



*Evaluation of the Greater Boston Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Pilot Program*

*Project Report – November 21, 2016*

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CVE Pilot Program Project Stakeholders



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## Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	1
Introduction.....	2
Scope of our evaluation project .....	3
Evaluation approach through a public health perspective.....	4
Methods.....	5
Interviews’ findings .....	7
Objective 1: Gather opinions on program goals and the overall initiative from the Greater Boston Area CVE Pilot Program stakeholders.....	9
Perceptions on program goals .....	9
Opinions of what the program goals should be.....	12
Description of the context in the Greater Boston Area .....	15
Negative Aspects of the Greater Boston Area .....	16
Positive Aspects of the Greater Boston Area.....	21
Broader Environment.....	27
Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Health & Human Services (EOHHS) - “Promoting Engagement, Acceptance and Community Empowerment (PEACE)” Project.....	36
Objective 2: Identify recommendations for practice suggested by the Greater Boston CVE pilot program stakeholders for governmental and non-governmental organizations engaged in the development of violence prevention activities in the Greater Boston Area including activities to be conducted under the grant opportunity “Promoting Engagement, Acceptance and Community Empowerment Project (PEACE)” issued by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Health & Human Services (EOHHS). .....	37
Nine recommendations for practice .....	37
Objective 3: Develop a logic model for the evaluation of violence prevention activities aligned with the Grant opportunity “Promoting Engagement, Acceptance and Community Empowerment Project (PEACE)” project goals issued by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Health & Human Services (EOHHS). .....	45
Development of a Theory Approach Logic Model .....	45
How to read the logic model .....	47
Conclusion .....	48
References.....	51

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## Executive Summary

On October 1 2015, the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health started the project entitled “*Evaluation of the Greater Boston Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Pilot Program*,” sponsored by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Science & Technology Directorate, Office for Public Safety Research, under the funding opportunity 2015-ST-108-FRG005 entitled “*Program Evaluation of the “Three Cities” Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) Initiatives*.” The main goal of this funding opportunity has been to bring together experts in the areas of program evaluation and violent extremism to integrate scientifically derived knowledge into homeland security policies and, more specifically, to generate substantive evaluation data that can be used by practitioners and policy makers to improve prevention approaches to violent extremism.

This report describes the activities of this evaluation project undertaken from October 1 2015 through September 30, 2016 which focused on gathering formative evaluation data on the views and opinions of the pilot program stakeholders regarding the goals of the program and recommendations on how the program should evolve. Formative evaluation is a method of judging the worth of a program while the program activities are forming or happening. The goal of formative evaluation is to provide informative data that can be used to shape future activities.

This report presents the findings from interviews conducted with over forty organizations in the Greater Boston Area that have been engaged in the Greater Boston CVE pilot program or that have experience in CVE-related issues in violence prevention initiatives. Interview data have been analyzed and used to create a theory-approach logic model to monitor and assess the evaluation of the CVE Pilot Program in the Greater Boston Area. We used a public health system approach for the evaluation of the pilot program focused on identifying system levels factors to be leveraged to address violence, in the Greater Boston Area, and practical recommendations for future activities based on the Boston context and desired program goals.

Recommendations have been described across three main areas as identified by the program stakeholders: 1) Foster civic engagement and cultural awareness, 2) Build trust and earn social support and 3) Improve human conditions and reach human potential. Details on the specific recommendations and supporting interview data are provided in the report.

## Introduction

In March 2014, the White House National Security Council (NSC) requested assistance from three regions in piloting the development of a comprehensive framework that promotes multidisciplinary solutions for countering violent extremism (CVE). CVE is a field of practice defined by the U.S. Government as “*efforts focused on preventing all forms of ideologically based extremist violence, to include prevention of successful recruitment into terrorist groups. It is distinct from disruptive actions which focus on stopping acts of terrorism by those who have already subscribed to violence.*”<sup>1</sup>

The Greater Boston region was selected to participate because of its existing collaborative efforts and nationally recognized success in developing robust comprehensive violence prevention and intervention strategies. With the support of the Department of Justice (DOJ), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), a range of stakeholders in the Greater Boston region met to develop a locally-driven framework under the coordination of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Massachusetts. As a result of this effort, in February 2015, the framework's foundational principles were outlined in the document entitled *A Framework for Prevention and Intervention Strategies: Incorporating Violent Extremism into Violence Prevention Efforts.*<sup>2</sup> This framework is intended to serve as a foundation to assist various communities (locally, nationally and internationally) in building resilience and capacity to prevent individuals, including young people, from being inspired and recruited by violent extremists.

On October 1 2015, the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health started the project entitled “*Evaluation of the Greater Boston Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Pilot Program*” sponsored by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Science & Technology Directorate, Office for Public Safety Research, under the funding opportunity 2015-ST-108-FRG005 entitled “*Program Evaluation of the “Three Cities” Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) Initiatives.*” The aim of this funding opportunity was to support evaluation work by engaging experts in the areas of program evaluation and CVE, engaging key stakeholders, and delivering information that is useful both to front-line CVE-related practitioners and policy makers.

## Scope of our evaluation project

We proposed to evaluate the CVE initiative conducted in the Greater Boston Area by housing this project in the Emergency Preparedness, Research, Evaluation and Practice (EPREP) Program, <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/preparedness> within the Division of Policy Translation and Leadership Development (DPTLD). This project report describes the activities accomplished from October 1<sup>st</sup> 2015 to September 30<sup>th</sup> 2016.

In absence of a specific CVE activity to be evaluated, during the first year of the project we focused on gathering **formative evaluation** data. Formative evaluation is a method used to judge the worth of a program while the program activities are forming or happening. The goal of formative evaluation is to provide informative data that can be used to shape future activities.

**The scope of this report is to present evaluation data collected and analyzed by the use of scientific methods about opinions of the Greater Boston CVE pilot program stakeholders on how the program should evolve, including program goals and recommendations for practice. This report does not investigate research on risk factors for Violent Extremism (VE), nor does it comment upon the effectiveness of specific interventions, as no intervention for CVE has been initiated under the Boston pilot program to date. This report is to provide formative evaluation data that can be used for program design and implementation to front-line CVE-related practitioners and policy makers.**

During the first year of activities, we have achieved the following objectives:

- **Objective 1:** Gather opinions on both program goals and the overall initiative from the *Greater Boston Area CVE Pilot Program* stakeholders,
- **Objective 2:** Identify recommendations for practice suggested by the Greater Boston CVE pilot program stakeholders for governmental and non-governmental organizations engaged in the development of violence prevention activities in the Greater Boston Area, including activities to be conducted under the grant opportunity “Promoting Engagement, Acceptance and Community Empowerment Project (PEACE)” issued by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Health & Human Services (EOHHS) on August 8th.
- **Objective 3:** Develop a logic model for the evaluation of violence prevention activities aligned with the grant application “Promoting Engagement, Acceptance and Community Empowerment Project (PEACE)” project goals issued by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Health & Human Services (EOHHS) on August 8th.

## Evaluation approach through a public health perspective

The prevention of violence is a complex issue, which requires a multidisciplinary approach. Public health is a multidisciplinary science aimed at protecting and improving the health of communities through the promotion of healthy lifestyles, researching disease, preventing injury and detecting and controlling infectious diseases. It is concerned with protecting the health of populations as small as a local neighborhood, or as big as an entire country or region of the world. Public health professionals seek to prevent disease and/or injury through implementing educational programs, recommending policies, administering services, conducting research to identify and address health disparities, and developing strategies that promote healthcare equity, quality and accessibility.<sup>3</sup>

In the U.S., violence alone contributes to approximately 55,000 premature deaths annually.<sup>4</sup> Violence is now recognized as a public health problem, but as recently as thirty years ago violence and health were rarely considered as intersecting concepts.<sup>5</sup> Achievements made in the prevention of youth violence throughout the 1980s and 1990s showcased the effectiveness of public health approaches for reducing youth violence, and the publishing of the report entitled *Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General* provided a comprehensive synthesis of the state of knowledge regarding youth violence, including what was known about the different patterns of offending, risk and protective factors within and across various domains (e.g. peer, family, school, and community), and regarding the effectiveness of prevention programs.<sup>6</sup> The report also highlighted the cost effectiveness of prevention programs over incarceration and set forth a vision of violence prevention for the 21st century. These early successes in youth-violence prevention paved the way for a public health approach to other violence problems, such as intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and child maltreatment. Efforts were made to document each separate problem and understand their associated risk and protective factors.

Any act of violence is an assault on the health of the public, regardless of whether or not such an act is perpetrated in the name of an ideology. Acts of violence not only cause injuries but, in some circumstances, can divide communities and raise fears about safety, which consequently exacerbate existing inequalities, injustice, segregation and lack of trust in the government; conditions that negatively influence access to education, healthcare, mental health and other public health resources. We acknowledge that any type of violence is a public health concern, and intuitively recognize that disciplines such as social science, law, epidemiology, behavioral-science and risk-communications, commonly used to tackle public health problems, may contribute to addressing any type of violence. We also recognize that to protect the integrity of the public health mission, it is important to maintain a scientifically and ethically sound approach to better understand the role of public health in CVE.

## Methods

The first step in our evaluation approach has been the engagement of program stakeholders by conducting interviews with individuals with a variety of perspectives and experience related to the program. The methods used for the conduct of the interviews and data analysis are described in detail below.

**Sampling strategy:** The interviews were conducted from November 2015 to May 2016. We used convenience sampling and a snowball<sup>1</sup> technique to identify the interviewees. We started by contacting all participants in the development of the report “*A Framework for Prevention and Intervention Strategies: Incorporating Violent Extremism into Violence Prevention Efforts*” and, by using the snowball technique, we asked the initial pool of interviewees to connect us with professionals and community leaders with experience in implementing violence prevention activities within and outside the Greater Boston Area (specifically directed towards youth) and individuals with opinions different from their own on how to address CVE-related issues. We reached theoretical thematic saturation after approximately twenty-five interviews. In other words, we reached a point where no new information was obtained from further interviews after the 20<sup>th</sup> interview. However, we continued with the snowball technique for an additional month and reached a total number of forty-five organizations and agencies with fifty-two individuals. Even though all major issues were covered during the first twenty-five interviews, the reason we continued was to identify specific examples of violence prevention activities that could serve the initiative and enlarge the number of stakeholders who could provide insights and ideas for future planning efforts.

**Interviewing technique:** We conducted semi-structured interviews and used the *convergent interviewing technique*. This technique seeks to resolve the dilemma of broad versus specific questions. It is a structured approach where information is analyzed in a step-by-step process and relevant information obtained from earlier stages is used in subsequent stages. The interviews start with an open-ended question, giving individuals a chance to contribute their perceptions unshaped by more detailed questions. In most interviews, but especially in later interviews, more specific probe questions occur, which are developed from analyzing previous interviews. In this way, the interview process becomes increasingly structured after each interview.

Ninety percent of interviews were conducted in-person, at the site of the organization and by at least two team members. We developed two types of interview guides deemed exempt from review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the Harvard Chan School: 1) For those individuals engaged in the development of the framework, 2) For those individuals not engaged

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<sup>1</sup> Authors note: The snowball method is a non-probability sampling technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances.

in the development of the framework but with experience in violence prevention activities. The interview guides are available upon request.

In addition to the convergent interviewing technique we used a *solution focused approach*, in order to help interviewees visualize and describe the change they would like to see in the Greater Boston Area as a result of initiatives aimed at reducing any type of violence. We asked them to describe the context and the current situation in Boston and attribute a number between 0 and 10, where 10 corresponds to an ideal situation in which there is no risk of acts of violence in the community, including acts perpetrated in the name of an ideology, and 0 is a situation in which there is a high risk of violent acts. Independent of the number given by each interviewee, we asked them to visualize a situation in the near future in which that number and the overall safety of the Boston community had increased by two points. More specifically, we asked interviewees to describe the activities necessary to achieve this new and improved situation and what they would need to see in the Boston community to feel comfortable saying that an improvement was made in any type of violence prevention efforts. Only one interviewee gave a score of 10, all other 51 interviewees provided a score lower than 10 and this information was used to develop recommendations for practice described below.

