THE VIOLENCE

A Bold Response

PREVENTION

to a California Crisis

INITIATIVE

Prepared for
The California Wellness Foundation

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"Statistics don't show it, but for those of us in the trenches working directly with youth, it's clear that attitudes about violence have changed. How youth see violence affecting them has changed. More people are saying they want to help prevent violence, they are taking ownership of the issue, and they are shifting toward prevention."

– Carlos Morales
Los Angeles Committee
Against Assaults on Women

PROLOGUE

WHEN THE CALIFORNIA WELLNESS FOUNDATION asked for a proposal to research and write a history of its 10-year Violence Prevention Initiative, we understood what a challenging proposition that would be. In 1997, Fern Tiger Associates had conducted a quick, qualitative assessment of the Initiative by interviewing about 50 grantees representing a cross section of the VPI, and from that project, we learned that the VPI, encompassing a huge variety of experiences and perspectives, was like a world unto itself. This new task would require summing up 10 years of effort by hundreds of people working to end youth violence; ensuring that all perspectives were included; understanding how the VPI evolved over time; and putting all of that into historical perspective. But the Violence Prevention Initiative was groundbreaking in many ways, and we couldn't pass up the opportunity to learn more about it, analyze its impacts, and tell its story.

We recognized that along with our work, the Foundation had awarded grants to three other organizations (Children's Hospital of Los Angeles, Leadership Learning Community, and Portland State School of Community Health) to write the stories of the community action programs (CAPs), the leaders, and the policies that comprised the VPI's rich experiences. Many times, we thought that the passion of the grantees – the individuals and the organizations who confronted the ramifications of youth violence every day – would be the more compelling story to tell. But as we met with those who helped to shape and guide the thinking of the Initiative – staff, board, advocates, funders, evaluators, researchers, public health professionals, and statewide and national leaders in violence prevention – we were drawn to a different kind of drive and passion, sometimes personal and sometimes professional.

In researching this history, we relied on interviews with people who were in some way connected to either the Initiative (although not necessarily directly involved in it) or the field of youth violence prevention and a variety of secondary sources, including many documents graciously provided by the Foundation.

We conducted 74 interviews (72 in-person and two phone interviews) with people throughout the United States, including the Bay Area, Los Angeles, Riverside, Sacramento, San Diego, Atlanta, Boston, Boulder, Chicago, New York, and Washington, D.C. Beyond the practitioners noted above, other interviewees included advisory committee members, current and former elected and non-elected state officials, and VPI grantees (including CAPs, fellows, policy, research, and Promising Practices grantees, youth, technical assistance providers, entertainment industry and media education grantees, and Peace Prize recipients).

Most interviews lasted approximately an hour and a half and some people were interviewed a second time to follow up on additional information we had obtained since the first interview. Each interviewee was asked a unique set of questions reflecting what we knew about their background, the quality and depth of their involvement with the VPI, and the knowledge we were accumulating over the course

of the interview process, which lasted from August 2002 to April 2003. Key themes addressed in the interviews included the important decisions about the VPI and its grantees (both prior to and during the 10 years of grantmaking); the VPI's legacy for youth violence prevention in California and beyond; the challenges of coordinating and evaluating such a large initiative; and philanthropic support and approaches to youth violence prevention, both historical and current.

Secondary sources used for this history include many produced by the Foundation in the course of administering the VPI, including requests for proposals, grant recommendations, grant reports, and communications materials. We also examined the materials produced by the VPI public education grantees for the Prevent Handgun Violence Against Kids and Resources for Youth campaigns; newspaper and magazine articles on youth violence and youth violence prevention, the VPI itself, the Foundation, and other topics; academic journal articles that influenced the VPI's architects as well as articles published by VPI research grantees; and other documents that shed light on decisionmaking processes and events, both internal and external to the Initiative.

This history is divided into four chapters:

- "Countering the Push for Prevention" provides an overview of the VPI itself and explains why the Foundation felt such a significant investment in youth violence prevention was needed.
- "Moving the Needle" examines the challenges faced by the VPI grantees in coming together as a youth violence prevention field and the impacts the Initiative had on that field.
- "Crossing the Divide" analyzes the ways in which the VPI represented a new way of funding to achieve results and the effects it has had on other foundations, in California and nationally.
- "Elusive Evidence" looks at the challenges and lessons learned from the evaluation of the first five years.

Together, the four chapters provide a comprehensive look at the VPI. However, because the latter three chapters address different aspects of the Initiative and may appeal to different audiences, they are purposefully written to be independent of each other. At the end of each of these chapters there is a page of lessons learned.

The appendix includes three items: a sample of another way to tell the VPI story: through a graphic depiction of the Initiative and its many influences and impacts; a list of all interview subjects; and the general framework of the unique interview questions used for each subject.

The VPI was unique among foundation initiatives in that it created a space for people to work together towards an overarching goal – reducing youth violence through prevention – without asking them to leave aside their individual perspectives and approaches. And although many who were part of the VPI "family" have moved on to areas other than youth violence prevention, they carry with them an understanding of the possibilities for change when people, ideas, and resources are combined strategically. We are grateful for the opportunity to have met so many passionate and thoughtful people through the interviews and for the chance to bring this story to a wider audience.

Fern Tiger Associates

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ON APRIL 29, 1992, tensions resulting from racism, class, poverty, drug and gang warfare, and police corruption brought a literal conflagration to the streets of South Central Los Angeles. It would eventually leave 53 people dead and 2,300 injured, and cost the city an estimated $1 billion. Sparked by the acquittal of four white police officers in the beating of Rodney King, an African American whose ordeal after a traffic violation had been videotaped for the world to see, the raging unrest in Los Angeles shattered the Golden State's false facade of progress in an ongoing battle with violence and highlighted an undercurrent of racial and economic tension that had gone ignored for too long.

Throughout California in the early and mid-1990s, a climate of divisiveness and retribution reigned, as both crime rates and poverty climbed. Politicians clamored for tougher law enforcement and longer prison sentences, but failed to make a connection between escalating crime and the state's loss of three-quarters of a million jobs in a span of just a few years. While unemployment and poverty rates skyrocketed and public spending on social programs declined, Californians' sense of safety was damaged, and many turned to scapegoating. White residents, slowly becoming a minority population (in a state which today has no majority ethnic group), continued to make up about 80% of voters. From Proposition 187 (an anti-immigration law billed as the "Save Our State" law) to "Three Strikes, You're Out" sentencing, it appeared that anxieties were being played out at the polls with the result of harsh new laws targeting immigrants, low-income people, and youth.

California needed to grow an anti-violence movement that could show that the epidemic of violence was not inevitable, that could reverse and prevent the, and that could instill hope for a safer, better future for youth. This movement would recognize the important role communities play in preventing violence and would invest in the potential of youth as standard bearers of change, rather than seeing them as victims or perpetrators trapped in an endless cycle of destruction. This effort would acknowledge the public health implications of the easy availability of guns and alcohol and view these as controllable environmental factors that could be addressed – in order to prevent violence before it occurred.

Countering the Push for Punishment

IN 1992, when The California Wellness Foundation was created, it embarked on a multi-million dollar, decade-long effort to build just such a movement to prevent youth violence. For direction, it looked toward a new source: the public health field, where a growing number of researchers and practitioners had begun viewing violence as a health problem rather than an issue solely for law enforcement and the courts. Violence had become the leading cause of death for young adults in California, and proponents of the public health model believed this could only be changed by studying related behavioral and environmental risk factors. Doing so would allow appropriate prevention and intervention strategies to be developed.

The Foundation's excitement about the potential of this approach prompted it to commit $70 million over 10 years to the Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI). Unlike many previous efforts in youth violence, the premise of the VPI was that the strategies it employed had to be comprehensive and multidisciplinary and, most importantly, they had to be driven by people in communities where young people were dying and being arrested in rising numbers every day.

Through support for four specific components – community action programs (CAPs), policy advocacy, research, and leadership development -- the VPI created the state's, and perhaps the nation's, first true youth violence prevention constituency.

Moving the Needle

DESPITE THE ALARMING GROWTH of youth violence, those working to prevent it were on a lonely frontier. Neither government nor private funders saw youth violence programs as a priority, and thus, the prospects for mobilizing action or understanding the potential for new approaches to address the problem were slim. Nevertheless, rising youth violence prompted many communities to begin looking for alternatives to the criminal justice approach. In California counties as diverse as Los Angeles and Contra Costa, public health departments were at the center of innovative violence prevention coalitions. The California Wellness Foundation, established in 1992 with the mission to improve the health and well-being of Californians, was then in the process of shaping its own grantmaking strategy and decided to fund a series of five major initiatives. After considering various alternatives, the Foundation's leadership chose youth violence as the focus of its first initiative, both because of the urgency of the issue and the potential for new, prevention-oriented strategies. "Violence was one of the more serious problems in California and it was not getting a lot of attention in terms of dealing with the underlying determinants, including the social environment that breeds it and the economic environment that sustains it," says Jonathan Fielding, Los Angeles County's public health officer and a Foundation board member at the time.

"The VPI built the notion that on a very hard issue – violence – it's possible to create a movement and that change is possible. But we've got a lot more work to do."

VPI Advisory Committee

Also influencing the board's decision was a 1992 publication from the Centers for Disease Control, *The Prevention of Youth Violence: A Framework for Community Action.* Using the framework as a guide, the Foundation developed an initiative grantmaking structure with four integrated components: policy, community action, research, and leadership development.

For the community action component the Foundation funded 18 organizations, "CAPs," to form collaboratives and to explore the potential for reducing youth violence through health promotion programs; to attempt to influence local policy; and to support statewide advocacy efforts.

As part of the policy component, the Foundation established the Pacific Center for Violence Prevention to design strategies and to coordinate grantees' efforts toward achieving three policy goals (which were developed by the Foundation's leadership): increased restrictions on access to handguns; increased public support for youth violence prevention programs; and reduced access to alcohol, believed to be a significant contributor to youth violence. In addition to funding the Pacific Center, the VPI also supported the policy work of other grantees with a multi-million dollar, statewide public education campaign.

The leadership program sought to build grassroots, local capacity by supporting a corps of community fellows each year, who were working at the neighborhood level to reduce youth violence. Additionally, fellowships were provided to public health and medical practitioners and researchers focusing on youth violence prevention at universities, hospitals, and health agencies around the state. And the Foundation annually awarded the California Peace Prize, a no-strings-attached grant, to acknowledge the work of three individuals whose efforts to prevent youth violence demanded attention. The Prize recognized these unsung heroes and raised the visibility of youth violence issues.

For the research component, the Foundation funded scientifically driven studies of community-level risk factors contributing to youth violence. The priorities of the research component were closely tied to the VPI's policy work. The VPI also funded educational efforts to influence the way violence is portrayed in commercial entertainment and in the news media. In addition to these four components, the Foundation funded a comprehensive evaluation of the entire Initiative.

