an overview of the project and its objectives, an introduction to RTI, and the name and contact information of the S&T program manager. This email will be followed (within 48 hours) by an email from RTI reintroducing the project team, reiterating the purpose and goals of the project, and initiating the scheduling process. RTI created a project-specific email account, through which all communication will flow (CVE@rti.org). All core project team members have access to the account so regular monitoring can occur.

Since the objective is to obtain a comprehensive view of CVE programming, RTI will seek input both from non-governmental organizations traditionally supportive of federal CVE efforts and those critical of federal efforts. By doing so, we can help DHS better understand the criticisms about federal CVE programming and the ways they may be ameliorated. Some of the organizations we plan to approach include the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the American School Counselor Association, the National Dropout Prevention Center, Life After Hate, the Center for Extremism and Hate, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the Muslim Public Affairs Council, and Islamic Society of North America. These stakeholders will also first be contacted by S&T via email. The email will contain a project overview, including objectives, an introduction to RTI, and encouragement to participate. Again, this email will be followed (within 48 hours) by an email from RTI reintroducing the project team, reiterating the purpose and goals of the project, and initiating the scheduling process. As with federal stakeholders, all correspondence will be handled through the project email account.

c. City-specific Stakeholder Outreach

All city-specific stakeholders will be chosen in close collaboration with S&T; the initial selection is detailed in the accompanying spreadsheet.

As with all other stakeholders, these stakeholders will first be contacted by S&T via email. The email will contain a project overview, including objectives, an introduction to RTI, and encouragement to participate. This email will be followed (within 48 hours) by an email from RTI reintroducing the project team, reiterating the purpose and goals of the project, and initiating the scheduling process. All correspondence will be handled through the project email account.

Stakeholder groups will be approached in the following ways:

i.   US Attorneys

In each city, RTI will contact the appropriate US Attorney's office via email. We will explain the purpose of the research and request an interview with the US Attorney or his or her designee. We will speak with this individual to develop a general understanding of the community, its needs and challenges, and CVE-specific programming.

ii.   Law Enforcement

In each city, RTI will contact the Chief of Police via email. We will explain the purpose of the research and request an interview with the chief or his or her designee. Should there be a law enforcement-initiated CVE-specific program, we will request an additional interview with the appropriate officer(s).

iii.   Education

In each city, RTI will contact with the superintendent's office via email. We will request a meeting with the superintendent or a designee and ask whether CVE-specific programs have been implemented. As private schools may provide valuable information, we will ask the superintendent (or his or her designee) how private schools are registered in the district. We will contact up to five private schools, including religiously oriented schools.

iv.   Community Groups

Through preliminary research, RTI identified CVE-relevant organizations in all four cities. The organizations represent a wide array of focus areas, ranging from CVE-specific programming to mental health to religion. We will contact these organizations via email, and ask for additional recommendations during the interviews.

Additionally, DHS component agencies, such as the Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, have been interacting with communities around the country for several years, and have developed an understanding of and cultivated strong relationships in these cities. RTI will leverage DHS's knowledge by asking for recommended organizations and points of contact, and, where appropriate, we will request the assistance of the component agency in facilitating introductions.
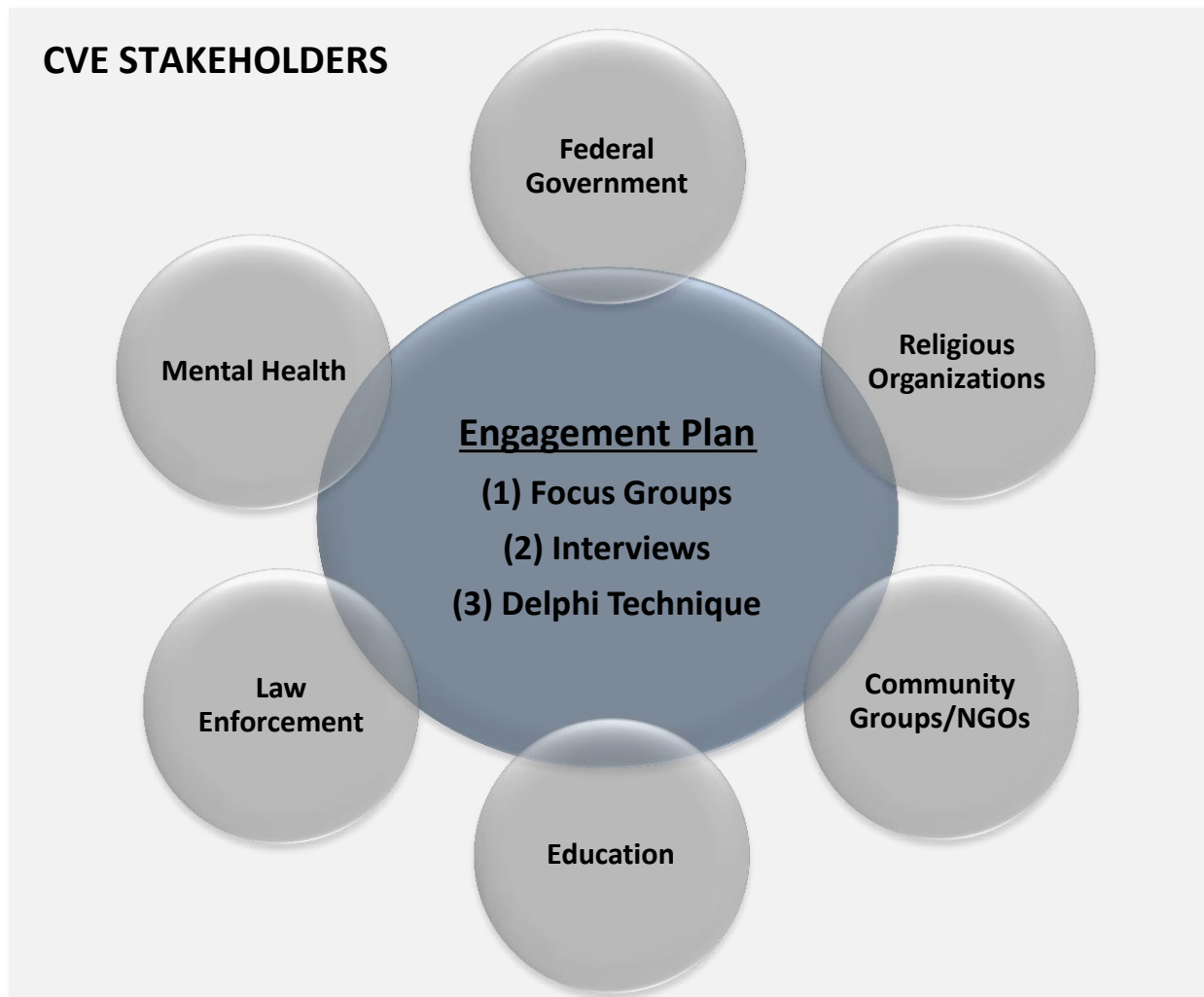
CVE STAKEHOLDERS