**Qualitative Analysis:** We adopted systematic procedures to analyze the data gathered from the interviews. Three team members with different educational, religious, and ethnic backgrounds analyzed the interview transcripts, so as to take into account personal biases and past experiences as potential influencers of the research process. The process consisted of the following steps: familiarization, identifying a thematic framework, coding, and interpretation. All steps are described in detail below:

*Familiarization with the data:* All interviews were transcribed verbatim. We subsequently familiarized ourselves with the data by reading the transcripts. During this process, we became aware of recurrent themes and made note of them. The name of the interviewee and the name of the organization to which the interviewee belonged were removed from the files. In order to record descriptive information about the interviews, transcripts were assigned one of the following classifications: community-based organization (CBO), government (including law enforcement and schools), academia, and healthcare/mental and behavioral health.

*Identifying a thematic framework:* In the second stage, we identified a thematic framework. There were four meetings with four team members to discuss an initial coding framework, which was developed from a priori topics. However, we also allowed the data to dictate the themes and issues. To achieve this end, we used notes taken during the familiarization stage, as well as logical and intuitive thinking, in order to make judgments regarding meaning, the relevance of issues, and implicit connections between ideas. To help identify emerging issues in the interviews, three analysts closely read six transcripts each and discussed them. This additional step allowed us to refine the thematic framework.

*Coding:* We performed systematic coding, which is the process of organizing and sorting your data. Codes serve as a way to label, compile and organize the data in themes. They also allow us to summarize and synthesize the data. In connecting data collection and data interpretation, coding becomes the basis for developing the analysis.

There were three team members involved in this process. To maintain consistency, each interview transcript was coded by two analysts, who subsequently met and discussed their coding and interpretation of the data. In this process 1,717 statements (quotes from the transcripts) were identified. For this study, we used the qualitative data analysis and management software program *Nvivo v 11*.

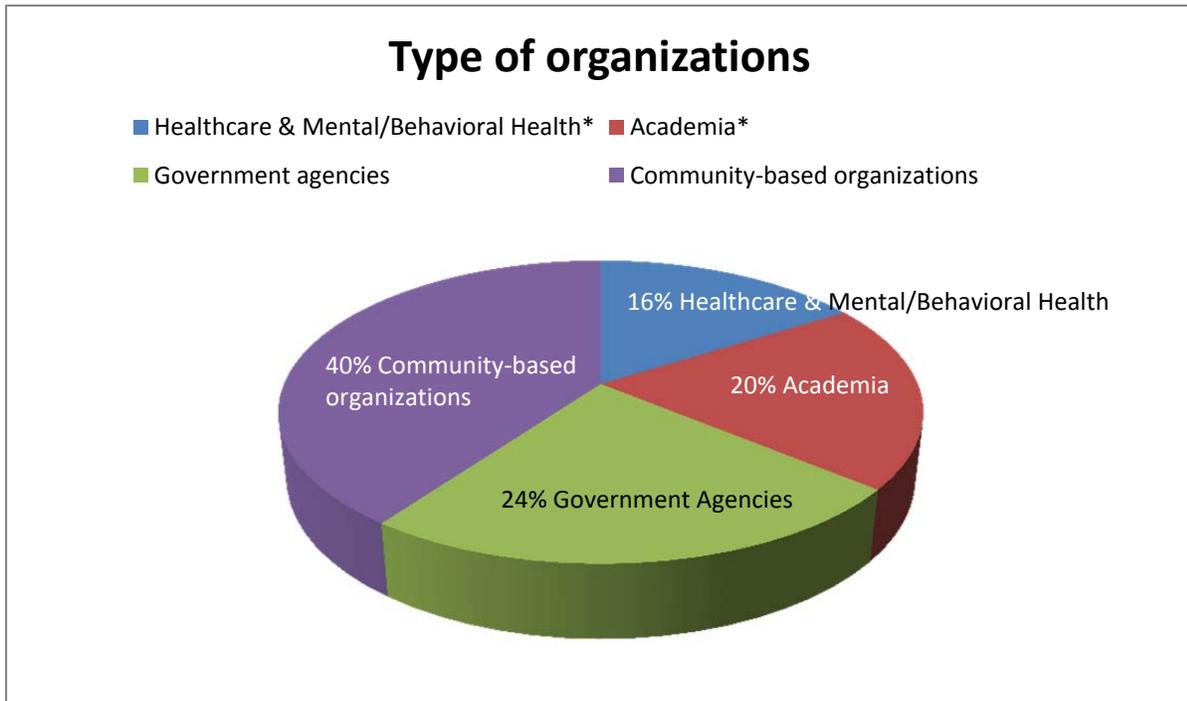
*Interpretation:* In the final stage, we searched for patterns, associations, variations, and conceptual networks as they relate to the respondents' description of the specific elements of the CVE initiative, as described below in the results section. Respondents' answers were validated both during the interviews with clarifying questions and by follow-up clarification of the interviews' findings during a stakeholders' meeting held at the Harvard Chan School on May 19 2016.

## **Interviews' findings**

We interviewed fifty-two people from forty-five organizations, of which twenty participated in the development of the framework and thirty-two were identified by the interviewees using the snowball technique. Figure 1 below describes the frequency of the distribution by type of organizations. The most represented type of organization was community-based organization (CBO). More specifically, the CBOs included the following types: faith-based organizations (Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, and Christian), organizations offering specific services and support to various groups of immigrants, (for example immigrants from Somalia, Vietnam, Cape Verde, Pakistan, and Israel) organizations implementing violence prevention activities (domestic and gang violence), and human and civil rights groups. The governmental organizations interviewed included: law enforcement, schools, and social services providers working at the local and state levels.

***Data reported by the interviewees including percentages on crime data, media reports etc. were not fact-checked. The quotes and information reported by the interviewees should be interpreted as opinions. The scope of the interviews was to gather opinions.***

**Figure 1. Distribution of frequency of types of organizations**



\*Healthcare & Mental/Behavioral Health professionals could also have an Academic position. Therefore, these two categories are not mutually exclusive

## Objective 1: Gather opinions on program goals and the overall initiative from the Greater Boston Area CVE Pilot Program stakeholders

### Why is information on program goals important for the evaluation?

The evaluation of any program starts with the engagement of program stakeholders in defining the expected goals of the program and a description of the interventions that align with such goals. A comprehensive description of the goals helps evaluators to focus their evaluation plan on the changes stakeholders expect to see in the future and what is relevant to them. For this reason, our evaluation approach started by asking program stakeholders to describe how they perceived the goals of the program and what they think the goals should be.

### Perceptions on program goals

Interviewees acknowledged that the framework *A Framework for Prevention and Intervention Strategies: Incorporating Violent Extremism into Violence Prevention Efforts*, reflected a comprehensive approach to violence prevention that does not focus on any one form of violent extremism.

Interviewees acknowledged that the use of the term CVE or VE, coupled with the fact that most stakeholders typically invited to be engaged in CVE processes in the U.S. and abroad are from the Muslim community, creates a contradiction and barrier in the attempt to address all types of VE.

As reported by an interviewee involved in the development of the framework and echoed by many others:

*“I think the whole thing is very contentious, and I think the government made a mistake in choosing the language, CVE, because that was associated with this program in England, which had a really bad rap, ... I think that sort of undermined the credibility from the start for a lot of folks....It really depends on what the real goal is. When there was the argument going on about is this really about violent extremism generally or is it really about Jihadist kind of stuff? There are people who said the only community leaders around the table were Muslim. That’s not true, but it’s almost true. So, there were small numbers of, one or two African Americans, a Preacher, a Pastor, a Jewish organization was there, but everybody else was Muslim. So, if really the intent was broader then they should have had a more diverse community representation.”*

Another interviewee from a CBO questioned the use of the term “ideologically driven violence”:

*“...when we specifically asked, “Okay, do you believe that ideology is a precursor for violence committed in the name of a religion,” [name] gave us ambivalent answers... On the one hand they said, “Yes.” But when we asked for empirical data to back that up they said, “There isn’t any.” And then they said, “There is no one factor which contributes. This interviewee emphasized his/her worry that by framing it as this is an issue of ideologically-driven act of violence, it inherently framed the issue in such a way that ideology is to blame. “And it obscures, obfuscates and even varies, for example, other contributing factors such as politically ideology or political motivations, economic rationales, disenfranchisement among young, African-American youth for example, mental health issues, government entrapment, larger disenfranchisement, or larger feelings of inclusion from the political process, that would not necessarily fall under the purview of ideology as a term with a capital ‘I’.”*

An interviewee who is currently working on de-radicalization projects in Europe highlighted the importance of not focusing on a specific community, and of acknowledging that susceptibility to violence exists across all segments of the population:

*“In [city X] we also worked with a Muslim youth group that were really the type of kids you would consider at risk for going off to Syria. After the screening of the film, one of the leaders of the youth group, an older kid in his kind of early 20's, he said to me, “[name], I can't tell you how good it is to hear somebody acknowledge that White guys blow up shit too.” He emphasized the acknowledgement of “violent extremism is a problem that we all face and that we're all susceptible to, that made all the difference in the world for this young man.” The danger of the Prevent initiative in the UK, which “focuses almost solely on Islamist-based extremism” caused grievance in innocent lives: “we're being treated like terrorists, but we're not, so we might as well become terrorists.”*

Interviewees perceived the need for addressing daily community violence as a priority:

*“Well, you know what, we have issues in our communities around violence, and unless you plan on putting whatever that definition we talked about earlier onto the violence that is going on in our community and you plan on addressing it as harsh or as tough or harshly even as you plan on doing with this one, then we didn’t really see that as affecting our communities that we work with. ....Is there any way that they go beyond just Islam? Because when I think of extremism I’m thinking like school shootings. I’m thinking like the abortion clinic situation. And particularly, and this is the conversation that doesn’t really get had or is it not being researched?, like angry White men that have issues and have mental health issues and have access to guns, and that being like-- Because I am more afraid of angry White men than I am of the Muslim community, so I’m just wondering if that is something also that would be probably discussed.”*

Similarly, a leader of a CBO concluded:

*“I think the answer to that is, first of all, to acknowledge publicly that violent extremism is something that any demographic is susceptible to. It by no means is exclusively a Muslim issue. I think in the states, speaking of data driven, there is a ton of data, there is more and more people kind of admitting the fact that right wing, militia and White Supremacist groups pose as much of a danger, if not more of a danger than Islamist extremism groups do. And I think until we acknowledge that and really start acting on that truth, we are not going to get a whole lot of commitment and involvement from the Muslim community.”*

Many interviewees discussed the lack of data and evidence supporting a pathway to VE, and acknowledged that more research is needed on the risk factors for VE to avoid profiling and further alienating specific segments of the population. A CBO representative questioned the appropriateness of focusing on the Muslim community:

*“...every study that I’ve found has, and every study that I’ve heard cited, either by ..., has said that there really is no, readily identifiable cause or root cause or profile of a person who commits an act of terrorist violence—whether this is Basque separatists in the south of France, KKK members in the U.S., Muslim Asians, such as those in San Bernardino. These kinds of people are all over the place. So it is really not easy to say that they are either lone wolves or part of a group or extremists or they go to mosques, they don’t go to mosques, they go to temples, they don’t go to temples. They are completely all over the place.”*

Another interviewee reported:

*“I think we have to do more research to understand the process of becoming a terrorist... Human behavior is human behavior and things don’t just happen, so basically there is some mechanism or developmental process that leads somebody to become, to reach the point of doing a terrorist act. So I think we need more research on that.”*

Contrary to the opinion of the majority of interviewees, one interviewee engaged in the provision of mental health services suggested that it may be possible to create a threat matrix and use a community approach to identify subjects at risk:

*“It takes a community of people to recognize that this person is dealing with this certain amount of risk factors that hopefully they have been taught to look out for, sort of the threat matrix, and then they have to feel comfortable bringing that information to the appropriate people...”*

Mental health professionals acknowledged that people who are engaged in violent acts may or may not be motivated by ideologies and therefore some of them may benefit from the access to mental health services, while others may not:

*“Just because somebody has mental health issues, it's a risk factor, but it doesn't necessarily mean that they're going to be more or less likely to commit violent acts. So, it all depends on what you're looking for. If you have somebody who is acting on paranoid delusions, psychotic thinking, command auditory hallucinations and has a propensity towards violence and commits and act, then yes, obviously, some sort of a mental health intervention could possibly be useful for this person. For people who are motivated by their ideologies, political or religious ideologies, or whatever ideology, I don't know if these are necessarily mental health issues – [this] person is totally sane and lucid and a functioning human being, able to perform all their own activities of daily living and doesn't look any different than you and I.”*

Some interviewees with experience in delivering mental health care pointed out the existing confusion and lack of clarity about what can be considered “harmful,” which requires mandatory reporting:

*“CVE can be in conflict in some aspects of it these [ethical] guidelines... as a psychologist, we have what is called mandated reporting if the person is harmful, if they say that they want to harm themselves or others, so we have to report that,” yet sometimes it is not as [a] clean cut, if somebody comes and says, “I am politically sympathizing with this group” or terrorist group that[does] not necessarily fall under mandatory reporting, but we have “federal laws that actually say if you don't report then you are aiding and abetting, so that is another thing” ...I think it would be naïve to say that we will follow one of these things.”*

## **Opinions of what the program goals should be**

After acknowledging the challenges reported above, interviewees stressed the adoption of an all-violence prevention approach that addresses the root causes of societal problems (27 quotes).