The VPI represented the first major attempt to bring cohesion to the youth violence prevention

field. Rubén Lizardo, an activist and 1999 Peace Prize winner, remembers being amazed that a Foundation wanted to focus on systemic issues which communities that were deeply affected by violence felt were not being addressed by law enforcement measures. "The VPI was the first time we felt we could be honest about our strategies," Lizardo says. The VPI also brought together people and organizations new to the field, including researcher María Alaniz, then at Prevention Research Center in Berkeley, who struggled to find funding for her research on environmental influences on alcohol consumption in Latino communities and its links to youth violence. "Finally, here was a foundation that saw the real issues and was willing to fund research to find out more about them," says Alaniz.

Before the VPI grantees could begin promoting prevention in communities and changing policies, they needed to find their own common ground. This was a challenging first step. The public health language was unfamiliar to many VPI grantees, especially community-based grantees, who found it strange and sometimes even objectionable to use terms like "host" and "agent" to describe real people committing or becoming victims of violence. Other terms used to describe strategies under consideration, such as media advocacy, multi-sector collaboration, and community empowerment, were interpreted differently by different grantees.

The VPI provided the first opportunity for many grantees, particularly those living and working in communities deeply affected by violence, to more effectively express their communities' needs. "Ten years ago, I didn't have the ability to articulate what it means to do youth violence prevention work," says Bernardo Rosa of Community Wellness Partnership in Pomona, one of the CAP grantees.

Grantees connected with one another at an annual two-day conference and celebration of their work – the first regularly scheduled, foundation-driven forum dedicated solely to youth violence prevention. The conference was a safe place to share experiences. In that sense, the Violence Prevention Initiative was not just a grantmaking structure; it provided spiritual nurturing, solidarity, and strong support for the work of grantees. The tone of each annual conference was set by Ray Gatchalian. The Oakland fire captain and peace activist encouraged the Foundation to acknowledge the spiritual basis of youth violence prevention work, saying,"If you can show another way of being in the world, and say there are other things to do with your pain, you can bring hope to young people who are suffering."

On a concrete level, the VPI exposed grantees to the idea that they were part of a larger movement. Before the VPI, communication among California's gun safety advocacy groups was rare, according to Barrie Becker, former executive director of Legal Community Against Violence, a VPI grantee. That changed once the Pacific Center for Violence Prevention began hosting monthly firearms strategy meetings. "Our projects were very complementary so there was a lot of good synergy," recalls Becker. Youth, too, formed a caucus so they could present a united voice for young people.

For Anita Barnes of La Familia Counseling Center in Sacramento, one of the CAPs funded by the VPI, participation in the Initiative represented a first opportunity to be part of something big. "It's great when you can say you are part of a statewide movement," Barnes says.

Arturo Ybarra, who in his spare time had been organizing residents in Watts around issues of inter-ethnic violence, utilized his community fellowship to launch the first Latino nonprofit in his neighborhood, the Watts Century Latino Organization, with help from many of the people he met through the VPI. His organization has leveraged its support from Wellness to obtain other private and public funds for the work it does in Watts, including partnering with local African American groups to prevent inter-ethnic violence.

While many grantees began to feel they were part of a larger youth violence prevention movement, cross-disciplinary collaboration – among researchers, community-based grantees, and advocates – wasn't always easy. This experience mirrored the difficulty that many CAPs had in their own communities as they attempted to develop collaboratives involving schools, local governments, and others to address youth violence. Some CAPS, like La Familia, developed broad-based collaboratives that continue to function today. But others, like Asian Resources

(also in Sacramento), found that language barriers and cultural norms hampered attempts to create a local collaborative focused on youth violence prevention. Despite the challenges, the CAPs grew more savvy about partnering to create a common agenda for youth.

Given the diversity of VPI grantees (community leaders, researchers, and policy professionals) philosophical divisions due to differences in class, race, educational background, and experience had to be overcome. These divisions were apparent when the policy issues were prioritized. Some CAP representatives felt that gun control was not as important to reducing youth violence as job creation, quality education, and family support. The Pacific Center, which led the strategy development process of the VPI policy agenda, wanted to focus on "winnable" local issues such as banning the cheap "Saturday Night Special" guns often used to commit crimes. This would enable advocates to build a track record that would give them credibility in advocating for state policy changes. "Banning Saturday Night Specials was simply one of the things that could be done that would build political strength for the Initiative," says Andrew McGuire, director of the Pacific Center. In response to the CAPs' concerns, the Foundation made participation in VPI-sponsored policy activities voluntary.

"Wellness always maintained a high degree of reverence for the complexity of violence prevention."

Community Grantee

Gun control advocates, most notably the Pacific Center for Violence Prevention and Legal Community Against Violence (LCAV), assisted community organizers and elected officials to pass city and county ordinances restricting gun sales, licensing, and manufacturing. In Pomona, Community Wellness Partnership was successful in pressing not only for a ban on Saturday Night Specials but also in helping ban gun shows at the Los Angeles County Fairgrounds. Throughout the 1990s, local organizing efforts eventually led to expanding restrictions on firearms in more than 300 cities and counties.

In addition to developing legal strategies, VPI grantees packaged information in ways that caught the attention of both policymakers and the public. In 1995, VPI research grantee Dr. Garen Wintemute published a monograph, *Ring of Fire*, highlighting the disproportionate role of Saturday Night Specials in violent crime. Wintemute's research — the subject of numerous media reports around the country — was used to show policymakers that concrete steps could and should be taken to limit the ease with which weapons get into the hands of young people. The VPI's public education campaign, produced by Bay Area-based public affairs firm Martin & Glantz, used stark, factual terms in paid advertisements — "Handguns are the number one killer of children" and "There are eight times more gun dealers than McDonald's in California" — to tell how violence was affecting youth. This resonated with lawmakers and the general public: High-profile events, such as video and press conferences and town hall meetings featuring state and national legislators, added weight to the campaign, as did a database containing the names of more than 10,000 "opinion leaders" around the state to whom high-quality, eye-catching materials were sent on a regular basis. As a result, the campaign's sound bites were picked up by policymakers, including many who had not traditionally been aligned with gun control forces.

The Pacific Center and other VPI grantees took the local momentum on firearms to the state level. They were helped by a shift in the composition of the state legislature in the mid-1990s, when the effects of a 1990 term-limits law began to be felt. Local elected officials who had supported gun ordinances in their communities – many of whom were ethnic minorities and women – moved up to the state legislature. Advocates' efforts were amply rewarded in 1999 when the state legislature passed a package of six bills, including a ban on Saturday Night Specials. The bills were signed into law by Governor Gray Davis, putting California at the forefront of the gun control movement.

Because the effort to change the firearms policy was so consuming, VPI grantees largely postponed

work on increasing state resources for youth violence prevention until the second five years of the Initiative. But the goal of obtaining more resources for youth turned out to be more challenging than firearms in that there was less local effort to build on.

One of the goals of the VPI "Resources for Youth" campaign was the creation of a state-level youth violence prevention authority to coordinate government planning and programs. But VPI advocates were unable to convince legislators that prevention programs deserved the same stature as the juvenile justice system. Another effort, a Senate bill to create a program modeled on the VPI within the state Department of Health Services (DHS), never made it out of committee. But still, there were important victories. In 2000 the Schiff-Cardenas Crime Prevention Act was passed, providing the most significant appropriation for youth violence prevention in California's history: more than $120 million per year. David Steinhart, a juvenile justice advocate and VPI grantee, was a key behind-the-scenes figure in crafting the "unbreakable" formula of the law, which tied youth violence prevention and law enforcement funds together. "The Foundation stayed with this issue for so long that it enabled youth violence prevention advocates to find opportunities that weren't there in the short term," Steinhart says. Another VPI grantee, Barrios Unidos of Santa Cruz, worked with a local coalition and their state assemblyperson to pass a bill in 1997 that set aside $3 million per year for community-based youth violence prevention programs. In addition, the After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships and Proposition 49 (the Schwarzenegger Initiative) provided more funds for youth programs.

The VPI policy program also supported the development of new research tools for future policymaking, such as the Linked Homicide Database, which DHS created by combining data from homicide reports with data from death reports. The first such database in the nation, it "allows us to analyze complex policy questions that we couldn't even think about before, particularly those that revolve around the relationship between murderers and their victims and the circumstances surrounding homicides," says Dr. Alex Kelter, director of the Epidemiology and Prevention for Injury Control branch at DHS.

VPI grantees also worked to change the portrayal of violence in both the news and entertainment media. Mediascope, a Los Angeles nonprofit, was funded to encourage more responsible portrayals of youth violence in the entertainment industry, but found film schools reluctant to address the public health approach to violence. Thus, Mediascope published a book on ethics in entertainment appropriate for film school curricula. Berkeley Media Studies Group (BMSG), a media advocacy organization, produced compelling reports on the lack of context provided in most media coverage of violence. BMSG also developed a handbook and workshops for journalists on violence and was invited to give workshops at some of the state's most prominent newspapers. But while some journalists were receptive, the media's traditional approach to covering violence as a criminal justice issue remains entrenched and there is a still a great need for continuing education among media professionals.

As the '90s came to a close, youth violence declined significantly, but researchers have so far been unable to determine exactly why. The growth in jobs, demographic trends such as a smaller number of adolescent boys as a percentage of the total population, a tough Three Strikes law (passed in 1994), increased funding for after-school programs, and the Violence Prevention Initiative are all likely contributors.

The VPI succeeded in demonstrating that by using a significant amount of resources to focus on one issue the needle could be moved – perhaps not all the way to prevention, but at least part of the way. Fundamental social change – which is what the VPI sought in the long run – occurs incrementally over many years, so the real impact of the VPI on individuals and communities is likely to be seen in years to come. Thus, the VPI is perhaps best understood as a critical first step in changing society's understanding of youth violence so that we no longer accept it as an inevitable fact of life.

Crossing the Divide

WITH THE VPI, Wellness provided a new model in grantmaking: funding across disciplines, providing decade-long grants, convening a diverse group of grantees to create partnerships, and supporting advocacy through local and statewide action, public education, and media. The Foundation was innovative and focused, funding not only organizations, but also grassroots organizers and peacemakers. Above all, Wellness is credited with addressing an identified need previously overlooked by nearly all private foundations and with understanding how it could leverage its resources by taking a risk that few funders had been willing to explore.