Federal Government

Mental Health

Religious Organizations

Engagement Plan

(1) Focus Groups

(2) Interviews

(3) Delphi Technique

Law Enforcement

Community Groups/NGOs

Education

Exhibit 1. Stakeholder Engagement

III.   STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

CVE has the potential to be a sensitive topic, so RTI will approach all stakeholders with utmost respect. We will work to develop trust and rapport so as to facilitate a fruitful engagement process.

We will employ three qualitative methods to recruit, engage, and collect input from relevant stakeholders regarding CVE: focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and the Delphi technique.

a. Focus Groups

RTI will select participants, including a diverse representation of community leaders from multiple sectors, and facilitate group conversation about community and CVE-related topics. During these conversations, we will encourage participants to candidly discuss CVE concerns, policies, programs, and operations. Along with the interviews discussed below, we will facilitate a minimum of one focus group in each of the identified cities of Chicago, Denver, Detroit/Dearborn, Montgomery County (MD), and Washington, DC.

b. Semi-structured Interviews

As a complement to the focus groups, RTI will conduct semi-structured interviews with federal and local stakeholders. Interviews will last approximately one hour each, and will be designed to elicit comprehensive information used to develop a thorough understanding of the views, concerns, and needs of all stakeholders. There will be three primary rounds of interviews, each of which will focus on one of Chicago, Denver, and Detroit/Dearborn. Since the project team is located in the Washington, DC area, interviews with federal and Montgomery County (MD) stakeholders will occur throughout the data collection period. The number of interviews conducted will be determined as the research progresses. We will employ the snowball sampling method; we will ask all interviewees to recommend additional interviewees based on project needs. Interviews are expected to be completed by the end of July 2016.

c. Delphi Technique

The third method we will employ is the Delphi technique. It will be conducted online using Think Tank software. To facilitate this process, the RTI team will design a series of questionnaires to collect data from a panel of participants. Through multiple facilitated rounds, we will enable group discussions about CVE. Rather than assessing what exists, this technique focuses on what could or should be; because the process is iterative, participants are afforded the opportunity to come to a consensus of opinion regarding specific topics pertaining to CVE (e.g., programming priorities, training needs, etc.).

d. Protocols

For each engagement approach (focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and the Delphi technique), the RTI team will develop protocols to guide the interactions. The protocols will ensure that important topics are addressed and that there is consistency among focus groups and interviews. Though there will be a base protocol, it will be tailored to each stakeholder group to account for the nuances between them. The protocols will be used as a guideline rather than a checklist of questions; the protocols will be used to initiate and guide conversations, but they will not trump conversations that arise naturally through the course of engagement.

IV.   SUMMARY

CVE stakeholders comprise the foundation of this effort; without their participation, this research will be compromised. The stakeholder recruitment and engagement strategy outlined in this document is intended to ensure participation and foster respectful relationships with stakeholders. In so doing, RTI will obtain valuable information regarding CVE policies, programs, operational activities, gaps, underlying challenges, and needs, all of which will come together to form the foundation on which the institutional context for CVE will ultimately be developed.