The great majority of interviewees in community organizations and government agencies urged a focus on the acts of violence themselves, not ideology:

*“if you're gonna have a program, a counter terrorism program, it should focus on the violence and criminal acts supporting that violence, rather than on the ideas...”, some shared the concern that the suppression of the so-called “extremism ideas” not only violate the first amendments right, but also play into the terrorists' hand: “The idea is, I define my in-group in a way, before I commit an act, that the government will suppress that group, and in suppressing*

*that group, that [provokes] their genuine grievance, that then I can exploit in order to expand the level of violence. And that's how terrorism actually works..." - CBO*

*"[CVE] changes the focus of the problem from violent acts, acts of terrorism, acts of extremist violence, to extremism, the adoption or expression of extreme ideas. And that's the problem, because all the empirical studies of terrorists show that the number of extremists far exceeds the number of people, the tiny number of people, who actually commit harm. If you examine the people who commit harm, even in the name of a particular ideology, they themselves are not necessarily extremists..." – Government*

An interviewee from a CBO, echoed by others from government agencies including law enforcement, noted the importance of including excessive use of force by law enforcement within the acts of violence to be prevented:

*"We need to acknowledge what state violence is doing in terms of creating and perpetuating conflicts. And we need to commit ourselves to accountability for state violence. And that includes, at the local level, when there are officer- involved deaths, we commit to pursuing independent and transparent investigations."*

Interviewees also noted that focusing on ideology, rather than on violent acts, could potentially violate individuals' fundamental civil rights:

*"If you have a program called countering violent extremism, you've misdirected the effort from people, and particularly because, what we have to remember and what the founders of our nation, in writing the first amendment recognized, was that if we have free expression, that tends to reduce levels of violence, because people feel they can vent their spleen and have a say without having to do something else. And in fact, it's the attempts to suppress extremist viewpoints that often result in violence."*

Contrary to the majority of interviewees, one from a CBO presented a different view on the goals of the program

*"...the focus of this [CVE] should be ideological violence, that is based on ideology. That could be white supremacist type of ideology. I think the main concern is a radical, perverse interpretation of Islam... My view is that, you could include some other types of extremism, but the focus really has been on Islamic extremism, and I think that's actually good... It's not the same as a white supremacist type of violence. It's not tied to the same type of movement as racial violence, where somebody who's a lone offender gets out, is mad at people who're black or people who're Latina, and gets up in the morning and goes kills people, like in the church in South Carolina. This is, because its justified by religion, it makes it's a little bit different and*

*there's also this connection to organized groups, you know, foreign terror organizations, so it makes it a little bit different, and therefore you need a different strategy."*

## Description of the context in the Greater Boston Area

### **Why is information on the context important for the evaluation?**

To conduct this evaluation project, we used a realist evaluation approach. Realist evaluation techniques recognize that there are many interwoven variables operative at different levels in society, thus this evaluation method suits complex social interventions, rather than traditional cause-effect, non-contextual methods of analysis. Yet saying that a program “works” or not is an over simplification because almost all programs may work under specific circumstances and not work under others. Effectiveness of a program is thus not dependent on the outcomes alone (cause–effect), rather, there is a consideration of the theoretical mechanisms that are applied and the socio-historical context in which the programs were implemented. For this reason, in order to better understand the social landscape of the Greater Boston Area, and which of its characteristics should be taken into consideration during the implementation and evaluation of violence prevention efforts, we asked interviewees to describe the context in which the CVE pilot program is unfolding. Interviewees were given an opportunity to point out issues they felt were relevant to a program of this nature. Based on their experiences, interviewees commented on the negative and positive aspects of the Greater Boston Area. They also identified conditions that are not necessarily specific to Boston (i.e. U.S. Foreign Policy), but have the potential to directly or indirectly impact ongoing CVE-related discussions in Boston.

From the transcribed interviews, we recorded 355 statements (quotes) directly related to the Greater Boston area’s socio-cultural landscape. These statements were categorized according to: negative aspects, positive aspects, and the broader environment (See Figure 2). There were 219, 74, and 14 quotes, respectively, for negative, positive, and broader environment categories. We present below some preliminary results from the qualitative analysis of the “context” domain.

**Figure 2. Boston context: positive and negative aspects**



## Negative Aspects of the Greater Boston Area

### ➤ Violence

The majority of interviewees acknowledged that violence is entrenched and pervasive in a few Boston neighborhoods. According to members of CBOs, inner city communities are the most affected by homicides, and as an interviewee from a CBO reported:

*“When you look at Boston, most gang and youth violence take place in four neighborhoods.”*

An interviewee from a CBO said:

*“There were 40 homicides last years, and that’s still 40 homicides too many. And so you know, most of these homicides occurred in our community.”*

As an interviewee from academia noted, the homicide clearance rate is low:

*“For instance, in Boston, the homicide solve rate in 2011 was 38%, I think, that’s off the top of my head but it’s extremely low.”*

An interviewee representing a CBO mentioned:

*“...two hundred forty-four people (were) shot last year, which is an increase from 2014 when two hundred fourteen were shot... and a lot of folks will say “Well, we have forty homicides.” But, you know, when you have two hundred forty four people shot and then you have so many hundreds of more shots fired, you live in a neighborhood where on any given week you*

*will hear the sound of gun fire and you won't know where those bullets are going or anything like that. I'm talking about Boston, Greater Boston area."*

Although Boston was described as a "small city" in comparison to other larger cities around the U.S., stakeholders reported that: *"depending on whom you talk to, there is anywhere from one hundred twenty to one hundred sixty gangs that operate in the city."* As a government stakeholder said:

*"It's a small town. We know the individuals. There are roughly, 5,000 individuals who are the so-called 1%. There are 5,000 people that are holding a city of 700,000 hostages, very small percentage."*

## ➤ Disparities

A significant number of interviewees pointed to Boston's large economic disparity, and the stark reality of life for deprived communities and, in particular, minority groups. Poverty and social ills such as *"failed housing policies, poor educational institutions, chronic unemployment and chronic underemployment, poor healthcare...drugs..., and guns"* tend to be concentrated in certain neighborhoods.

Unfortunately, minority groups are the most effected, as one government official noted: *"Usually ... our people of color are the poorest, our people of color are dealing with higher concentration of medical issues in their communities and dealing with higher concentration of people with disabilities."*

The interviewee further talked about issues with public assistance: *"...for example, if you live in a housing development and you're getting public assistance, there is no incentive to save money, because if you save money, then your benefits get reduced... the system in its current form is designed to perpetuate that survival piece, where you're not completely in abject poverty where you don't have any food."*

For many interviewees, Boston is a highly educated city with a lot of resources. Yet, Boston is the city that sees many communities living in precarious conditions, as a government stakeholder noted: *"Brookings Institute says we're number one in income inequality in the country... we're producing the highest number of millionaires. We're in the top five or something like that out of cities. So, when you have that constant comparison, look at all of these people with money and look at me, I don't have anything, they're always making decisions that don't benefit the everybody. So, that's the kind of environment that breeds the type of thinking that leads to bad things."*

Many have called Boston “a diverse city,” but some have also described it as a “city with a long history of discrimination and hatred across the lines,” with segregated neighborhoods with “weird invisible lines.”

A government stakeholder highlighted the lack of trust certain communities have towards academic institutions:

*“When they [academic institutions] want to talk about violence they want to come to the hood, they want to come talk (about) projects, they want to knock on doors, but when it comes to the actual action plan there is no follow up... Colleges are not paying taxes. No resources. Why not?... I mean that just goes back to institutional, I don’t even want to say racism, just institutional oppression. Which makes people really upset, which feeds into other contributors or factors that community oppression equals depression, which affects mental health, social stability, which are contributing factors to violence.”*

Greater Boston is witnessing a growing number of multi-ethnic communities. Unfortunately, the youth in these minority groups have a lack of hope in the future. An interviewee from a CBO said:

*“Many times when you talk to them (youth) they tell you they have good grades, but they don't have any hope that they can actually make it to college. They have good grades in high school, but they say, I don't think I can go to that school, because they have someone at some point that has told them that that school is not for them or they're not intelligent enough to go to that school. But when you talk to them you see their SAT scores are 1,600, sometimes it's plus, and it blows you away that they have this perception that something is going to impede them from actually going and doing what they can do or from realizing their dreams and their potential. And that's sad, because then they turn into a different direction, which is mediocracy of perhaps going to just a two-year college and then settling for a job that really is not what they really wanted.”*

### ➤ **Housing Situation**

A number of stakeholders reported issues with housing. An interviewee from a CBO described the challenges they face on this matter:

*“The challenges that I face (is) with shelters, first of all we’ll call Safe Link [domestic violence program] and there are never any beds. (The) housing waiting list is crazy. It used to be two or three years. Now it’s up to five to seven, and it keeps getting longer and longer. So even if you have a victim who has DV [domestic violence] priority... when I first started back in (the year) 2000 maximum you (would) end up (waiting) eight months you get in a shelter, not shelter, housing with priority. Now it is like five years plus and it’s crazy.”*

A government official described Boston as: *“the fastest gentrifying city in the country.”* The stakeholder further added that this fact: *“has been documented by so many different credible sources.”* As a result of gentrification, people are being displaced, as they can no longer afford rent or mortgage. An interviewee from a CBO noted:

*“I feel that [gentrification] is definitely happening. Dorchester started to be gentrified in some areas. But there are still these pockets of poverty. Just because people are starting to move there, and they are opening businesses, I don’t think it is necessarily doing much for the people that were already there... The high living cost and everything make it harder for people to afford housing and rent.”*

### ➤ **Mistrust**

Several stakeholders from the government and CBOs vocalized their opinions about the existence of lack of trust in the government by specific groups of the population, but also the existence of lack of trust between levels of government.