Despite mounting data and anecdotal evidence from grantees about the toll violence was taking on youth and communities, established foundations had not acted in any significant way to address the issue. In 1990, less than 2 percent of all grant dollars nationally was destined toward violence prevention programs of all kinds. What's more, only a tiny fraction of that two percent was awarded for primary prevention – efforts to address the risk of violence to the entire population – a key element of the public health approach. Many philanthropists perceived youth violence, from gangs to school shootings, as such a complex problem that only government could have an impact. From the foundation perspective, explains Gwen Foster, program officer at The California Endowment, "It's hard to feel as if your work is making a difference on this issue because violence never goes away." But government's solutions focused on incarceration, while funding for innovative approaches to both controlling violence and preventing its spread remained insignificant.

Given this situation, The California Wellness Foundation's investment of $70 million in ten years had the potential to change the funding picture significantly. "The Foundation marketed the issue and brought together other foundations to support it," says Deane Calhoun, a 1995 VPI Peace Prize winner and executive director of Youth Alive in Oakland.

> **"The level of community violence was appalling, and it directly affected the ability of funders to make change."**
>
> *National Funder*

By venturing into policy advocacy, the Foundation had to ensure that its stance on public policy issues and its support for policy research and analysis fit the terms of IRS laws that restrict foundations from lobbying for specific legislation. While the Foundation was willing to provide resources and muscle toward ensuring that the messages of the VPI public education campaign were heard throughout the state and beyond, this was also likely to invite greater scrutiny of the Foundation's position, particularly in relation to gun control.

But Wellness assessed the risks it faced and persevered. In California in the 1990s, where handguns were fast becoming the number one killer of children and an average of 22,000 juveniles were arrested for violent felonies every year, there was an urgent need for bold steps. "We'd always known that you can't address youth violence just by providing services and intervention; you also have to deal with policies and systemic issues, but we were limited in what we could do alone," says Anita Barnes.

In embarking on the Initiative, Wellness provided hope to violence prevention advocates that foundations could and would play a key role in funding alternatives to conventional criminal justice approaches. And according to many observers, the Foundation has succeeded in this regard. "Today, violence is accepted by foundations as a public health issue, and that's due to the work of the Wellness Foundation," says Father Greg Boyle, executive director of Jobs For a Future in Los Angeles and a California Peace Prize recipient in 2000.

Placing violence prevention funding within an initiative structure proved to be both an advantage and a challenge of the decade-long investment. The initiative format seemed logical in that the youth violence prevention field was still young and lacked a core of visible, established organizations; this meant that the Foundation could play a useful role as a nexus. "The VPI required an initiative structure because there wasn't much on the ground," says

Gary Yates. Many believe that the Initiative structure gave voice to a movement. "There was a sense of many people working together on this issue," says Larry Cohen, a member of the VPI advisory committee and executive director of Prevention Institute. Linda Wong of Community Development Technologies Center agrees: "The value of an initiative is that it makes you realize that you can't reduce violence without affecting other parts of the system."

While a well-planned initiative held the promise of a coherent, consistent, and comprehensive approach to grantmaking, it also presented challenges. The level of grantee buy-in varied greatly; there was disagreement about policy objectives and some community-based grantees felt that the Foundation's use of quantitative evaluation tools to assess outcomes was unfair. That the community collaboration model was driven by the Foundation's mandate rather than by practitioners in the field bothered some grantees. Father Greg Boyle says that while the initiative structure provided momentum for policy change, it sometimes felt "disconnected" at the local level because "it came from on high, rather than being born from below."

Wellness hoped to bring about change in the foundation world, and began working early on to build alliances with other funders. To expand the number of CAPs, the Foundation invited other foundations to become part of the VPI through co-funding partnerships. The pitch wasn't easy, as some foundations viewed both the public health approach to violence prevention and the length of the VPI as unorthodox. "It's hard for foundations to commit and stay committed to a single issue for a long time," says Dorothy Meehan, vice president of Sierra Health Foundation. Nevertheless, eight foundations eventually joined with Wellness, enabling the VPI to support 18 CAPs, rather than 10.

Co-funding brought resources, but also challenges. Some of the co-funded CAPs had to provide progress reports to two funders, and "it was sometimes confusing to have all these cooks in the kitchen," says former VPI program officer Michael Balaoing. For varying reasons, only two of the original co-funders remained with the VPI for the full 10 years of the Initiative. But many co-funders, say that the VPI fundamentally changed how they look at youth violence. "The VPI enabled me to see that the public health model can be applied in a powerful way to the issue of violence," says Gwen Foster.

The VPI was also a trailblazer in supporting policy change. Wellness demonstrated how foundations could support advocacy through research, public education, media, and strategy development. For Alliance Healthcare Foundation, the VPI was "liberating," according to its president Ruth Riedel, because "we were able to show our board that advocacy really works." When elected officials began adopting the VPI's public health terminology, that provided powerful evidence to Alliance Healthcare Foundation's board of the effectiveness of VPI-style advocacy. Alliance Healthcare Foundation has since launched two of its own advocacy projects, using many of the strategic tactics employed in the VPI campaigns.

Wellness shared its experiences nationally, most notably with the National Funding Collaborative on Violence Prevention, a consortium of funders seeking opportunities to support the field. A close relationship developed between the Funding Collaborative and Wellness, which was a founding member and whose staff played a consistent leadership role on the Collaborative's board. This interchange was a key influence on the Funding Collaborative, according to executive director Linda Bowen. "I was very impressed with the VPI as a model because of the focus on community engagement and pushing for policy change at the community level," she says. Without diminishing the key role that Bowen herself played in shaping the Funding Collaborative's focus, the VPI model of convening people and organizations from a variety of disciplines to address youth violence had a strong influence on the Funding Collaborative's efforts.

At times, the size of the VPI investment in youth violence prevention created the perception in the foundation world that the issue of youth violence prevention was "covered." During the 10 years of the VPI, "there was little a foundation could do in violence prevention in California that would not be seen as Wellness," Larry Cohen notes.

Today many funders view violence prevention as

part of a larger set of "youth development" or "community building" goals. And although some supporters of youth violence prevention say the reluctance of foundations to use the term "violence prevention" to describe their grantmaking downplays the significance of the issue, there still is no single accepted definition of violence prevention among philanthropists. On a more concrete level, the steep drop in the value of stock portfolios after 2000 has prompted many foundations to focus their reduced grantmaking on issues they view as more fundamental than youth violence, such as shoring up health services ravaged by cuts in public spending. The foundation world may need a reminder of the key lessons demonstrated by the VPI: youth violence *is* an urgent public health issue; it *can* be prevented; and foundations *can* play a role in reducing the likelihood that youth fall prey to violence.

"You had all these evaluators who didn't have the tools to evaluate our passion and our pain, and yet that's exactly what they were trying to do."

Community Grantee

Elusive Evidence

ONCE THE DECISION TO INVEST in a 10-year, youth violence prevention initiative was made, a natural question ensued: How would the Foundation know if the VPI had an impact? In 1993, the answer was to examine each of the four Initiative components as well as their relationship to one another.

The evaluation as envisioned by Wellness was extremely complex, and finding one institution in California that could evaluate the many activities funded by the VPI proved difficult. As a result, the Foundation brought three teams together: the Injury Prevention Center at Johns Hopkins University was to evaluate the policy program and the research program and manage and coordinate the evaluation; the Stanford Center for Research in Disease Prevention would evaluate the CAPs; and RAND would evaluate the leadership development program and analyze criminal justice data from the CAP communities. This arrangement was akin to a forced marriage, but it was one the Foundation felt was necessary since each institution brought particular expertise to the project. About two years into the evaluation, this forced marriage ended in divorce and Johns Hopkins left because of differences over how best to measure VPI-related outcomes. At the request of the Foundation, RAND agreed to add to its scope the evaluation of the policy and research programs (begun by Hopkins), while Stanford continued to evaluate the CAPs.

In seeking to prove the value of its investment, the Foundation was optimistic that evaluators would be able to show a causal relationship between the work of the VPI grantees and a reduction of youth violence. This was particularly true in the case of the CAPs, where the evaluators attempted to determine, using quantitative methods, the impacts of the work of these organizations. As it turned out, the evaluation "tried to quantitatively measure an area that was still being defined, where indicators and clear objectives were still being developed," according to Dr. Mark Rosenberg, director of The Task Force for Child Survival and Development and former director of the CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

Developing outcome measures for the CAPs was a major task since there was considerable variation in program structure, design, and outreach. The evaluation team had to take into account different definitions of "community" in determining each CAP's "focal area" (from which evaluation data would actually be collected). Asian Resources, for example, viewed its service area not geographically but in terms of the Southeast Asian immigrant community, which was spread throughout the Sacramento metropolitan area.

Many CAPs viewed the evaluation as an attempt to "grade" their performance and felt that the evaluators represented an elite, academic world far removed from the reality of the communities being studied and the youth violence problem. Many observers say the CAPs never fully accepted the

evaluation in the format designed by Stanford and RAND. The Stanford team made site visits, helping to raise its credibility among some CAPs, but most remained unconvinced of the evaluation's fairness. "I don't think the evaluators ever really understood what we feel," says Bernardo Rosa.

The evaluators also encountered serious limitations with the data. For example, violent crime statistics from the FBI that RAND was using to determine impacts on youth violence were not available for all of the CAP focal areas (only citywide statistics are reported) and did not provide adequate information about the age of those involved in violent crimes. But while this was disappointing, says RAND's Peter Greenwood, the more significant problem was that the CAPs' process and outcome goals were linked to direct service delivery and not explicitly to reducing violence.

Accomplishments such as engaging and involving youth and building collaboratives in local communities, unfortunately, were not likely to be captured by the quantitative methods being used by the evaluators. People Reaching Out in Riverside, a key player on the city's youth advisory council, developed a strong partnership with the school district, but this was not reflected in the evaluation. With the benefit of hindsight, it seems the Foundation, CAP grantees, and others might have been better served by an evaluation that measured progress toward interim goals, such as the creation of constituencies for whom youth violence prevention is a priority or focusing on the reduction of risk factors for violence. "I was very proud of what the CAPs were doing in terms of working with schools, law enforcement, community workers, and youth. But they didn't get credit for it," says Loretta Middleton, a youth services director in San Diego schools and a member of the VPI advisory committee.

Because several favorable trends converged in the early 1990s to put significant momentum behind the VPI policy goals, particularly those related to firearms, it was somewhat difficult to delineate the VPI's role in bringing about both statewide and local policy change to reduce youth violence. In a sense, it was a lucky break for the VPI agenda, but it also demonstrated the importance of providing sustained funding to enable advocates to take advantage of political opportunities.