Some described the trust level in some communities as low, as reported by an interviewee from a CBO:

*“because people do not want (to) deal with the Federal Government, they have their own suspicions, they say it (the government) is profiling.”*

An interviewee from a government agency noted:

*“the trust is lower in immigrant communities and with some civil rights advocacy groups. Some strongly disagree that law enforcement or a justice entity should be engaged in this effort [CVE initiative].”*

One interviewee observed:

*“There is still this negative stigma that comes with working with the government from certain issues that took place after 9/11, this issue of mistrust or lack of trust.”*

In fact, another stakeholder from a CBO made a similar reference:

*“There is just a natural fear that comes from the Muslim community about anything that involves the federal government since they have surveilled mosques and denied surveilling (them). And then when they find out it is actually true ... so they don’t trust.”* An interviewee from a CBO thought that political leaders in the Nation’s Capital are: *“facing a lot of pressure about this ISIS stuff.”*

According to an interviewee from a CBO, this sentiment of mistrust towards the government would have been different had the government adopted the following narrative:

*“This is one of many challenges the United States faces. How do we support the Muslim community in the United States on this?”*

An interviewee from a government agency reported that the government has been told many times *“not to equate the Muslim belief with that ideology [ISIS].”* The interviewee further noted:

*“When I hear a framework like this (CVE framework), and especially targeting Islamic extremism what I’m thinking I’m hearing, personally what I’m hearing is there is going to be a lot of surveillance to Islamic individuals. What I’m thinking is that what is going to actually happen is help radicalize these individuals, because they’re going to feel they don’t have any trust in the government or folks around them.”*

The stakeholder also drew a parallel with the violence experienced within communities and warned against surveillance of: *“people that for as far as we know are peaceful individuals.”*

The quote below captured the interviewee’s view regarding this matter:

*“When we have the rise of awareness of police brutality, people’s lack of trust in police, which I think is helping radicalize communities of color against the police, and the political establishment, and it was like, “We don’t trust these individuals. We don’t trust these systems. So, we either need to look out for ourselves or really kind of just take them on head on.” So we have to think about when we’re either trying to prevent or intervening how can our actions actually radicalize a group of people against us. So by trying to prevent Islamic extremism we never got to the root cause of what first led to people becoming radical, and then we actually help promote more radicals, because we are actively attacking people who are currently peaceful, we are surveilling people that for as far as we know are peaceful individuals.”*

Another government official attempted to explain the low level of trust that some communities have in the government. According to this interviewee the history associated with the CVE initiative is problematic. Suspicion grew as communities perceived the CVE initiative in the U.S. as a clone of its counterpart in the United Kingdom:

*“CVE started in England, and CVE started for a very specific purpose. So, we adopted that, brought this over to this country, and we don’t operate the same way in terms of how we do policing here in the United States. So, what happened was, especially people who are familiar with history really understand where it evolved from and now are very suspicious of it because they just think it’s an extension of what was going on back in the U.K. In fact, even our U.S. attorneys basically said, you’ve got to stop calling it CVE, because people attach certain meanings to it. And I don’t care what you say you’re doing, this is what it means. And that’s a problem that they’ve had all along.”*

Lack of trust between FBI and law enforcement was also noted as a barrier by an interviewee from a government agency:

*“Police officers don’t trust the FBI ... the FBI comes in, whatever they do, they’re the ones locking police officers up. So if local police and state police don’t trust the FBI, how do you expect the community to trust them?”*

## Positive Aspects of the Greater Boston Area

### ➤ Melting Pot

The majority of interviewees referred to Boston as a “*geographically small*” city with a “*huge academic community*,” “*fresh ideas*,” and a large “*international community*” with “*lots of languages, cultures, and religions*.” Common terms used to describe Boston in a positive manner were “*melting pot*” and “*culture of diversity*.” An interviewee from academia described such diversity, without omitting the presence of racism, saying:

*“While it's almost always difficult to be an immigrant, especially if you're coming to a substantially different culture, as places in the United States that you could move to, Boston is used to being a more diverse city. It thinks of itself as kind of a world-class city. We've had people coming to universities from all over the world forever. We have absorbed immigrant populations for a very long time. I don't think there's kind of the rooted ideology here that you would find in other parts of the country. The racism in Boston is very real, but it tends not to be physically violent. So I think there is less polarization here.”*

The diversity can also be observed within the Muslim community, as one interviewee highlighted:

*“In our community, for instance, when we stand for prayer we stand in lines, in one line when you stand there is every nationality you can think of, there is every different language, culture, there is so much diversity.”*

Despite the occurrence of the Boston Marathon Bombings, many stakeholders acknowledged that there were no backlashes against the Muslim community, and said: “*You don’t see that hatred or that islamophobia*.” According to a government stakeholder, Islamophobia does exist but:

*“...it’s not outwardly demonstrated. Because the diversity and the education of the city [Boston] gives it that resiliency.” One interviewee from a government agency noted: “I think again thinking about the Marathon Bombing, as traumatic as that was for so many of us, that the way that the community came together after that, that there was not a lot of backlash, I think*

*speaks to the way that we come together in Boston. And that while there has been some anti-Muslim rhetoric, there has not been a lot, and even in the schools, which is, yeah, and so if we learn about it we deal with it very quickly... And I think that there is not so much sensationalizing of things. (X) News, of course, would be the exception. But if you look at some of the other areas of the country where there is some really, there is a lot of hate speech, there are leaders who are very insightful, and not, you know, I-N-C-I-T-E.”*

Another interviewee from a CBO shared the same sentiment:

*“I think we have not had a tremendous amount, or even significant of backlash against the Muslim community here. And, even though there has been around the country some, we’re still nowhere near where we have been in other times in our history, in the history of this country.”*

A healthcare professional said:

*“So even at the time when we actually had a really bad event [Boston Marathon Bombings], we, the whole Boston responded, “We are all Boston, we are all together.”*

A community-based stakeholder further supported the point in this quote:

*“Let's look at it, in this country there have been various incidents, even after the Boston Marathon Bombing, there wasn't really any kind of backlash in Boston, which is very significant. Interestingly, our politicians are not the ones who are saying, yes, X did say that before the Marathon Bombing that we should keep an eye on mosques, but none of the politicians from here is saying we should keep an eye on Muslims or anybody else. So, I think that's what gives me a lot of hope and confidence.”*

### ➤ **Community Engagement & Community Policing**

According to all groups of stakeholders, Boston Police Department (BPD) has had a long history of community policing spanning over twenty-five years. Police departments prioritize relationships with the youth and place a great deal of emphasis on building relationships and trust with communities as an approach to solving community problems. One interviewee recounted the city of Boston’s notorious history associated with the integration of African Americans into White schools. Although this was: *“a very bad example,”* the incidents paved the way for the better engagement and collaboration among the police and other local stakeholders, as one healthcare professional said:

*“There are a lot of precedents in Boston. I think Boston is an interesting place because years and years ago during the Civil Rights Movement Boston was a very bad example of trying to integrate African American in white schools. It was a very bad example. But I think in subsequent years, I think the police and other city agencies have worked really hard to cultivate*

*relationships with clergy, and I think that the relationships that they cultivated with clergy probably were more in minority neighborhoods that were maybe Christian neighborhoods. So, now I believe they're doing the same thing with Muslim communities. So, I think they have a lot of blueprints here for how to address issues."*

In later years, communities and law enforcement made significant progress, working hand in hand to tackle issues, as a community based-organization stakeholder explained:

*"I think on the positive side is that we've done a lot of work trying to build partnerships that are based upon a deep understanding of one's social, cultural context. And so, you know, we've had people, what I would call traditionally conflicting constituencies coming together in order to make a difference in reducing violence. So you don't normally see black ministers out working with members of the police department, particular in these days. But that's exactly what we did. And, you know, city sort of coming together in partnership with the private sectors, with the schools, with the law enforcement, with the community leaders in order to work in communities to reduce violence in our cities. And I think the success of that partnership has sort of served as a model nationally."*

This point was echoed by a government official:

*"We've been doing this community outreach for the last twenty-five years. When other cities and towns, when they didn't realize that the history of policing in the minority community is an issue, and years and years and years of trauma inflicted on a black community by the police. We've been, for the last twenty-five years, working on bias, working on outreach, working on relationships, building relationships. So I think, that's why I talked about France, and their decentralized, their needing to go to a decentralized model. Boston has demonstrated for the last twenty-five years that we build relationships."*

A healthcare professional mentioned the presence of people whose active involvement in the clergy and civic engagement has made a difference in Boston, stating:

*"There are a lot of African American ministers in town who have been very politically active in social justice ways and I think they've developed relationships with the police and with the mayor and with all of those folks over the years... But I think that's kind of the melting pot thing in Boston that maybe is a positive and is a strength. I'm not saying the police-- there are probably parts of the police that have come a long way and parts that are still trying to change now."*

A number of stakeholders think the *“police department is sophisticated,” “excellent, well-trained, and they respond in a sensitive matter to community issues and cultural issues”* and *“is genuinely concerned about the young people, and about the problems in the communities.”*

As a healthcare professional reported:

*“The concept of community policing is pretty big in Boston, and every year, I’d say there is more emphasis on that, and I think that’s reflected in their training, especially at the academy level. So, the (X) team goes into the academy for each recruit class and does some training there. So, just the fact that we’re embedded at such an early stage in their training process I think is a testament to Boston’s commitment to trying to be a little bit more proactive as a policing agency.”*

A government stakeholder described the interaction of the police with the youth as follows:

*“Even the fact that we partner very closely with the Boston Police, they have a school police unit, they talk to kids who are involved in gangs, like heavily involved. It’s not to shake them down. There is a lot more involvement with community partners and the Boston Police and the police in general are not looked at as the enemy, or law enforcement in general, like it is in many of the big cities.”*

The interviewee continued by describing the involvement of faith-based organizations in some initiatives with the police:

*“I think that part of that is that there is the faith-based piece which is tied in very closely as well with the Boston Police. So many of their initiatives, they have an Operation Homefront program, they have neighborhood programs. They go door to door with clergy, with just checking on kids, and it is not a police initiative. I mean the police are there, but they’re not there because they want to find out what is wrong or that someone has violated the law in some way. They go there because they really sincerely want to help. And I think that that is very different culturally than it is in many of the other, the larger cities in particular.”*

Some interviewees discussed the culture of transparency that Greater Boston police departments try to foster when dealing with communities, as noted in this statement from a healthcare professional:

*“One thing that Boston does really well now is transparency. That’s huge within the Boston Police.”* The interviewee continued and gave an example, saying: *“A good example of that, and we can compare that to other cities, the past few years, obviously, in the news there has been a lot of police-related shootings and that’s huge in the news, and Boston is no different.”*

*We've had our share of police-related shootings. I think one of the big differences is in Boston-- For example, when [one] was shot last year, the Boston Police met with leadership within the city, clergy leadership, different social service leadership, sat everybody at the table within a week and showed them the footage. This is what happened, these are the circumstances, as to try to get out a head of this to sort of fend off any possibilities of rioting and protesting and all of this sort of fallout that tends to come with these types of incidents that you see in other cities. We've been lucky-- knock on wood-- that we've had sort of minimal fallout from our police-related shootings here in Boston, and I think it's largely due to the transparency that Boston tries to put out there."*

Despite great progress made over the years in community policing, some people thought more improvement could be made, as one government stakeholder noted:

*"I think we do have good relationships with law enforcement, for the most part. That doesn't mean that there's no conflict, there is, obviously. But I think that we do have a bit of trust. We still have a lot of work to do in that scheme."*

#### ➤ **Presence of Academic Institutions**

Many statements were made by interviewees about the presence of academic institutions and hospitals in Boston, which gives the city a unique culture, as one interviewee from a CBO described: *"Boston is broadly a much more liberal, progressive place in much of the United States. There is lots of evidence to prove that."* A healthcare professional echoed: *"Very educated people, academic communities, a huge diversity especially, because of the education and all the academic institutions."* Another stakeholder from a CBO noted:

*"Boston is a unique city, because you have a lot of diverse ethnic group living in the city. You also have a very high level of educated people that work within the city and you have a lot of universities and colleges that actually are right here in the city of Boston and in Massachusetts itself. And this has given the opportunity for many minorities or people of different backgrounds to have access to education and to be in position, for example, of influence, a position of power and to have people that can be role models and people that could actually go into the community and speak with some level of credibility."*

#### ➤ **Existing Violence Prevention Services**

Interviewees reported the need for creating a comprehensive list of organizations and initiatives currently being implemented in the Greater Boston Area aimed at preventing youth engagement in violence. A comprehensive list would be useful so that law enforcement, schools and healthcare professionals could be able to quickly identify such resources in their area of

service. The following initiatives were cited as examples of best practices interviewees were familiar with: Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston, Center for Teen Empowerment, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Refugee Trauma and Resilience Center at Boston Children Hospital, Community Relations Units in Cambridge Police Department, Youth Connect in Boston, Boston Emergency Services Team (B.E.S.T.), Violence Intervention & Prevention (VIP) program Boston Public Health Commission, Boston TenPoint Coalition, The Violence Interrupters, Safe Street Programs, Greater Boston Muslim Health Initiative and other community-based initiatives designed to build social capital and neighborhood cohesion. The mentioned initiatives, as well as collaborations between faith-based organizations and healthcare professionals to provide free and anonymous assistance to community members, were cited as examples of best practices occurring in the city, some of which emerged from civic engagement and do not belong to a formalized service structure or organization.

Several representatives from government agencies, healthcare and law enforcement referred themselves as “*service brokers*” and said “*we steer those youth and young adults into existing programs*” and continue “*we're kind of ambassadors who visit these other disciplines' worlds and we're easy access for them to try to help them to understand what resources are available, even if we're not present.*”

One interviewee from a government agency puts it clearly that the program (the Greater Boston CVE pilot program) is about enhancing the missions of each organization/agency:

“*...the effort isn't really a program which changes things in my mind. The overall goal is increase community and government's ability to protect vulnerable individuals from engaging in violent extremism.*”

### ➤ **Inter-Faith Initiatives**

Some interviewees reported existing inter-faith initiatives as examples of best practices in building social capital. A CBO stakeholder described these efforts as:

“*very intentional efforts, particularly (with) what's going on right now... through Greater Boston Interfaith of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities coming together in dialogue about this issue of otherness.*”

As further described by an interviewee from a CBO: “*there is this network of congregations working on social change issues like healthcare, housing, gun violence, other issues that they work on together as a network.*” The stakeholder further discussed the engagement of communities towards proactive relationship building and “*not relationships in response to a crisis.*”

The interviewee continued to describe the nature of the interactions during inter-faith activities:

*“And some focusing on learning from each other, learning about each other. And at times things have bubbled up out of that space into collective action. Sometimes that collective action is, shall we say, not too controversial from this point of view. Like last winter during our winter blizzards those ministers sort of decided to do something like One Boston, Boston Together in the Blizzard with videos. And like we are all in this together. We can get through this winter together. A little bit of spiritual giving back to Boston sometimes is more intentional, like these recent conversations that started two weeks ago about unity and humility across faith communities. But those, I think it’s important that, at least how we see the interfaith community, the work comes by building relationships not in crisis. So that there is the resiliency during crisis.”*

Members of the clergy were also given credit for fostering an environment conducive to dialogue. A CBO stakeholder highlighted:

*“Reverend X has quietly and gently played a significant facilitation between the Jewish and the Muslim Communities – just being present and encouraging... to keep trying to find ways to be in relationship.”*

## **Broader Environment**

Stakeholders highlighted issues such as violence across the U.S., U.S. foreign policies, tensions among races, and others. These conditions were deemed relevant because they have the potential to influence ongoing discussions about the CVE initiative in the Greater Boston Area.

### ➤ **Violence in the U.S.**

The consensus among stakeholders is that violence in the U.S. has turned into an “epidemic,” described as the “business of violence,” or as a “big business,” and that it should be addressed as such. A CBO stakeholder painted the following picture:

*“I think we’re a violent society, and violence is tolerated. And you see that in TV and music and every other form of you know. Violence is tolerated, and so kids and people are desensitized and it’s no big deal to hit somebody.”*

Many interviewees were concerned about the disproportionate amount of funding being spent on terrorism as opposed to curbing violence altogether. An interviewee from a CBO said:

*“New York Times reported 355 mass shootings, only two of those were inspired by ISIL. We have an epidemic of violence in this country, and we need to look at the root causes of what’s causing violence generally.”* And interviewee in academia noted: *“That’s the astonishing thing in this space, that there are 15,000 homicides a year. Only a third of those get solved every year.”*

*So, there are [thousands] murderers running free every year, and somehow we don't worry about that, we don't freak out about it, we don't demand zero tolerance for homicide."*

This interviewee further suggested that the focus should be placed on violence across the board, stating:

*"And this type of violence is, you know, when you check that annual homicide rate, somehow gets all the attention, and rather than implementing a program that targeted all violence, that would also include this violence, we move away from what is actually going to make American communities safer." <sup>11</sup>*

An interviewee from a government agency reported:

*"We've had about ... say for rough number ... one hundred domestic and foreign or Jihadi type terrorist deaths in the last ten years. In the same period we've had over 350,000 Americans killed by guns. You know, I don't know if the numbers include suicide. So you've got an elephant on one side, a mosquito on the other side, and now the Federal Government wants to come in, and with all the resources it has, focus in on the mosquito. When every city in town, Baltimore, Chicago, Philadelphia, you can keep any urban, poor, minority, inner city where homicide is a problem. Why aren't we equally addressing that situation?"*

The stakeholder further highlighted issues of racial disparities and urged the government to focus on violence that continues to plague U.S. cities:

*"Why isn't this community, why aren't they getting federal dollars? Is it because that they're black and brown, and society sees that, ok, it's alright that black and brown people kill each other. From a racist standpoint, one would stand back and say, alright, they don't care, their lives have no value, and if they kill each other, well it's better for us. So, I mean, that's a really harsh analogy, but why are you focusing, with all the federal dollars and the resource that the federal government has, on a small group, versus the bigger picture."*

The topic of violence and firearms were brought up again by one stakeholder who highlighted the difficulty in gaining access to mental health and social services as compared to acquiring firearms, stating:

*"Unfortunately in this country it's very easy to get firearms, it's very easy to manufacture explosives, but it's very hard to get mental health care. If we want to address that problem, then*

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<sup>11</sup> Authors note: Data reported by the interviewees were not facts-checked. The quotes and information reported by the interviewees should be interpreted as opinions.

*I'm in favor. You know, let's make it easy for someone to get some mental health care and get social services for other social problems that they have. I'm in favor of it. But they talk about it as if there's this safety net that's there and accessible, and I'm not aware of it. Most of the people, you know, it's not rich kids who are going to be sent into these programs, it's going to be the same groups that were targeted by the anti-gang initiatives, and these other things, so it's going to be poor families who don't have the resources, they don't have insurance, they don't have the ability to get that kind of serious treatment. So it's somewhat of a charade, and I think that the real thing is they just want there to be an upward flow of information to law enforcement intelligence that they can keep doing what they've been doing."*

A CBO stakeholder also argued about easy access to firearms, social media, and their combined effects in younger populations, stating:

*"Availability of weapons in our country... I have 14-year-olds who can go get a gun in 30 seconds. So when you combine that with the brain of a 14-year-old... who's been exposed to domestic violence and poverty, and every other adverse childhood experience that there is... So how does a 14-year-old go off and get a gun? And then, you get them mad – then they can play around the Internet a little bit and they say, 'Oh, if I take this piece, plus this piece, plus this piece, I can make a bomb.' "*

Some stakeholders reiterated that Far Right and White supremacists groups are dangerous, and pose an imminent threat to national security, and that this kind of violence should also be addressed. A CBO stakeholder noted:

*"First of all, acknowledge publicly that violent extremism is something that any demographic is susceptible to. It by no means is exclusively a Muslim issue. I think in the states, speaking of data driven, there is a ton of data, there is more and more people kind of admitting the fact that right wing, militia and white Supremacist groups posed as much of a danger, if not more of a danger than Islamist extremism groups do. And I think until we acknowledge that and really start acting on that truth, we are not going to get a whole lot of commitment and involvement from the Muslim community."*

### ➤ **Tension among Races**

According to several interviewees, Islamophobia existed before the 9/11 attacks, but has increased in frequency over the last ten years. This exaggerated fear, hatred, and hostility toward Islam and Muslims, which is perpetuated by negative stereotypes, have resulted in bias and discrimination against Muslim communities, as an interviewee from a CBO reflected:

*“It’s a whole lot worse now, but we already have had four [incidents], since at least September 11th there has been quite a bit of Islamophobia in the country. There is a lot of disproportionate fear, and a lot of Muslims have been the victims of hate crimes, and not just Muslims but anybody who anybody thinks might be one, so like the Sikhs are often, because they wear turbans, are often misidentified as Muslims and targeted and so on.”*

The profiling of Muslims can also be seen in airports, as one stakeholder noted:

*“Over the summer when a seventy year old Egyptian American was boarding a flight at LAX he was detained for six hours without any cause.”*

Similarly, a government official shared personal experiences about profiling at the airports or at the port of entries:

*“She always gets total body pat down at the airport, total. She is an American citizen. Total body. I have another friend who is Russian, but he looks like he could be from the Middle East, and he travels a lot. They squeeze out every drop of his toothpaste from his toothpaste tube, every single drop every single time he travels.”*

An interviewee in academia acknowledged the prevalence of xenophobic tendencies, especially in times of economic crisis, and also warned against this intolerance, stating:

*“We can just look at some of the variation across Europe. Countries engage differently with their immigrant and refugee communities. I mean, the French are still struggling about what to do with Algeria; and that was a while ago. And there’s a lot of reasons why countries do what they do. I think the United States is an interesting one because on the one hand, with the exception of the indigenous Native Americans, everybody got here at some point from somewhere else. And we do have this kind of culture of engagement. But we also have a very nasty tendency during times of political or economic stress to dart into a kind of nativist xenophobia. And I think we’re kind of the razor’s edge here. And if we dart into nativist xenophobia, we’re going to behave in exactly the kind of ways that will get the outcome that they most fear.”*

As they recalled the incidents in Ferguson as incidents of excessive use of force by the police, most interviewees agreed that violence perpetrated by law enforcement around the country is totally unacceptable and has to be addressed. One CBO stakeholder acknowledged the tension between races, especially between communities of color and predominantly White police forces, stating:

*“Ferguson is a tragic example of what happens when you have a predominantly Black community policed by a predominantly White police force.”* The interviewee further elaborated:

*“I’m not someone who says that’s impossible. I’ve heard voices in education saying that we shouldn’t have white teachers for black kids, I think that’s nonsense. I don’t think the color of our skin precludes us from caring about each other. I’m a White teacher who works with Black kids all the time and we have amazing relationships and our relationships mean the world to one another, but at the same time, it can’t be completely one-sided like that. I think the more community policing you have, if you have a police force that’s predominantly White in a predominantly Black area, the community engagement that happens can inspire people in that community to become police officers and to address this.”*

➤ **Political Landscape**

Many interviewees commented on the political landscape within which the CVE initiative is taking place. To some interviewees, hostility towards Muslims and counter-terrorism measures are becoming means to gain political ground. One interviewee from academia noted: *“I don’t know if that’s the right term, it’s [counter-terrorism] corrupted by the politics of the situation. As a result, counter-terrorism tends to have a political edge to it as well, when the government is not careful that it’s not, and unfortunately what we see in terrorism research is often that’s influenced by the politics of the situation.”*

For many interviewees, political rhetoric promoting exclusionist attitudes towards minorities have planted the seeds for further ethnic divisions and intolerance. As an interviewee from a CBO stated:

*“...some of the language being used about Syrian refugees or immigrants from Muslim countries is the same language or the same political culture that was used in this country about Jews one hundred years ago.”*

Another interviewee from a CBO argued:

*“...the rhetoric that has been happening, that is taking place on the American stage.... Is that not hateful, separatists, bigoted, prejudiced, blatant?”*

The interviewee also commented that this rhetoric is counterproductive and could compromise further efforts in building cohesion, stating:

*“You could do all the work with a pilot program like that, then you have the kind of rhetoric we have in our elections right now where it is all, let’s stop all Muslims, let’s keep an eye on them. That can totally destroy that kind of an effort.”*

➤ **U.S. Foreign Policy**

Several stakeholders raised issues related to the U.S. foreign policy or “*U.S. policy events around the globe*” and how they might impact the CVE pilot program in Boston. An interviewee from academia said:

*“In the years since CVE has been in implementation, the pilot programs, the department of justice is touting 60 prosecutions of people, many of whom are expressing a desire to move, or to participate in, a conflict. And they treat that as terrorism, when in fact Americans have been participating in foreign conflict since there’s been an America. You know, it’s only recently that we, in each one of those, say this is terrorist, that is not terrorist, even though the violence is the same on all sides.”<sup>III</sup>*

The interviewee additionally commented on U.S. drone policies and recommended that they be re-examined, stating:

*“If you talk to actual terrorists, people who have actually tried to commit a terrorist attack, they don’t talk about ideology nearly as much as they talk about drones. So, where is our drone policy going to be in this conversation? And they said it’s not, that’s not going to be part of this conversation. So I said, exactly, this is all about blinding us to what the real causes of terrorism are, so we can continue to pretend this is a mental health issues.”*

An individual from a community-based organization supported the point, stating:

*“U.S. government foreign policy, for example, which is something like CVE really fails to address in a big way. It seems to lay all the blame on the communities, which are being bombed.”* As one healthcare professional noted *“In order for us to solve the problem of extremism, we have to become aware of our own extremism in our life.”*

Using World War II as an example, the interviewee continued:

*“To talk about, for example, the terrorist groups killing civilians, but at the same time not willing to apologize about the dropping of the nuclear bomb, that is not going to help. I think we have to look at these things and evaluate our actions in this light.”*

➤ **Media and Social Media**

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<sup>III</sup> Authors note: Data reported by the interviewees were not fact-checked. The quotes and information reported by the interviewees should be interpreted as opinions.