By the end of the first five years of the Initiative, numerous cities and counties in California had either passed or were considering firearms-related ordinances, including "junk" gun bans, dealer restrictions, and other measures. The Pacific Center and other VPI policy grantees, such as Legal Community Against Violence and Charles and Mary Leigh Blek of the Million Mom March, clearly contributed to these successes. Yet in the evaluation, while RAND credited the Pacific Center with developing key policy strategies on firearms, it would only say that the Pacific Center's work had a "modest" effect on getting gun control measures passed into law. And although the evaluators recognized that the Pacific Center's gun control efforts may have been a crucial first step toward reducing youth violence, they stopped short of attributing California's steep declines in youth firearms violence during the 1990s to the Foundation-funded strategies. According to the evaluators, it was simply too difficult to control for extenuating factors such as the booming economy and the Three Strikes law, which put many more violent offenders behind bars, to reach any definitive conclusions about the impact of the VPI.

But others saw it differently and observers within and beyond California consistently credit the Foundation and the VPI with playing a major role in putting California at the forefront of states severely limiting access to firearms. They say that without the data, model policies, messages, and grassroots connections provided for them by VPI grantees, legislators would not have been so proactive in moving a gun control agenda forward. "California's always been very pro-gun, yet there has been a significant change in attitudes and norms here in recent years," says Larry Cohen. "That's an outcome, in part, of the VPI work." To a certain extent, the willingness to fund grantees working for policy change has to be accompanied by an understanding that it is not always easy to see exactly how things happened. Unlike service provision, advocates' efforts to change policy can be stalled for years, only to get a jump-start when an unforeseeable event spurs legislators to action.

Demonstrating the impacts of the VPI-funded

research on policy was challenging when so many external factors couldn't be controlled for. The intent of the Foundation was to fund research on the factors contributing to youth violence in order to influence policy debates. According to the RAND evaluation, that happened in several cases: Jim Mosher's work on a model alcohol policy control act; María Alaniz's studies of the relationships between advertising, alcohol, and violence in Latino communities; Susan Sorenson's work on the role of guns in youth violence; and Garen Wintemute's report *Ring of Fire*.

Although initially some community fellows expressed the same suspicion of the evaluation process that the CAPs did, the fellows were able to demonstrate to the evaluators their accomplishments in the community, as well as "a strong commitment to mentoring youth" and how their association with the VPI increased their access to resources and to policymakers, according to RAND's assessment.

"The VPI was a case study of what sustained, enlightened, and engaged efforts could do to change the landscape."

Government Researcher

The academic fellowship program was intended to attract medical and public health scholars, particularly women and ethnic minorities, to the field of injury control and violence prevention, while the community fellowships were designed to enable community-based youth violence prevention practitioners to expand their work. The evaluators described the academic fellows program as effective in reaching the Foundation's goal of increasing the number of "professional, trained health workers committed to violence prevention."

Despite many unanswered questions, the evaluation was valuable in many unintended ways, helping to shape subsequent evaluation processes both at Wellness and at other foundations. It also served as a reminder of the limits of scientific methodology for examining some complex, social issues. "Hardly anything that happens in the arena of public policy is ever evaluated, and there's no reason to hold violence prevention programs to a higher standard," says Alex Kelter.

Before moving into the second five years, however, the Foundation wanted to have a better understanding of how the VPI grantees perceived their own challenges and accomplishments than what the evaluation provided. Thus, it funded a four-month qualitative assessment of the VPI by Fern Tiger Associates (FTA) in 1997. The Foundation did not take up the VPI evaluation again until late 2001, when it awarded grants for qualitative evaluations of the VPI components to Children's Hospital of Los Angeles, Leadership Learning Community, and Portland State University's School of Community Health.

GIVEN CALIFORNIA'S SIZE, diversity, and the number of other challenges the state has been facing over the past decade, the Violence Prevention Initiative could not be expected to completely turn the tide in favor of prevention. But in funding the VPI, the Foundation challenged California to take a fresh look at a worsening problem and in doing so, it created the possibility that the status quo might be changed. Although the VPI may not have worked in all the ways the Foundation hoped it might, in retrospect, it is clear that the Initiative produced real and tangible results for individuals, for organizations, for communities, and for the state of California.

COUNTERING THE PUSH FOR PUNISHMENT

An Overview of the VPI

> "Our streets are being stained with the blood of our children — and damn it, it's got to stop. So I ask you, please, to work with me to pass tougher laws. We should start with the 'Three Strikes, You're Out' bill. It's time to turn career criminals into career inmates. For those sick individuals who commit forcible rape, who molest a child, or devastate a community through arson, the first offense should be the last. What we need for them is a simple law: One Strike, You're In — for Life. Third, we need new laws to attack the growing tide of armed thugs on our streets. Law-abiding citizens have the right to a weapon for self-defense. Criminals do not. Fourth, we need to ensure that all dangerous criminals serve more of the time to which they're sentenced. We can – we must – prevent these crimes by building the prisons we need to put violent criminals away."

Pete Wilson, Governor of California, "State of the State" address, January 1994

> "In the early 1990s, the only approach to violence that had traction was incarceration. More and more jails were being built. But we knew we could prevent violence and reduce its impacts. The California Wellness Foundation understood that and provided the leadership to advance a strategy that could make a difference."

Jack Calhoun, National Crime Prevention Council

TO UNDERSTAND WHY The California Wellness Foundation believed that the problem of youth violence warranted a decade-long, $70 million dollar investment, it is important to understand the challenges that the state faced in the early 1990s. While California was not alone in dealing with an economic downturn and a rapidly growing and diversifying population, in the state with 10 percent of the nation's population, these trends were more exaggerated than in other parts of the country, and the magnitude of the impacts, especially on disaffected youth, was enormous.

Poor economic conditions and new pressures brought by rapid growth have been correlated in research with increased incidences of violence. The recession that began in 1990 lasted longer and was more profound in California than almost anywhere else in the United States, resulting in the loss of nearly three-quarters of a million jobs and adding stress and despair, in poorer areas. As high-paying manufacturing jobs gave way to a service-based economy and the proportion of immigrants increased, poverty rose year after year. In 1993, possibly the worst year of the recession, more than 2 million children in the state lived with families whose incomes were below the federal poverty line ($14,350 for a family of four that year). Adding to concerns about jobs was the state's rapid population growth. From 1980 to 1990, the number of California residents rose by 26 percent to nearly 30 million, and much of this growth was attributable to the

influx of immigrants. Between 1984 and 1994, California became home, on record, to about 3.5 million newcomers, of which about two thirds were legal immigrants,[1] and another estimated 1.4 million undocumented residents attained legal status through a 1986 amnesty law. Not included in these numbers is an unknown number of undocumented immigrants who also moved to California.

No matter how one analyzes the numbers, it was becoming quite evident that within a few decades, California would be a "minority majority" state: By 1990, Latinos already made up more than one-quarter of the state's population, while another 9 percent were Asian or Pacific Islander, and the proportion of both African Americans and whites was on the decline. As the state's educational, health, and social service systems struggled to cope with these changes and the economy continued to flounder, many Californians became pessimistic about their future. A worsening drug problem fueled a rise in violence, and at times ethnic tensions were manifested in clashes between rival gangs.

"If you want to be effective in preventing violence you need an articulated, conscious approach to systems change."

Public Health Advocate

Throughout California and the nation, violence was on the rise, especially in cities. In 1992, 1,092 people were murdered in the city of Los Angeles, a staggering 45 percent increase from the previous year, while San Francisco saw a 22 percent rise in the number of murders. But it wasn't just in urban centers that violence was growing. Suburban San Mateo County, just south of San Francisco, saw the number of homicides jump from 30 in 1988 to 55 in 1992, and Fresno County in the rural Central Valley saw murders more than double in that same period. Youth violence was also becoming more prevalent. Between 1988 and 1993 – just five years – the state's youth homicide rate leapt 61 percent, compared to 19 percent for adults.[2] Rather than encourage policymakers and the public to commit to violence prevention programs, these statistics fueled a drive for tougher criminal sentencing laws such as Three Strikes, which was signed by the governor in 1994.

While most voters and lawmakers looked to law enforcement to stem the tide of violence, The California Wellness Foundation sought answers from a relatively new source of expertise on the issue: the public health field. Here, a small but increasingly vocal group of practitioners and researchers was working to promote the notion that violence – a leading cause of death for young people – should be addressed like any other epidemic. This method required applying a public health approach: using data to reveal the nature of the problem; determining underlying risk and protective factors; bringing multiple partners, community stakeholders, and academics together to develop and implement strategies; and focusing on not one individual at a time but on environmental and systemic solutions.

For those who advocate for using public health strategies as a way to deal with violence, 1992 was a seminal year: the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* devoted an entire issue to the topic and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) published *The Prevention of Youth Violence: A Framework for Community Action,* providing the first roadmap for youth violence prevention practitioners.

Compelled by the scale of the problem and the potential to develop a cutting-edge, research-based approach, The California Wellness Foundation, with help from injury control advocates and information from CDC violence prevention researchers, spent much of 1992 planning the Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI), a 10-year effort which was launched the following year. It would become the first and largest of 10 initiatives that the Foundation would sponsor over the next decade. The VPI represented a departure from traditional philanthropy: Violence prevention was still a relatively new area in public health, yet the Foundation was open to supporting some unconventional and innovative grantmaking concepts (such as fellowships for community-based activists and funding for public education and media). By committing significant funding and energy to a little-known and somewhat

1 California Department of Finance.

2 Source: 1995 State of Our Children Report Card, Children Now.

A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO VIOLENCE

The emergence of a public health approach to violence in the United States occurred in the 1970s along with a shift at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) toward greater recognition that many preventable injuries, rather than disease, were the leading cause of death for young Americans. This led the CDC to research factors and circumstances surrounding deaths caused by both unintentional injuries, such as drowning, and intentional injuries from violence. By studying violence and identifying the behavioral and environmental risk factors associated with it, many public health researchers came to believe appropriate prevention and intervention strategies could be developed that would reduce the likelihood that future violence would occur. The public health model, therefore, provided an alternative to the criminal justice system, which begins its work largely after a violent incident occurs.

"In the beginning, people didn't believe that violence was a public health problem and they didn't understand what that meant. And they certainly didn't know why the CDC would take precious resources from other public health problems and put them into violence prevention. People asked us, 'Isn't this a problem for the police?' These days, the idea that violence is a health problem is not as hard to sell, and the World Health Organization has embraced it and elevated it to a global level."

– Mark Rosenberg, M.D.
The Task Force for Child Survival and Development

The public health model includes efforts to modify individual behavior, but it emphasizes changing environmental factors. It has been successfully used to reduce injuries and deaths from a variety of causes, from car crashes to tobacco use. This approach also recognizes that public health problems such as violence are exceedingly complex, arising from a variety of social and economic factors. To achieve real success in reducing violence requires a multidisciplinary strategy such as the Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI), which brought together community leaders, researchers, advocates, educators, law enforcement representatives, and others to contribute expertise and build relationships with one another.