Terror groups have reasons to use the Internet and social media, whose popularity suits them in many ways. These outlets allow them to recruit individuals, and provides a space for them to encourage the carrying out of attacks intended to inflict mass casualties.

An interviewee from academia noted:

*“Social media or Internet encouragement for people to go solo could very well change the sort of tactical picture. Or, even if the larger attacks no longer are looking to do something like blow up the X, but instead are prepared to target people in theatres and in restaurants because the goal is not just to get attention, but actually to create mass casualties.”*

Some interviewees reported media sensationalism as a problem. Distorted journalistic reports were noted as generating unwarranted fears among the U.S. population, and may potentially serve the purposes of terror group.

As one stakeholder in academia noted:

*“So overall I would say that the failure to sensationalize the crime is actually beneficial. We know hate crimes are terrible, but it’s a small subset of crime, and acknowledge that this is a crime that has a wider impact, and we should make sure resources are devoted to addressing it, but at the same time we shouldn’t give every misguided person out there the idea that I can become world famous by doing it. Right? And unfortunately, the reason we have so many people yelling ‘I’m ISIS, I’m ISIS’ when they do something is they know that gets them on the front page of the paper.”*

The interviewee commented further that the media is not the only culprit in this sense, but that people in the government should also practice caution when dealing with the issue of sensationalism, stating:

*“It’s easy to blame the media, but if the media said ‘ISIS is the most dramatic threat to the United States right now’ and then went to the X agency director who said, ‘No, actually it’s a tiny threat to the United States and that’s quite overblown’, they wouldn’t have a story. So, the problem is, you have people in government who are sensationalizing this, that feed that media narrative.”*

Furthermore, the interviewee expressed concerns about the lack of due diligence by the media in evaluating certain claims:

*“When they [Department of Justice] announced sixty prosecutions, sixty terrorism prosecutions last year, the Department of Justice claimed this was unprecedented, and showed the rapid increase of the problem, but in fact, the data has been published for year, and it not only is not unprecedented, it’s not even close to the high numbers of prosecutions that happened*

*immediately after 9/11. So all it would have taken was the reporter actually checking, that it's true that this was a new record. ”*

A government stakeholder expressed some concerns about the danger of sensational reporting as well, stating:

*“The media in my opinion, we talk about politics, and we talk about the media, with the vast number of cable channels, with the Internet being ubiquitous, the message now resonates. So they always talk about the news, if it bleeds, it leads, so you've got, X, pushing that terrorist, terrorist, terrorist agenda. I mean, how do I scare people, and how do I gain viewership. So you see what's going on in society, where this little problem has mushroomed into this problem. And I understand, I really do, I understand that the fear associated with terrorism is such that, it's arbitrary, it can happen anywhere, so yes, we have to focus on the problem, but we can't single out a community.”*

This is further supported by this quote from a CBO stakeholder:

*“You know, considering that terrorist acts committed by Muslims occupy somewhere in, or committed by people in the name of Islam occupies in the range of 2 percent. And yet there are about 85 percent of the media appearances of the word terrorism. That really demonstrates the extreme paucity of genuine reporting related to the issue. So obviously media is exacerbating and media is driving and media is generating the fear, which leads to a government response.”<sup>IV</sup>*

Another interviewee from a government agency warned about the deliberate intent of media miscommunication, and its long-term ramifications of targeting a particular group of people that fit a certain profile:

*“I was interviewed by X TV and it was interesting, I presented them with a lot of facts, I did some research before the interview and I presented them with a lot of facts about why we should be less concerned with terrorism and more concerned with gang violence and gun violence and all of the other things, particularly in this country. And they took all of my research, they were very impressed with it, and the story included nothing about that, nothing. The story was, it was as if I didn't say a single thing about any of that. And it just reinforced for me my belief that a lot of this is created by the media.”*

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<sup>IV</sup> Authors note: Data reported by the interviewees were not facts-checked. The quotes and information reported by the interviewees should be interpreted as opinions.

The government stakeholder gave another example of encounter with a different news channels, stating:

*“X too, I mean they interviewed me. I couldn’t believe it. It was so ridiculous. It would be a kick to see it, actually. But they did me on one screen and this psychologist from New York City on the other screen, and the psychologist from New York City is like all wound up and ‘We’ve got to arrest these terrorists.’ And I was on the other side saying, ‘No one wants their child in prison.’ That’s the way that we need to look at this. And we need to look at every single human being equitably.”*

The interviewee continued to comment on bias and news media reporting, namely the high rate at which terror incidents in the West were covered in comparison to terror attacks in the Middle East, and even killings in the U.S.:

*“And granted what happened in Paris was terrible, what has happened in London, what has happened, I mean let’s look at what happened in the Mideast, let’s look at what happens in Lebanon that we don’t hear anything about. Turkey, exactly. I mean we don’t even hear about that stuff. It’s a little blip. But you cut down-- I mean granted 9/11 was huge, there is no doubt about it. A lot of people died and a lot of people were greatly impacted. But there are a lot of people greatly impacted innocently every single day, and I think personally race has a lot to do with this. And I have always said when the killings-- this was long before this-- when killings started impacting White people, that’s when White people were going to get serious about it and start saying, ‘No, something has to be done’”*

## Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Health & Human Services (EOHHS) - “Promoting Engagement, Acceptance and Community Empowerment (PEACE)” Project

Boston is known for its decades of work in reducing youth violence. On August 8th, 2016, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Health & Human Services (EOHHS) issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the “Promoting Engagement, Acceptance and Community Empowerment (PEACE) Project,”<sup>V</sup> with an overall goal to prevent Violence. EOHHS made it clear in this RFP that the terms “Violence” and “Violent Extremism” were used interchangeably and that the Violence was defined as “*an act that violates state or federal law and causes physical harm to a person, or property,*” and:

- *Is motivated, at least in part, by prejudice related to race, religion, ethnicity, handicap, gender, gender identity or sexual orientation; and/or*
- *Appears to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion, or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination or kidnapping.*

A link to the original RFP document is provided in the footnote.

During the RFP selection process, our team made it known to the Boston community that we would serve as independent, external evaluators to the Boston PEACE projects and that we welcomed those who were interested in applying to use us as technical assistance for evaluation components. In the second phase of this evaluation program, our team will evaluate the processes, outcomes and impact of PEACE activities and other Violence prevention related efforts in the Greater Boston Area.

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<sup>V</sup> Authors note: Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS). (2016) Grant Application for the Massachusetts “Promoting Engagement, Acceptance and Community Empowerment (PEACE) Project”:

<https://www.commbuys.com/bsa/external/bidDetail.sdo?docId=BD-17-1039-EHS01-EHS02-0000009400&external=true&parentUrl=bid> (accessed in August, 2016)

**Objective 2: Identify recommendations for practice suggested by the Greater Boston CVE pilot program stakeholders for governmental and non-governmental organizations engaged in the development of violence prevention activities in the Greater Boston Area including activities to be conducted under the grant opportunity “Promoting Engagement, Acceptance and Community Empowerment Project (PEACE)” issued by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Health & Human Services (EOHHS).**

**Why information on recommendations for practice is important in the evaluation?**

Given that there are never enough resources or time to answer every evaluation question, it is critical to work collaboratively with program stakeholders to prioritize the evaluation based on a shared understanding of what actions are most likely to produce the expected change. This information becomes particularly important when the program is forming and resources are limited on the activities that can be implemented.

**Nine recommendations for practice**

As described above in the methods sections, interviewees were invited to visualize what they would need to see in order to increase their perception of safety around the Greater Boston Area and, more specifically, what they would need to see in relation to the ways in which a CVE program could be implemented. The recommendations reported below are intended for implementers of the PEACE project or any other project addressing violence in the Greater Boston Area. From the transcribed interviews, we recorded 276 coded statements related to this topic, of which 190 were general observations related to the stakeholders’ overall vision of change and 86 related to practice-based recommendations. The 86 practice-based recommendations were categorized under three different themes: Foster Civic Engagement and Cultural Awareness (42 quotes), Build Trust and Earn Social Support (30 quotes), Improve Human Conditions and Reach Human Potentials (14 quotes) and are presented in Figure 3 below and described in detail in the following sections.

**Figure 3. Nine recommendations for practice**

<b>Foster civic engagement and cultural awareness</b>	<b>Build trust and earn social support</b>	<b>Improve human conditions and reach human potential</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Encourage civic conversation and open forums</li><li>• Develop counter-narratives</li><li>• Increase diversity in the system and improve cultural sensitivity</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listen and validate the opinions of stakeholders</li><li>• Avoid profiling</li><li>• Expand community policing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Invest in school system and education initiatives</li><li>• Expand youth programs and services</li><li>• Address housing issue and nurture healthy neighborhoods</li></ul>

### **Foster Civic Engagement and Cultural Awareness**

➤ **Encourage Civic Conversations and Open Forums**

A member of a CBO engaged in various activities with members of Muslim communities spoke about the frustration among Muslims, who feel they are being misunderstood, targeted and profiled:

*“When I interact with some people in the Muslim community here in Boston and so like there is an element, ‘What do I have to do for you to stop asking me these questions? What do I have to do to stop being treated with suspicion?’ And that’s the thing that hangs out there.”*

Another interviewee from a different CBO voiced the importance of promoting integration in school settings starting in early education programs:

*“When my child.... like six years-old, comes back from school and somebody says, but you're not an American, ... the child is made to feel as an outsider, that's a problem. So, to me, the challenge is in schools and places like that. By the time kids are teens, it's almost too late. Yes, you can make them worse I feel, things can get worse. I feel there hasn't been enough effort at schools. In my view that's a huge issue.”*

Among interviewees there was an overall consensus on the importance of having a greater number civic conversations in open forums as a mean to break down stereotypes, promote acceptance and integrate communities with differing cultural and religious backgrounds, as a participant from an academic institution stated:

*“I think what I would like to see is a more explicit conversation, sort of a civic conversation about what it is we want to do as an increasingly multiethnic society... So I was quite taken, for example, it was about two or three weeks ago, the Muslim community... basically had an ask-me-any-question-you-want day. And they just sort of opened a forum. Which I thought was brilliant.”*

➤ **Develop Counter Narratives**

A number of community-based stakeholders suggested developing counter-narratives, or in other words, creating social media campaigns to combat hate, discrimination and violent extremism:

*“The spreading of violent extremism through media and online is a real challenge. We know this on, from our end on sort of looking at the White Supremacist movement and how they spread, online spread, and that sort of building of that community has been an incredible threat. And so I think the counter to that positive stories messaging about how communities can come together and address hate and intolerance.”* Another interviewee from a CBO stated: *“We have to develop counter-narratives. We have to put our heads together and our idea folks together, to put together programs... maybe develop some games, maybe develop some quizzes, maybe develop some websites, maybe develop some Facebook page, or any other social media, Twitter, whatever, right? And disseminate those messages as well.”*

➤ **Improve cultural sensitivity and increase diversity within the “System” (Schools, Government, and Law Enforcement)**

According to many of stakeholders, diversity, cultural sensitivity and awareness could be improved by creating internships opportunities in government and state offices for people with different cultural and religious backgrounds, and by training law enforcement and homeland security officers at the port of entry to be more mindful of cultural differences.

Concerning the issue of diversity within the system, an interviewee from a CBO suggested:

*“Why can’t we have, the youngsters spend a day at the airport with the law enforcement people?”*

The same interviewee further adds that these opportunities should be created for instance at the: senator’s office, the congressman’s office, and that the political leadership must step up to the plate as well to make these opportunities available. The point is further illustrated in this quote:

*“I mean the political leadership has to step up to the plate as well, not just by talking and talking, I mean, they have to engage people, they have to create internship at the White House, more internship positions for certain targeted communities why not? I mean we are living in an unusual world now, why can’t they create positions at the state level?”*

Many stakeholders observed that, as the city is becoming more ethnically and religiously diverse, it is of paramount importance for law enforcement agencies to undergo cultural sensitivity trainings. One CBO interviewee noted the urgency for such a training, stating:

*“I say we’ve got to teach the police officers, our Federal Bureau of Investigations, and this Homeland Security, and everybody else, I mean we’ve got to teach them cultural sensitivity.”*

Another stakeholder reiterated the importance of educating law enforcement about cultural sensitivity:

*“Education again. I say that because if the police programs or the police officers go through training and education programs, that gives them as a sensitivity program, that makes them understand the complexity of what goes on, I think that we will have a better police and then we can change the image of how people perceive the police department as not an enemy, but a friend, and also work on creating that friendly police environment.”*

## **Build Trust and Earn Social Support**

### ➤ **Listen and validate the opinions of stakeholders**

The general consensus among interviewees is that, in order for the initiative to be successful and increase buy-in from program stakeholders, it is important not only to listen to their voices but also validate their opinions by making concrete changes to planning efforts, as a member of a CBO explained:

*“Because when people come to the table and they talk to you and they get the understanding that you're not listening or that you're not doing what they're suggesting, chances are they're not going to be involved. People get involved and they'll stay involved, they'll stay committed when they feel they're validated, when they feel that their concerns are being taken and that being actually implemented.”*

### ➤ **Avoid Profiling**

A large number of stakeholders expressed major concerns about the profiling of Muslim communities in the absence of known risk factors on who is likely to commit an act of violence. As far as the success of the initiative is concerned, interviewees suggested that the government should support initiatives that foster the integration of Muslim communities. In particular, one interviewee from a CBO mentioned:

*“I think that for the government to have credibility behind this program, they have to step back as far as intelligence gathering and profiling and focus on education and transforming these people's lives.”*

Interviewees from government agencies shared similar sentiments, as two interviewees noted:

*“I think anything we can do to have the government work with communities in a way that really communicates respect and protects them from stigma and discrimination, and protects them from feeling singled out as potentially at risk to become extremist. I think anything along those lines is going to improve our security as well.”* The government stakeholders continued: *“I think a lot of people get themselves in trouble, because they develop these profiles that I think can get a lot of false positives that way and I think you miss a lot if you get yourself too much hooked into these kinds of things.”*

### ➤ **Expand Community Policing**

As stakeholders described the social context within which the CVE pilot project is unfolding, a large majority perceived that genuine community engagement and community policing are important to improve the current situation in Greater Boston. An interviewee from a CBO said:

*“Build trust in the community, not just be involved in the community for your spreadsheet, ‘Oh yeah, I talked to the Muslim community. They seemed okay.’ But come in and really get to know the community.”*

This point was echoed by another interviewee from another CBO:

*“I think community engagement and community policing is an absolutely crucial aspect to move us towards that 9 or 10 place on the scale.”*

A representative from a government agency further confirmed the point by saying:

*“Well, one thing I think is that we need to do more community outreach. I think that we need to be more inclusive in our practices.”*

Another interviewee in academia mentioned that, when violent crimes go unsolved in communities, there is a sentiment of outrage among underserved victims of crimes. This resentment eventually leads to lack of trust in law enforcement agencies. Based on this observation, the interviewee suggested that resources be directed towards solving crimes as a priority, because of its impact in building trust with disenfranchised communities:

*“When the police aren't doing their job in the neighborhoods where they want to have influence and so called build trust, that becomes very difficult. And I think the same thing would be true here [Boston], if half the resources devoted towards surveillance and other methods that treat communities unfairly were instead diverted to actually solving criminal problems, you*

*know, it is easy for the law enforcement to build trust in a community if they solve crime in that community, that's how they do it. You know, when you're the police officer who helps a mother, the son's murder, the mother is gonna love you. And the mother is gonna help you whatever you do. If you help the guy whose life's savings were ripped off in some fraud scam, he's gonna love you. You know, you don't need to have some community outreach program."*

## **Improve Human Conditions**

### ➤ **Invest in School Systems and Education Initiatives**

Despite being labeled as a “*highly educated*” city with “*meds and eds*,” some stakeholders acknowledged the great divide between classes in Greater Boston, existing socio-economic factors, and the negative impact of inequality on underprivileged communities, especially on the youth. As one interviewee from a CBO stated:

*“And for a city that has, that is supposed to be so tied into all these academic institutions and for our schools to be so piss poor that I have to feel like I won the lottery if my kid can go to a school where he can learn to read and write, that is ridiculous. Every single school should be a great school in this city.”*

### ➤ **Expand Youth Programs and Services**

A government stakeholder called for funding for Youth Connect and the BEST Team because they are able to assess and provide services and resources to young people in need of help:

*“If I had my way, BEST, YouthConnect, they'd get funded by the U.S. attorney's Office, all the monies, not all, but the bulk of the monies would go there to let them hire more YouthConnect. Cause imagine if a mosque could have a YouthConnect worker, a church could have a YouthConnect worker.”* It was expressed that there should be improved mentoring, integration and after school programs for young people, particularly between the age of 7 and 12: *“I would like to see more programs that involve people at younger age because those are already committing the crimes and creating problems... You got to get them between 7 and 12. So if you implement programs for age 7 and 12, these pilot programs could be implemented into schools... And if you do that, then five, ten years from now, the young people will be very different.”*

Along the same lines, an interviewee from an academic institution recommended the introduction of a conflict resolution curriculum in elementary schools, stating:

*“I think some of the positive intentions and potentials of the project were more along the primary prevention lines, like providing economic opportunity, thinking about conflict resolution curriculum in elementary schools.”*

Because of the growing concerns about suicide and drug addiction among adolescents, one CBO stakeholder suggested that efforts be spent on suicide prevention and drug addiction programs as well:

*“If you think about youth that are troubled, just think about any of the programs that are like that. I think even, like, drug addiction programs you know, I think is worth thinking about. Suicide prevention, which is a huge thing in the suburbs now, you know, I mean, at least in Massachusetts, a lot of suicides been happening. So why are kids committing suicide?”*

In addition, a CBO stakeholder made statements about *“having an ongoing discussion, awareness [violent extremism and radicalization] amongst families and communities at large,”* because they are refugees with *“with very little or no educational backgrounds.”*

A government official also suggested creating *“more awareness by parents and peers.”*

Another government stakeholder echoed the need for having more public conversations with the youth about the danger of radicalization, stating:

*“There needs to be more public awareness that there's a problem, and we got to address it, rather than putting your head in the sand, if you get my drift. So I would expect to see more of a dialogue that's public, you know, in the messaging, which it would include, you know, in the schools, in the community, on social media, you know, that we're reaching kids, that we're talking about how ISIL really doesn't represent what this means, you know. It's not going off and working in some type of a paradise atmosphere, for men or for young women, especially young women.”*

### ➤ **Address Housing Issues and Nurture Healthy Neighborhoods**

Regardless of whether they were from government, CBOs, or academic institutions, a number of stakeholders acknowledged the urgent need for the government to invest in communities to prevent social ills, such as teen substance abuse, poverty, violence, the degradation of neighborhoods, and issues associated with housing and failed housing policies. As a CBO stakeholder shared with us:

*“I would need to see a lot more government investment, and community investment, in the neighborhoods that are really struggling... I mean, there are kids right in the neighborhood that keep on getting high, they get on drugs, there was a shooting right across the street recently. I would need to see some real investment on community and government's part, working together, to begin to tackle these problems. I would like to see that money going in that, as opposed to what this accomplished, which is very little, and I would ultimately want to see the number of shootings and fatalities down.”*

A government stakeholder sympathized with the idea of increasing funding for the development of poor neighborhoods. For instance, the interviewee recommended that the

government be efficient about repairing sidewalks to give a clear signal of care to the community, the elderly and frail, as an easy mean to gain trust: *“But as government, do sidewalks have to be fixed based on a complaint or is there a better way to do it? Proactive... right? It should be systemic. So, let's look at a map, let's see where the sidewalks have been fixed and where they haven't. Focused on the places it hasn't been fixed, prioritizing people who really need their sidewalks to work well for them, like people with disabilities, frail, elderly, families. And once you kind of fixed the gap, now you can get on a systematic schedule, and then everyone just knows when it's going to happen, and now no one needs to call 311. So, not only does it work better for me as a resident, it works better for all residents in Boston, and for the organization, because now you're not chasing calls.”*

Another government stakeholder noted that there are many urgent problems, such as poverty and violence, in a few neighborhoods that threaten the lives of people residing there. The interviewee said that when students in those neighborhoods were randomly asked about “VE,” whether they had any concerns about VE, and what their concerns were, the majority had no concerns about VE, and one student told the stakeholder:

*“I'm concerned about walking from my house to the bus stop and not getting shot.”*

Based on this, the stakeholder recommended the discourse be about poverty and how to address social ills, as illustrated in this quote: *“Those are the issues that we need to be talking about. And we need to really be talking about poverty in the neighborhoods and we need to be talking about opportunity and we need to be talking about what starts all of this violence, if it's terrorism or if it's gang violence or if it's bullying even.”*

The housing situation, and failing housing policies, seemed to be a recurring point of discussion, as a member from a CBO emphasized the importance of allocation of more funding to mitigate these issues:

*“I'd have to see an improvement in the housing situation, in the shelter system, the homelessness, the community violence, for example, domestic violence... in the past we used to have rent assistance, to assist the woman trying to escape their situation [domestic violence] to be independent. But they don't have that fund to help them to go where they want to go. So if funding, more funds would be good.”*

A government official also highlighted issues with current housing conditions in the Greater Boston Area, and suggested: *“If we were to change back to having like an income rental housing cap to regulate how people are being pushed out, people are being displaced, thank you. That would help settle that. That will help people's happiness. It may make some people, a very small amount of people at that, very unhappy, but it would affect and spread a lot more joy.”*

### **Objective 3: Develop a logic model for the evaluation of violence prevention activities aligned with the Grant opportunity “Promoting Engagement, Acceptance and Community Empowerment Project (PEACE)” project goals issued by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Health & Human Services (EOHHS).**

#### **Why should program implementers engage in evaluation activities?**

Data gathered during evaluation enable managers and staff to create the best possible programs, to learn from mistakes, to make modifications as needed, to monitor progress toward program goals, and to judge the success of the program in achieving its short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes. Through evaluation, you can track these changes and, with careful evaluation designs, assess the effectiveness and impact of a particular program, intervention, or strategy in producing these changes.