Throughout the 1980s, violence researchers worked to build understanding and acceptance of this new approach, which was a challenge even within the public health community. "A lot of our initial work involved describing the magnitude of the problem and showing how it ranked relative to other health problems," says CDC researcher Jim Mercy. Nationally, the VPI was the first major attempt to apply many of the theoretical concepts embodied in the CDC's public health framework for addressing violence.

Today, few need convincing that violence is a health problem. An expanding body of research has also provided important insights about the effectiveness of various prevention and intervention programs. Instead of focusing solely on risk factors for violence, researchers are now looking at "protective factors" against violence, such as having male role models for children. (The scientific base for such factors is still fairly limited). Unfortunately, credible violence prevention program evaluations are still rare and dissemination of research findings to community-level practitioners and policymakers isn't systematic. And because of the enormous variability among communities, no one size fits all, as The California Wellness Foundation found out from its experience with the VPI. "The hardest aspect of violence prevention research is trying to be science-based and work in communities with other paradigms that aren't necessarily in accordance with the public health approach," says Mercy.

controversial field, the Foundation was taking a risk that it knew might not produce corresponding results. But its leadership was optimistic that a comprehensive, sustained prevention approach could ultimately reduce youth violence in California and perhaps serve as a model in other communities and for other initiatives.

Foundation staff outlined a recommended structure for the VPI in late 1992: "As national and state public health officers struggle with this complex problem, the Foundation will provide to California a directed movement to address the issue in creative and substantive ways, through a policy/media program, a leadership program, a community action program, and a research program." Each of these four components they described was seen as indispensable in creating a comprehensive and integrated approach to the problem of youth violence. Without community-based leadership on the issue, it would be impossible to bring about local policy change and implement proven practices, no matter how much research existed to justify such actions; without advocacy to change environmental and systemic factors causing youth violence, the problem could be dismissed as particular to a local community or an individual and therefore not deserving of greater resources. The VPI was an attempt to move the violence prevention field forward and increase its effectiveness by learning more about what works and what doesn't. In addition to the four components, the Foundation funded an extensive evaluation to determine whether its funding for youth violence led to measurable outcomes.

The 10 years of the Violence Prevention Initiative are often described as two five-year phases. During the first phase, the Foundation provided grants within its four program areas, as well as for the evaluation. In the second phase, the Foundation made several changes to the Initiative, building on the experiences of the previous five years and a more sophisticated understanding of grantee needs.

Community Action Grants

"It was substantial to be able to say that we were part of a statewide initiative working on violence prevention. One of the things that was really unique was getting together regularly with other grantees. I can go anywhere in the state and find a program that's affiliated with the VPI. It's like having family all across the state of California."

– Kimberly Thomas, People Reaching Out

The Foundation's goals in providing community action grants were "to identify successful methods for delivering youth violence prevention interventions at the community level; to determine if multifaceted community programs can reduce rates of violent behavior, injury, and death associated with youth violence; and to build the capacity of local community agencies and organizations to intervene successfully in the youth violence problem."[3] The Foundation hoped that each CAP would lead a community empowerment process, bringing together a wide variety of stakeholders. Together, the CAPs would create a network contributing to advocacy at the state level. In the first five years of the Initiative, from 1993 to 1998, 18 community action programs (CAPs) were funded to develop these local collaboratives.[4] Each of the CAPs – which served at-risk youth in communities throughout the state[5] – received a $75,000 planning grant for the first year and $175,000 in operating funds each year thereafter. The VPI encouraged community grantees to create collaboratives that could bring the expertise of each community together (including schools, local government, parents, and youth), in order to develop efforts to reduce youth violence. By building local constituencies for youth violence prevention, grantees were thrust into both leadership and learning experiences. And by being exposed to statewide policy campaigns the capacity of these organizations to advocate for change in their local communities grew.

3 Source: VPI description. The California Wellness Foundation, December 1996.

4 Two of the CAPs withdrew from the VPI within the first couple of years, leaving 16 that stayed through the first phase.

5 The CAPs were located in San Diego, Escondido, Riverside, Pomona, Los Angeles, Inglewood, Stockton, Santa Cruz, San Francisco, Oakland, Richmond, Sacramento, and Point Arena.

Investing in Leadership

"Making change is not really about creating programs. You can't throw programs at problems – particularly complex problems, which require multifaceted solutions. The key is to create leaders who can continue to create change...The Foundation's definition of leadership went well beyond the usual suspects. They recognized the value of young people and people who had been working tirelessly at a grassroots level for many years, and in doing so they elevated people's skills and commitment. They created not just leaders, but a cadre of leaders, a sense of people working together to build a movement on violence prevention. "

– Larry Cohen, Executive Director, Prevention Institute

Recognizing that there were individuals in communities scattered throughout the state working to address local factors contributing to violence in their neighborhood, the Foundation incorporated a program into the VPI to encourage, to honor, and to provide funds to people "on the ground." Wellness also invested in young public health and medical professionals who could make the case for prevention in their respective disciplines. The goal of the VPI leadership development program, according to the Foundation, was to "build a critical mass of leaders willing and able to bring peace to their communities by instituting violence prevention programs and policies and mobilizing parents, youth, residents, and other members of their communities."[6]

This component included grants to individuals to acknowledge their contributions to violence prevention efforts at the community level. During its 10 years, the VPI honored a total of 71 community members with $50,000 fellowships (spread out over two years). The grantees were expected to use the funding to solidify or expand their activities; guide at least two youth whom they identified as having leadership potential; attend VPI events; and contribute their expertise to the Initiative. The VPI also funded 60 academic fellows by awarding $50,000 grants (also over two years) to public health and medical professionals and scholars to work on independent projects and to build knowledge in core competencies related to violence prevention. Academic fellows were based at six institutions: UC San Francisco/San Francisco General Hospital; California Department of Health Services; UCLA School of Public Health; UC San Diego Medical Center; the Division of Child Psychiatry and Child Development at Stanford Medical Center; and UC Davis/Highland Hospital. These grants provided opportunities for academic fellows to focus on violence within a prevention orientation early in their professional careers. In addition, over the decade, the VPI awarded 30 California Peace Prizes, which were unconditional, $25,000 awards for community leaders doing exceptional work in youth violence prevention. The Peace Prizes provided an opportunity to take the VPI's main message – that youth violence is preventable – to a broader audience by highlighting recipients' accomplishments through outreach to the media.

Building Potential for Policy Change

"We started with the belief that communication is a form of organizing and that organizing is a form of communication, and that there is a set of people whom we dub 'influentials.' Influentials either make policy, or influence people who make policy, or communicate to particular constituencies about policy. If you can identify those people and communicate effectively and strategically with them, you can change the public dialogue."

– Gina Glantz, SEIU, formerly with Martin & Glantz

Prior to the VPI, advocates in the youth violence field did not have a strong, statewide organization dedicated solely to promoting prevention policies. While some existing organizations focused on related issues such as the juvenile justice system or

6 Source: Memo, The California Wellness Foundation.

access to higher education, stopping youth violence was not at the center of their efforts. To ensure that VPI grantees would be adequately supported in their advocacy, the Foundation awarded a grant of $6.75 million for five years to the Trauma Foundation[7] to establish the Pacific Center for Violence Prevention. Although the Center was not the only organization awarded a policy grant within the Initiative, it was the grant intended to ensure that the VPI would work in a coordinated and strategic fashion with grantees and violence prevention professionals to advocate for the three VPI policy goals: a reduction of firearm injury and death among youth; an increase in state resources for youth violence prevention; and greater restrictions on youth access to alcohol.[8] During the first five years of the Initiative, the Pacific Center was to provide media and public policy training, as well as other technical assistance, to all VPI grantees. In addition, the Foundation awarded a grant of several million dollars to public affairs firm Martin & Glantz to develop education campaigns to increase public support for the VPI policy goals.

Research To Support Advocacy

"Research is really critical when you enter a new area and you don't have a proven, effective recipe. You're kind of building the boat as you sail it, and you're learning as you go. It's important to continue to learn as you go, to be able to improve what you're doing."

– Mark Rosenberg, M.D., The Task Force for Child Survival and Development

The VPI supported new prevention-oriented research to advance understanding of the causes of youth violence and to bolster the policy positions of its grantees. Emphasizing the public health focus on environmental conditions that contribute to violence, the VPI research program supported studies that would shed light on the role of community-level factors rather than individual factors that lead to youth violence.

In establishing the research component, the Foundation developed a list of four to six research objectives for each of its three policy goals and awarded grants of up to $450,000 over three years for research that might contribute to achieving these goals. The research objectives were then prioritized in terms of their importance. According to the Foundation, the top research objective related to firearms policy lay in determining the risk-benefit ratio for possession of a firearm and the variation of that ratio across communities and risk groups. For the resources for youth goal, the key objective was to determine factors that influence high-risk youth when they choose nonviolent behavior. And in relation to alcohol, the most important research objective was to determine the correlation between both the price of alcohol and its consumption and youth violence. Through these grants to researchers, the Foundation hoped to advance the state of youth violence prevention research to determine not only where VPI grantees should focus but also to provide direction for future work beyond the VPI. Seven research grants were approved by the board of directors at the VPI's launch, for research on topics ranging from the correlation between socioeconomic status, immigration status, ethnicity, and youth violence to legal research on existing alcohol policies in California.

Linking Grantees to One Another

"Whenever I came to a VPI event, I looked at the spirituality. The root word for spirituality is 'spirare,' to breathe. 'Conspire' means 'to breathe together.' And, in reality, we're really conspiring – the foundation was bringing all these people together to conspire for a positive end."

– Ray Gatchalian, Peace Activist

In order to foster the nascent youth violence prevention field, the Foundation provided opportunities for grantees to come together. By

7 The Trauma Foundation is an injury prevention advocacy organization based at San Francisco General Hospital.

8 The alcohol objective was eventually eliminated after policy grantees and the Foundation determined that there were not enough resources and time to make a significant effort towards all of the goals.

convening VPI grantees on a regular basis, the Foundation sought to help them build relationships, share knowledge, learnings, and experience, and join forces in tackling complex challenges they all faced. To accomplish this objective, each year the Foundation hosted a two-day conference for grantees to meet and attend workshops and presentations by and with other grantees. In many ways this annual conference established a tradition of collegial relations between such diverse practitioners as researchers, community activists, and policy advocates.

The conferences were spirited, intense, and informal, except for the dinner where Peace Prizes were awarded and keynote speakers such as U.S. Senator Bill Bradley, state Senator Jack Scott, and Bill Lockyer, attorney general of California, made presentations. In addition to the annual conference, program directors and youth from the CAPs came together at their own annual retreat, and there were also periodic retreats for community and academic fellows. The Foundation, the Pacific Center, and another grantee, the California Family Health Council, coordinated these events. In the aggregate, these convenings helped advance the youth violence prevention field as well as the work of the grantees themselves and added insight and valuable knowledge for the Foundation as it worked to maintain the VPI.

Evaluating and Strategizing in Two Phases

"We wanted the evaluation to play a variety of roles: to open the eyes of the foundation world to the opportunities and possibilities of tackling complex issues; to persuade policymakers from a variety of arenas to make sustained commitments; to look at the whole process of evaluation from a different perspective; and to learn from 'failures.'"

– Linda Wong,
Community Development Technologies Center

THE FOUNDATION BELIEVED in the value of assessing the impacts of particular prevention and intervention efforts. Hoping to show that a comprehensive set of programs could lead to greater acceptance and implementation of prevention strategies, the VPI included a $6 million grant for an extensive evaluation of each program component and an overarching assessment of the first five years of the Initiative. The Foundation expected that the largely quantitative evaluation would measure both processes and outcomes to determine to what extent the VPI had been instrumental in reducing youth violence through community- and state-level efforts and policies. The evaluation grant and corresponding responsibilities were initially divided among research teams from Johns Hopkins University, Stanford University, and RAND Corporation (though Johns Hopkins withdrew after two years with RAND assuming its responsibilities). The evaluation utilized a range of data collection methodologies, including student and community surveys, analysis of FBI crime data, and interviews with VPI grantees as well as external observers. Following that evaluation, the Foundation opted for a more qualitative examination of the VPI impacts in the second five years.[9]

A Changing Initiative

CHANGE WAS INEVITABLE as the first five years of the Initiative drew to a close and the Foundation recommitted itself to an unprecedented ten years of funding for the comprehensive Violence Prevention Initiative. But the experiences of the previous years prompted the Foundation to make some changes, reflecting learnings, new opportunities, and shifts at some grantee organizations. Realizing that many of the CAPs faced considerable organizational challenges that could hinder their long term sustainability, additional resources were allocated toward technical assistance tailored to the individual needs of each

10 In 2001, the Foundation awarded a new round of evaluation grants totaling about $1.5 million. Children's Hospital of Los Angeles evaluated the CAPs; Leadership Learning Community evaluated the leadership programs; Portland State University's School of Community Health evaluated the policy program; and Fern Tiger Associates was given a grant to write a history of the VPI.

agency. The number of CAPs awarded funding to complete the 10 years of the VPI was reduced from 16 organizations to nine; the remaining seven CAPS were awarded two-year "bridge grants."

Finally, a new area of grantmaking to community programs, Promising Practices, was added in 2000 to provide up to $225,000 over the remaining three years of the VPI to 12 community- and school-based organizations around the state. This decision recognized that over the years new programs and organizations had grown and evolved and that their work in violence prevention was also worthy of Foundation support. This extended the VPI's geographic presence and continued to build the capacity of the field. Although the Promising Practices grantees were not mandated to be active in VPI policy issues, they were expected to participate in VPI events and meetings.

"Foundations generally want you to put aside your politics before they fund you to do any work in youth violence prevention."

Community Fellow

The Foundation awarded a few other grants under the VPI umbrella, over the years, included $1 million for the National Funding Collaborative on Violence Prevention, a consortium of foundations exploring options for funding the field, and $300,000 to Mediascope, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit, to conduct outreach to entertainment industry professionals about portrayals of violence and to work with the industry to promote alternatives to violence in film, television, and other media.

The Foundation hoped these programs, individually and collectively, would begin to transform traditional attitudes about why youth become involved in violence and would put much needed momentum behind a preventive approach to the issue. Given California's size, diversity, and the number of other challenges the state faced throughout the 1990s, the Violence Prevention Initiative was never expected to completely turn the tide in favor of prevention. But in funding the VPI, the Foundation challenged California to take a fresh look at a worsening problem and, in doing so, it created the possibility that the status quo might be changed – that the norm of prisons as an investment to prevent violence would be reconsidered.

And although the VPI faced many challenges – some expected and some unanticipated – in retrospect it is clear that it produced tangible, long-lasting results for individuals, organizations, communities, and all of California.

MOVING THE NEEDLE

The VPI's Impact on Youth Violence Prevention in California

> "When we first considered an initiative, it was going to be funded at perhaps $2 million a year for three years. We realized violence prevention would require a longer period of time and more resources than that, so we were reluctant to recommend it to the board of directors. But once they looked at all the issues, they decided violence was a very important health issue. The decision was risky because we were a brand new foundation and no other funder had made violence prevention a high priority. And there were so many health issues that one could have focused on, such as HIV/AIDS or help for the uninsured. The other risk was that, although you needed to put a lot of funding into the issue to have any effect, you could do that and still not be able to demonstrate impacts."
>
> *Gary Yates, president and CEO, The California Wellness Foundation*

BY 1992, violent crime rates in the United States had been rising at an alarming rate for several years. Many blamed gangs, the drug trade and the war against it, the lack of economic opportunity in low-income communities, as well as a general deterioration of social relationships. Whatever the causes, one thing was clear: Guns were central to the increase in fatalities. More Californians died from gunshot wounds in 1992 than in car accidents, and about one-third of those being killed by guns were under the age of 18. But while some states took steps to decrease the ease with which firearms could flow into the hands of criminals, few policymakers saw prevention policies as the answer and relied instead on harsher penalties for violent offenders, particularly for youth offenders. The smattering of California researchers, practitioners, advocates, and others promoting prevention approaches to youth violence at the time could hardly be described as constituting a "field" or a "movement."

Community organizations working with youth had limited access to training or information about best practices for addressing the violence engulfing young people, and most researchers investigating its causes and risk factors were not sharing their findings with community-based audiences. The few who saw themselves as advocates for youth violence prevention had yet to organize a statewide constituency to push forward a policy agenda. And although some efforts to address youth violence were gaining momentum in local communities, most responses to the problem were being formulated by law enforcement. "Many felt that violence prevention wasn't possible, so it wasn't a legitimate issue for community activists to get involved in," says Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith, a Harvard professor and former Massachusetts Commissioner of Public Health.

The Violence Prevention Initiative, which directed close to $70 million to the issue of youth violence prevention, radically changed that picture. Using a public health paradigm, it encouraged and supported the development of a youth violence prevention field and identified youth violence as an urgent health threat that could be addressed by

using data first to determine underlying causes and then to design appropriate prevention and intervention programs. In preparation for launching the VPI, The California Wellness Foundation identified four key areas for investment – research, policy, leadership development, and community-based programs – and linked them within a comprehensive effort that not only strengthened each component but led to synergies that would not otherwise have been possible. In funding the VPI, Wellness brought new focus to the issue and created the potential for a comprehensive, multidisciplinary, multi-ethnic youth violence prevention constituency to emerge. The Foundation's 10-year commitment enabled these stakeholders to coalesce around key organizing principles and begin articulating youth violence prevention strategies for California.

"Twenty years ago the words 'violence' and 'prevention' were rarely, if ever, used in the same sentence. We've learned so much since then."

CDC Researcher

By directing such significant resources toward youth violence prevention in California, the Foundation generated a great deal of optimism about what the VPI would accomplish. And by many accounts, grantees made important gains, both in the policy arena and in increasing their individual and collective capacity to develop partnerships with local institutions for the benefit of youth. The first six years of the VPI saw especially significant progress, as community organizations developed new programs and partnerships, as policy advocates focused on a common agenda around firearms, and as research findings expanded the knowledge base about community-level factors contributing to youth violence.

But the final years of the VPI were more challenging – not only for grantees but for the VPI's policy efforts as well. The drive to increase state funding for youth violence prevention was a less "sexy" issue than the gun control policies that had been the focus of the early years. Few legislators were willing to push for reallocating resources to prevention, though without these resources, programs would close, partnerships would end, and more youth would become victims of violence. Although some legislators made encouraging moves – such as increasing support for after-school programs – when it came to youth offenders, retribution continued to characterize California's policy response, with voters passing a draconian youth sentencing law, Proposition 21, in 2000. Given this climate, coupled with a worsening economy, the VPI's efforts to increase public funding for youth violence prevention struggled to gain traction.

Thus, despite early successes, it was inevitable that the Initiative – a first-ever effort to address youth violence in a comprehensive way – would produce a certain amount of disappointment in what it *didn't* accomplish. In 2003, as the VPI concludes 10 years of significant and sustained funding, it is easy to point out missed opportunities; what is important, however, is to recognize the ways that youth violence prevention has been strengthened because the Foundation undertook the Violence Prevention Initative.

Youth Violence Prevention: A Lonely Frontier in 1992

ALTHOUGH THE NOTION of the youth "superpredator" didn't make it to the cover of *Newsweek* for another four years, in 1992, there was a widespread perception that youth were responsible for a disproportionate share of violent crimes. To some extent, those perceptions were well-founded: Nationally, juvenile arrests for violent offenses rose by about 70 percent between 1983 and 1993.[1] Youth were increasingly likely to be victims of violence, as well: Between 1987 and

1 Juvenile arrests for violent felonies (homicide, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) in California peaked in 1994, falling every consecutive year thereafter until 2001. The largest year-to-year increases occurred in the late 1980s: for example, from 1988 to 1989, juvenile arrests for violent felonies shot up 25%. (California Department of Justice).

1992, the rate of handgun crimes against youth 16-19 years old was three times higher than the national average.[2] Most significantly for a California-focused funder interested in addressing underlying social issues, the state's "gang problem" and the associated violence had escalated in some communities to an arms race between police departments (spurred by a frightened electorate) and disaffected youth. In April 1992, South Central Los Angeles erupted in frustration and civil unrest as a result of the Rodney King trial verdict, reminding the rest of America that racial and class tensions were seething underneath the country's supposed social order. People of color were then (and continue to be) disproportionately represented among those arrested for violent crimes, exacerbating ethnic and racial divisions over how to appropriately respond. Adding to the fears about youth violence was the increasing availability of guns and the resulting rise in the number of young people being injured and killed. But in their frustration over violence, lawmakers and the general public largely overlooked preventive measures as solutions and focused instead on increasing penalties for those youth involved in violent crime.

Notwithstanding the attitudes of the general public and policymakers, there had been a minor revolution in the way the public health and medical fields viewed violence beginning in the late 1970s. At the time, an understanding began to emerge that violence as a health problem was not being adequately addressed with law enforcement measures. Within the medical community, emergency room physicians knew well that an increasing number of their E.R. patients were victims of violence, particularly gun violence, and that as physicians they were playing an end role in an unnecessary chain of events. In 1983, the Centers for Disease Control established a Violence Epidemiology Branch with a handful of researchers and a budget of less than $200,000. Dr. Mark Rosenberg, branch director at the time, recalls that few in the public health field understood the relationship of violence to community health. "The Violence Epidemiology Branch was located in the sub-sub-basement of a CDC building," Rosenberg recalls. "My office was a converted bathroom." But interest in this new approach was growing, and in 1985, Rosenberg and his colleagues worked with Surgeon General Dr. C. Everett Koop to convene a conference on violence as a health threat. Seven years later, the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* devoted an entire issue to violence, highlighting the role of guns and drugs in the violence "epidemic," and in 1993, the CDC created the Division of Violence Prevention within the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. At Harvard, Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith was publishing extensively on the impacts of violence on youth and ways to both decrease the violence and minimize its effects.