#### **Some Reasons to Evaluate Programs**

- To monitor progress toward the program’s goals
- To determine whether program components are producing the desired progress on outcomes
- To permit comparisons among different contexts
- To justify the need for further funding and support
- To find opportunities for continuous quality improvement
- To ensure that effective programs are maintained and resources are not wasted on ineffective programs

### **Development of a Theory Approach Logic Model**

Leveraging the results of the interviews reported above, our team has developed a theory approach- logic model (Figure 5) to support the evaluation of violence prevention projects to be sponsored by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) under the grant funding solicitation entitled the “**PEACE Project**” which stands for *Promoting Engagement, Acceptance and Community Empowerment (PEACE) BD-17-1039-EHS01-EHS02-00000009400*.

Logic modeling can enhance the participatory role and usefulness of evaluation as a management and learning tool and build community capacity in the ability to judge the worth of

investments in specific activities and initiatives. Using tools like logic models can serve to increase the practitioner's voice in the domains of planning, design, implementation, analysis, and knowledge generation. The development of logic models is a process of outlining the challenges ahead, the resources available and activities needed to achieve expected outcomes.

We anticipate that the level of detail and content of the logic model proposed below will change overtime as additional input is provided by project stakeholders on the specific activities that have been proposed in the implementation of the PEACE projects. Once the projects are funded and additional details are provided on their implementation plans, we will generate opportunities for feedback on the model, and with input from project stakeholders develop *specific activity based logic models* to support the implementation and monitoring of project outcomes. The logic model will also be made available to other organizations interested in implementing violence prevention projects in the Greater Boston Area and assistance provided to adapt the model to their needs and proposed activities.

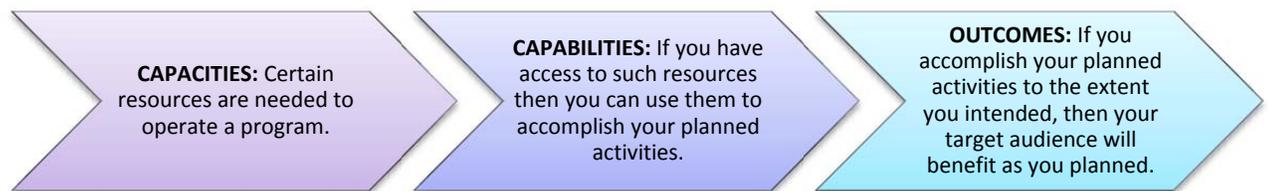
A theory approach logic model links theoretical ideas together to explain underlying program assumptions. The focus of a theory approach logic model is on the issue being addressed and on the solutions proposed to address the issue. A theory approach logic model is, by definition, broad and about "big ideas" and not about specific program "nuts and bolts." The model we created emphasizes the theory of change and recommendations provided by the interviewees (i.e. activities, changes and outcomes that interviewees want to see) that influence the design and plan for violence prevention programs in the Greater Boston Area.

A logic model is a picture of how a program will work. It describes the resources and activities thought to bring about change and how these activities are linked to the results the program is expected to achieve.

## How to read the logic model

Logic models are typically read from left to right following the chain or reasoning “*If...then...*” statements which connect resources with activities and outcomes. The flowchart below (Figure 4) shows how a basic logic model is read.

**Figure 4. Logic model Flow chart**



In the proposed model, capacities are the resources, infrastructure and mechanisms in place which can be drawn upon to address violence. Capabilities, on the other hand, are the actions and activities a system, or components of a system, is assumed capable of taking to address the phenomenon of interest if adequate resources are allocated. Capabilities have been categorized by the three core public health functions: 1) Assessment including assess, investigate and analyze the needs of a community), 2) Policy development including advocate, build constituencies, identify resources, prioritize, plan and develop policies based on population needs and 3) Assurance including manage resources, develop organizational structures, implement programs, evaluate programs, inform and educate the public. The primary outcome included in the model is “improved community relations” as described by program stakeholders as a key step in reducing youth engagement in any type of violence (secondary outcome). Short and intermediate outcomes have been developed based on our interpretation to what outcomes the nine recommended practices (see interview results) identified by program stakeholders could lead to. As reported above, we expect that the model will evolve overtime and that more specific measures will be created in collaboration with program stakeholders once the PEACE or other activities are funded and implemented.

## Conclusion

This report summarizes the findings derived from the opinions of fifty-two interviewees including government and community leaders, covering critical elements that should be taken into consideration for program managers or policy-makers who plan to introduce violence or VE prevention activities to the Greater Boston Area, as reported by major stakeholders. The fifty-two interviewees have several years of experience working at the community level in preventing different types of violence, and the majority of them have dedicated their entire careers, and in many circumstances put their lives at risk, to prevent violence. Most importantly, they each possess decades of professional experience addressing issues related to youth engagement in violent activities in the Greater Boston Area.

While we are confident that the interviewees we included represent a wide range of opinions on CVE, and are certain that we included major stakeholders' in our interviewing process and used rigorous qualitative methods, we also acknowledge that the results of our work represent the views and opinions of the fifty-two people we interviewed at a given point in time.

Interviews' findings on the Greater Boston CVE Pilot Program goals and scope highlight that VE prevention programs to be implemented in the Greater Boston Area should adopt a comprehensive approach to the prevention of violence and not focus on any one form of violence. Many acknowledged that the locally-driven Framework for the Boston CVE pilot program - *A Framework for Prevention and Intervention Strategies: Incorporating Violent Extremism into Violence Prevention Efforts* - is consistent with such approach and that a narrow focus on ideology and/or extremism, rather than on the prevention of acts of violence regardless of the motivation by which they are perpetrated, is counter-productive.

Despite a decrease in violence over the years, interviewees acknowledged the persistence of social disparities in the Greater Boston Area and the fact that acts of violence are still of concern, especially in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Current efforts to build a more integrated and safe community, such as inter-faith initiatives, existing violence prevention initiatives and effective community policing, did not go unnoticed and were highlighted positively and as examples of good practices to build upon. Educational programs offered to children during the early stages of their educational path that help them applying critical thinking skills to positive civic engagement opportunities have been described as a cost effective way to implement a transgenerational approach to violence prevention, including the prevention of VE.

**The value of this formative evaluation process has been the gathering of feedback on the pilot program initiative since its earlier phase of implementation to assure the inclusion and integration of the opinions of community leaders in planning, mobilization and evaluation efforts. The interviewees' views and opinions suggest that the future direction of the Greater Boston Area CVE Pilot Program should focus on the potential stressors at the societal level that, based on their experiences, are likely to make youth lose prospects in**

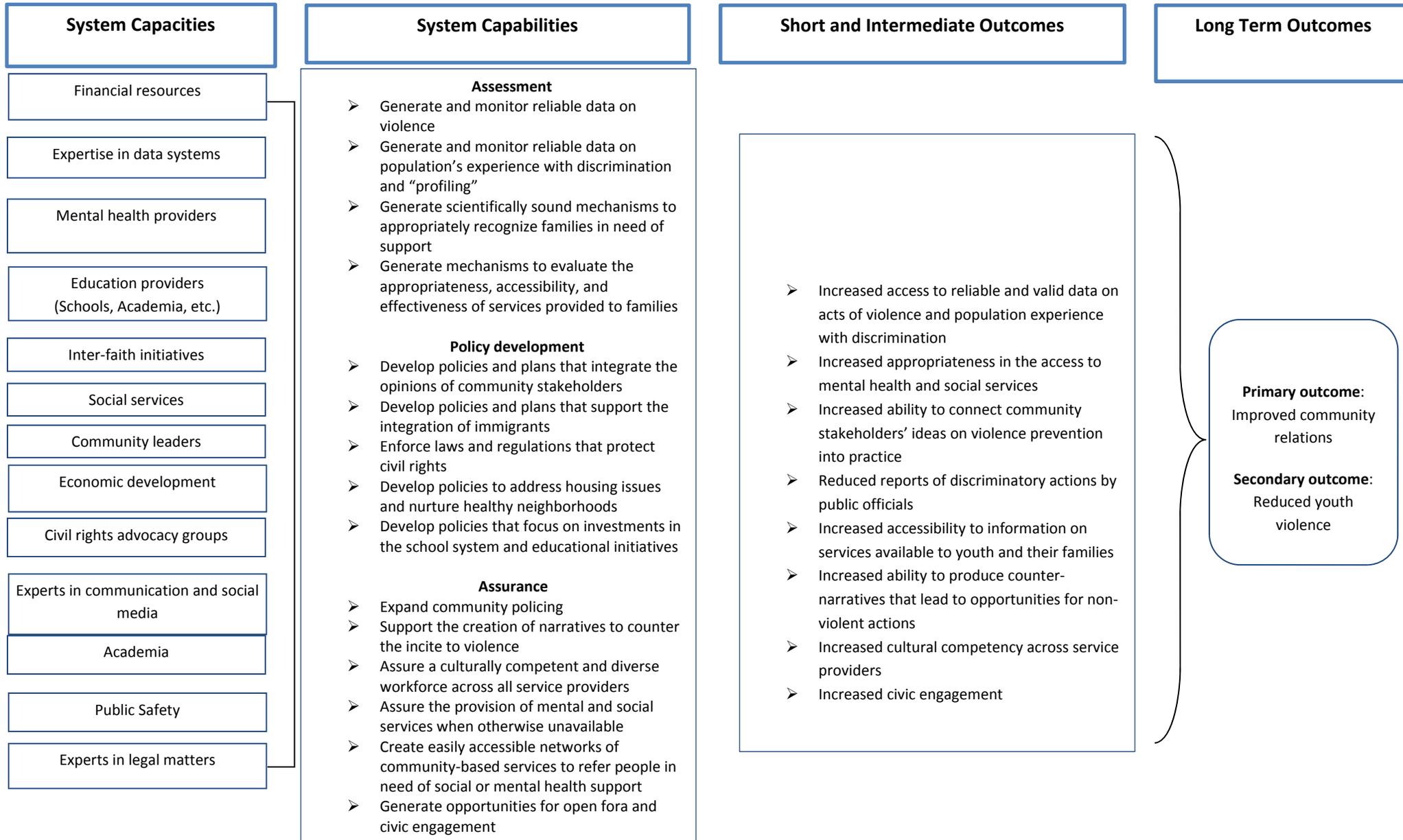
**life and their sense of belonging to the community and, consequently, embrace violent behaviors.**

Many of the interviewees refer to the need for implementing basic societal development programs to strengthen opportunities directed to youth. This approach may seem quite different from what is frequently seen in CVE programs, which typically focus on developing interventions aimed at de-radicalization and which, according to project stakeholders, would be narrow in scope, and would not embrace a cost-effective transgenerational approach to the prevention of violent extremism, as is desired. In the specific context of the Greater Boston Area, development efforts are embraced by the interviewees as the most cost effective way to reduce the risk of youth in engaging in violent activities, including the likelihood of being recruited by violent extremist groups.

Subsequent to the completion of the formative evaluation process, on August 8, 2016, a funding opportunity aiming to address the challenge of violence and violent extremism was announced by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Health & Human Services (EOHHS): “*Promoting Engagement, Acceptance and Community Empowerment Project (PEACE)*.” To support the community members who are interested in creating a PEACE program, nine practice-based recommendations, categorized into three major themes: *Foster Civic Engagement and Cultural Awareness, Build Trust and Earn Social Support, and Improve Human Conditions and Reach Human Potentials*, were gathered and presented in this report.

In the second phase of this evaluation program, our team will continue serving as an independent, external evaluator and evaluate the processes, outcomes and impact of PEACE activities and other VE related efforts in the Greater Boston Area based on the theory based evaluation logic model presented in this report. By working closely with the community, data gathered from this evaluation program will enable program managers and staff to design the best possible programs within the context of Boston, to monitor the progress, improve learning from mistakes, make necessary modifications, and eventually, to demonstrate the effectiveness and impact of their programs and inform future initiatives that reflect the stakeholders’ opinions on what programs are relevant to the Boston context.

**Figure 5. Theory Approach Logic Model**



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