In a few California counties including Los Angeles and Contra Costa, public health departments were at the center of innovative efforts to develop violence prevention coalitions. Independent of institutional support, many community-based organizations had incorporated violence prevention and intervention into their youth services, seeking funding where they could. "We started a small project with $30,000 from the state Office of Criminal Justice Planning to work mainly in one neighborhood in Sacramento," recalls Anita Barnes, executive director of La Familia Counseling Center (which would later become a VPI grantee). "The grant was for working with kids who were on probation and with at-risk families. The state money lasted only three years, but after that we were able to get funding from the County of Sacramento Probation Department." Research on violence was also a low priority for government and private funders. "Funding for violence prevention research was very limited: it only came from the CDC," recalls Professor Susan Sorenson, who directs the Violence Prevention Research Group at the UCLA School of Public Health and became a VPI grantee. "There were other government agencies that could potentially have provided funding, but they didn't think in that way. And foundations go through cycles of what they think is important, but violence wasn't important to them at the time."

The California Wellness Foundation, which had been established in 1992 with the mission of

2 *Guns and Crime: Handgun Victimization, Firearm Self-Defense, and Firearm Theft.* U.S. Department of Justice, Crime Data Brief, 1994.

A COMMUNITY LEADER GROWS IN WATTS

To the outsider, it's often difficult to tell one block from another in the South Central Los Angeles neighborhood of Watts. But those who live there, according to Arturo Ybarra, executive director of the Watts Century Latino Organization, know how different each block is when it comes to their own safety. And too often, that depends on skin color.

"The community fellowship I received from the Foundation meant a lot to our organization because we were then able to survey African American and Latino adults living in five housing projects in South Central L.A. to find out about relations between the two communities. As a result, we have a better understanding of the perspectives of both communities, not only in terms of the challenges but also in terms of opportunities for developing better relations between them."

– Arturo Ybarra executive director, Watts Century Latino Organization

Like many other low-income neighborhoods, the racial composition of Watts has changed drastically in recent decades. Long perceived as an African American neighborhood, Watts is now more than 60 percent Latino. As Latinos became the majority, racial tensions were heightend. Ybarra recalls that when he moved to Watts in the late 1980s, inter-ethnic violence was a huge problem that played out everywhere: on the streets, in the schools, and in the enormous housing projects that ring the neighborhood.

Ybarra began organizing in his community because no one represented Latinos from Watts in dealing with city government agencies. "The Community Redevelopment Agency would hold public meetings, and of the 250 people there, only 10 or 15 would be Latino," recalls Ybarra. He worked with the CRA to provide fliers in Spanish, and at the next hearing, more than 200 Latinos showed up. Once Ybarra and others formed the Watts Century Latino Organization in 1990, "it quickly became clear that to survive as an organization, we had to build communication links between the Latino and African American communities," Ybarra says. The next year, Watts Century Latino Organization joined some African American organizations in sponsoring the first Latino/African American Cinco de Mayo festival.

Developing Watts Century Latino Organization was a part-time activity for Ybarra until he became a Wellness Foundation Violence Prevention Initiative community fellow in 1994. Of the $50,000 he received from the two-year fellowship, Ybarra says he dedicated $38,000 to activities related to his fellowship and to his organization and used $12,000 so that he could devote himself solely to his work there. "He did a really good job forging peace between Latinos and African Americans and at the same time trying to build the first free-standing, community-based group that could engage Latinos in Watts," says Rubén Lizardo, a member of the board of directors. In addition to purchasing computers for the organization, Ybarra developed youth leadership projects. One of those projects involved working with youth to conduct a survey of inter-ethnic relations and physical conditions in local schools.

Like many of the people it serves, Watts Century Latino Organization continues to struggle against what seem like overwhelming odds. Ybarra, however, isn't wavering in his quest to make Watts a safer and more economically viable place for all ethnic groups. "Both the Latino and African American communities have historically been victims of discrimination, and that unites us," Ybarra says.

improving the health and well-being of Californians,[3] was in the process of shaping its own strategies for grantmaking. The Foundation's leadership decided to use its resources to fund a series of five major initiatives and facilitated focus groups with public health practitioners, community leaders, and others across the state to find out what they thought individually and collectively were the most pressing health problems. Subsequently, the Foundation asked health experts to develop background papers on the five most salient issues – one of which was violence – that had surfaced in the discussions and to include some recommendations for a grantmaking program in each of the topic areas. For the paper on violence, the Foundation sought advice from three Bay Area injury prevention advocates: Andrew McGuire and Elizabeth McLoughlin of the Trauma Foundation and Larry Cohen, who was then director of the Contra Costa County Prevention Program. The three developed a compelling proposal, but the amount of money being considered for the first initiative – $2 to $3 million per year for five years – didn't seem adequate to address a violence problem of such magnitude. Instead, Foundation staff recommended to the board of directors that they tackle another issue.

"The issue of youth violence exposes all the fault lines of America. It addresses race and income; inequality and poverty; which young people have a future and which don't. It's volatile."

Violence Researcher

But, after a lengthy discussion, the board decided to make violence the focus of the Foundation's first initiative and to increase the program budget, directing staff to come up with a plan for its next meeting. This decision was "incredible," says Jim Mercy, a violence researcher at the CDC. "It was a great opportunity. We were laboring to get violence prevention on the map, and the idea that a foundation would take it on was very gratifying."

Given the composition of the Foundation's original board, it is not surprising to learn that its members were open to exploring a relatively new approach to a major health problem. Several board members, including Jonathan Fielding, Ken Kizer, and Sheldon Margen, were prominent in public health circles. "Violence was one of the more serious problems in California and it was not getting a lot of attention in terms of dealing with the underlying determinants of violence, including the social environment that breeds it and the economic environment that sustains it," says Fielding, Los Angeles County public health officer. "I was very supportive because I think the role of foundations is to say, 'How can we address this issue using the best knowledge, developing new knowledge, trying new things, and even being willing to fail at some?' We realized that this was a big problem, but even by moving the needle a little bit you can make a big difference." Fielding and several other board members were also particularly interested in "pushing the policy envelope," says Gary Yates, then a program officer at the Foundation, by addressing the role that firearms, and particularly illegal firearms, contribute to making violence a problem of epidemic proportion. Also influencing the board's decision to focus on violence was a 1992 publication by the CDC, *The Prevention of Youth Violence: A Framework for Community Action*. Using the principles that guide community health promotion efforts, the framework emphasized the role of community-based programs in violence prevention efforts and described some of the other components of a comprehensive strategy, including legislative and regulatory changes to policies on guns and alcohol.

But board approval of the VPI structure wasn't immediate. The proposed structure went through several iterations before settling on four basic components: community empowerment, leadership development, research, and policy development. The VPI's stated goal was to "increase the public's understanding of systemic violence as modifiable and

3 The California Wellness Foundation was created in 1992 as the result of a conversion of the Health Net HMO from nonprofit to for-profit status. The new Foundation received the equivalent of Health Net's valuation at the time, about $300 million, plus equity in Health Net's parent company. The Foundation was created as an independent foundation without ties to either Health Net or its parent company. In 2002, the Foundation had total assets of about $1 billion.

individual violence as preventable, thereby increasing the public's support for strategies and policies that could interrupt the increasing cycle of violence in California."[4] To get feedback on its proposal, Wellness convened a group of about 40 people at the Ritz-Carlton in Marina del Rey, an upscale beach community near Los Angeles. Often viewed as the precursor to the advisory committee that would be formed once the Initiative got underway, this initial group included several academics and public health professionals. But it also included community activists, policy advocates, youth, law enforcement officials, health care providers, and even gang members.

"People were putting their cards on the table, and there was very little professional posturing because the stakes were so high at that time – so many people were being murdered," says Susan Sorenson. Attendees recall heated discussions, starting with the irony of debating youth violence while esconced in a conference room at a four-star hotel. "The gang members were asking why we were meeting in this fancy hotel," recalls Beverly Coleman-Miller, a violence prevention advocate based in Washington, D.C., who participated in the discussion. "It was like a clash of cultures." In fact, the recollection of most of those at the meeting was that tensions were high, especially between gang members, police, and academics who were on equal footing – perhaps for the first time. Issues that incited great debate included whether data and analysis gathered by researchers was really "objective" and why that would be preferable to the documentation of community members' personal experiences with violence, as well as what law enforcement's role in addressing youth violence should be.

But the meeting was extremely valuable, at least from the Foundation's perspective, not only because of the feedback it produced but also because it provided the first sense of how powerful it could be for people with different viewpoints on an issue to work together on strategy. This was a style the Foundation would continue throughout the Initiative. Despite some hesitation, there was general agreement among the group assembled in Marina del Rey that the VPI was a step in the right direction. And in the end, the group strongly recommended that the Foundation commit at least 10 years of funding to the VPI (some felt 20 years would be more effective) and that grants be awarded for at least five years with the possibility of renewal for another five.

After two more months of work on the design of the components, Wellness' board of directors approved the Violence Prevention Initiative at $24 million for five years (the addition of funding for the evaluation brought the Foundation's allocation closer to $30 million).[5] A recommitment from the Foundation in 1998 would bring Wellness' funding for violence prevention to about $70 million over the 10-year period. From an initially vague "grassroots and policy" focus, Wellness refined and added detail to the Initiative structure, shaping an intricate link between public education, policy, and research. In the minds of most who had contributed to the architecture of the VPI, all of the components would interact with and support one another in a way unprecedented in the fledgling youth violence prevention field.

The policy program grant, which called for the establishment of the Pacific Center for Violence Prevention, was awarded to the Trauma Foundation. The Pacific Center's mission was to design strategies and coordinate grantees' progress toward the three policy goals of the VPI, which had been embraced by the Foundation's board from the start:

- increased restrictions on handgun purchasing and elimination of state preemption of local ordinances;
- a shift in society's definition of how to address youth violence from criminal justice approaches, such as harsher sentencing, to prevention approaches; and
- the reduction of alcohol consumption that contributes to youth violence.[6]

The VPI's local empowerment component included

4 Violence Prevention Initiative description, The California Wellness Foundation.

5 The funding from seven co-funding partners brought the VPI's actual total for the first five years to about $35 million.

6 The alcohol objective was eventually dropped because there were not enough resources or time to make headway on all three.

the funding of 10 community action programs (though that number was later expanded to 18 through collaborative funding arrangements with other foundations). These "CAPs," as they came to be called, explored the potential for decreasing youth violence through health promotion programs and attempted to influence local policy and play a role in statewide advocacy efforts.

The leadership component provided:

- 10 fellowships per year for community leaders throughout California who were already working to reduce youth violence and would be responsible for mentoring at least two youths. These awards were sometimes referred to as "street MacArthurs";
- Academic fellowships for "injury control specialists" pursuing advanced degrees in public health and medicine; and
- Three Peace Prizes per year, providing no-strings-attached awards to California's youth violence prevention leaders.

The research component supported scientifically driven work that could inform the VPI's efforts toward the three policy goals, including research on the impact of the firearms and alcohol industries on youth violence. An adjunct effort to influence the portrayal of violence in commercial entertainment and in the news media was also funded through grants to Mediascope, a Los Angeles-based organization with close ties to the entertainment industry, and Berkeley Media Studies Group, a media advocacy organization.

Within each program, the Violence Prevention Initiative emphasized innovative strategies that the Foundation believed would bring energy and cohesion to its goals in youth violence prevention. Grants to the CAPs and community fellows represented an attempt to build grassroots, local capacity in youth violence prevention and, with the inclusion of local collaboration as a central objective of the work of the CAPs, the multidisciplinary nature of the VPI was being replicated at numerous levels. The Peace Prize provided an opportunity both to reward those already working to reduce violence and to raise the visibility of youth violence prevention. The research program encouraged academics to investigate community-level risk factors, a particularly underfunded area in health research. The policy component was supported by a statewide public education campaign using polling and data. The Initiative included technical assistance in media advocacy for all grantees. Finally, the VPI hosted a unique and spirited gathering of all grantees, the annual conference, which was a forum where grantees could share knowledge and experiences among themselves, with the Wellness Foundation, and with other funders. This became the first large-scale, regularly scheduled, foundation-convened forum dedicated solely to youth violence prevention in the nation. But more importantly, the conference was the place where advocates, activists, funders, youth, researchers, and others could feel acknowledged and supported, and where both accomplishments and challenges could be discussed openly.

"The public health approach involves different sectors working together, from medicine to education to criminal justice, labor, child development, and social services. It's science- and evidence-based and research is developed along the way and incorporated into programs. It focuses on prevention."

Public Health Advocate

Defining the Youth Violence Prevention Field

THE VIOLENCE PREVENTION INITIATIVE moved from an idea to a robust, comprehensive initiative in the space of just a few months. The Foundation approved the allocation of funding in October 1992 and by September 1993, $12 million had been disbursed to grantees. But designing the Initiative on paper – although a major feat in such a short time – was nothing when compared to what was required to implement its

concepts. Every aspect of it was challenging. As the staff was planning the VPI, the Foundation itself was still developing its own internal systems, including a database of all of the health-related organizations in California, from Crescent City to San Ysidro and Monterey to South Lake Tahoe. In addition, because youth violence wasn't defined as a *traditional* health issue, when the Foundation wanted to distribute information about the VPI it needed to throw out a wide net in order to capture all entities with a connection to youth violence prevention, including churches, schools, Boys & Girls Clubs, and others. Seemingly simple tasks like compiling a list of churches statewide were a huge challenge, recalls Crystal Hayling, the VPI program officer in 1992. "We weren't just trying to reach the large, well-established churches," she says. "But even within the more established faiths, like Baptists, there were so many different branches that it was mind-boggling."

Finding the right recipients for RFPs within public agencies presented another kind of challenge, because the Foundation wanted information about the VPI to reach teachers, counselors, and others who were either involved in or wanted to collaborate on youth violence prevention. "We could get our information to the Los Angeles Unified School District," says Hayling, "but how do you get it to the people within the District who were in there doing interesting work on this issue?" Foundation staff also took the RFP on the road, meeting with almost 900 people in six regional presentations where potential grantees could get more information about the kinds of proposals the Foundation was seeking.

This process provided an opportunity for many who had been working on youth violence to see for the first time what a comprehensive approach to youth violence prevention might look like. Rubén Lizardo, a 1999 Peace Prize recipient, was organizing school-based groups to bridge inter-ethnic differences in Los Angeles when the RFP was released. He remembers being amazed that Wellness wanted to address systemic issues. The VPI reflected what Lizardo and his fellow community activists had been advocating "but with a different flavor," he recalls. "The RFP said you had to be able to bring together multiple stakeholders and youth had to be at the center. Most of us were shocked and only halfway believed that this foundation was saying it really wanted to get at the systemic underpinnings of youth violence. It was the first time we felt we could be honest about our strategies – the community organizing and community transformation – that would be needed to end youth violence."

In addition to drawing the attention of those who considered themselves part of the fledgling youth violence prevention field, the VPI invited people and organizations who had not previously been involved in youth violence prevention. María Alaniz, a researcher at Prevention Research Center in Berkeley, had been studying individual alcohol consumption patterns in Latino communities and was becoming interested in the influence of environmental factors on alcohol consumption. But it was difficult to obtain funding for research on ethnic communities, violence, and alcohol outlets, Alaniz recalls, so she and her colleague Rob Parker, a criminologist, put their plans on hold. When the VPI research program was launched, Alaniz jumped at the opportunity to focus on violence. "Violence is one of the major alcohol-related problems that we had identified," she says. "Finally, here was a foundation that saw the real issues and was willing to fund research to find out more about them." Alaniz's research on the links between the prevalence of liquor stores and violence in Latino neighborhoods later helped bolster community-based efforts to restrict the number of alcohol outlets and to limit alcohol consumption at Cinco de Mayo celebrations in many California communities.

Discussion of the RFP process itself provided a framework for people from various disciplines to coalesce around key issues in youth violence. Ironically, just as Wellness made the largest funding commitment to violence prevention in California's history, state policymakers were laying the groundwork for a series of measures emphasizing harsher penalties for criminal activities, including those committed by youth. Although at the national level, President Clinton was touting youth programs like midnight basketball within his 1994 crime bill, when it came to youth violence, most lawmakers looked to criminal justice and law enforcement for

answers. One year after grantees had submitted their proposals and well before any impacts of the VPI could be felt, Governor Pete Wilson called a special session of the legislature which culminated in the passage of the Three Strikes law[7] and a bill that lowered the age from 16 to 14 at which youth can be tried as adults for certain crimes. In 1994, the California Youth Authority's $400 million budget (not including juvenile justice spending by the state's 58 counties) dwarfed the several million dollars spent on youth crime prevention programs.

The tasks ahead – helping lawmakers shift from incarceration to prevention and promoting strategies to ensure youth had alternatives to violence – were daunting. "There is a whole profit-oriented industry related to violence that looks at the end result and says, 'let's just lock people up,'" notes Larry Cohen. "But prevention is really hard to grasp and explaining how to do it without seeming like you're sympathetic to people who are hurting you is very difficult."

"The VPI built the notion that on a very hard issue – violence – it's possible to create a movement and that change is possible. But we've got a lot more work to do."

VPI Advisory Committee

Before the VPI could begin to try to change the minds of the public and policymakers about youth violence, the grantees would need to find their own common ground. The umbrella of the Violence Prevention Initiative created the potential for grantees to connect with and learn from one another. But there were significant challenges to bringing together people from a wide range of disciplines, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, and geographies to focus on youth violence prevention. While the VPI was a welcome change from the law enforcement perspective on youth violence, the public health language used by Wellness was new to many VPI grantees, especially those who were community-based grantees. Terms like "host" and "agent," while appropriate for describing the spread of a disease like malaria, were strange and even objectionable to some when talking about people or patterns of youth violence.

"The public health model was limited in terms of scope and language, and a lot of people from law enforcement and education and other sectors were not in tune with that language," says Rubén Gonzales of New York's Valley Inc. And the VPI evaluation, which brought in researchers from elite universities and institutions to assess the impacts of the four components on reducing youth violence in the state, also introduced new concepts, such as asking the CAPs to differentiate between "process" and "outcome" objectives. Community activists, policy grantees, and researchers had different interpretations of terms being used by the Foundation, with phrases such as community empowerment, media advocacy, and multi-sector collaboration meaning different things to different people.

Nevertheless, the VPI provided the first exposure for many grantees, particularly those living and working in communities deeply affected by violence, to new ways to express their needs. Bernardo Rosa of Pomona's Community Wellness Partnership, one of the CAP grantees, says his ability to describe his work improved as a result of his involvement with the VPI. "Ten years ago, I didn't have half the language that I have today to describe what Community Wellness Partnership does," he says. "You would have heard me use only the grassroots terms, which I'm still very attached to, but I didn't have the ability to articulate what it means to do youth violence prevention work."

There was obviously far more that united grantees than separated them, although some say at the onset one might not have known that. "People came from different backgrounds, and they had never been in a room together before," says Susan Sorenson. "It was incredibly diverse, not just in terms of ethnicity, but in terms of opinions and belief systems and agendas." Finding a common language wasn't always possible, yet the annual conference was for many a safe place to learn from

7 California's Three Strikes law is considered one of the broadest and toughest in the country, because the third "strike" does not have to be a violent felony.

COMPLETING THE CIRCLE: THE YOUTH CAUCUS

Community empowerment, media advocacy, collaboration – these concepts were all essential to the VPI, but what about young people themselves? In the request for proposals for the community action program (CAP) grants, the Foundation outlined its vision for youth participation. "Young people and community residents must play an active role in a collaborative planning and decisionmaking process," it said. But within the Initiative structure itself, youth struggled to find a space where they could exercise leadership. Through persistent hard work and support from the Pacific Center for Violence Prevention, a core group of youth eventually succeeded in carving out that space for themselves: the Youth Caucus.

"It was initially a struggle for the youth to be able to be active at the annual conference, but they learned to demand what they wanted."

– Ray Gatchalian
Retired, Oakland Fire Department;
Peace Activist

Although the Foundation hoped that the VPI funding would support the emergence of youth leaders in the CAP communities, it was less sure about how to incorporate youth perspectives into the VPI itself. "At the first annual conference, there were a number of youth who wanted to speak and they felt they weren't being given a chance," says Ray Gatchalian. For several years after that, a core group of young people who met informally at the conference complained that the conference didn't offer any way for them to contribute to the Initiative or to develop leadership skills. "We were pushing for youth involvement in conference planning and deciding what policies we wanted to work on," recalls Carlos Morales.

Morales, a project director at the Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women (LACAAW), one of the CAP grantees, exemplifies the kind of leadership so sorely needed in the youth violence prevention field. He started out as a participant in a LACAAW workshop, began volunteering for the agency while still in high school, and was hired there as soon he graduated. He and several other young people who were "growing up within the VPI," including Adina Medina at La Familia Counseling Center and Henry Adame of Californians for Drug-Free Youth, formed the Youth Caucus in 1998 seeking to create a statewide youth network. While it never became a formal part of the VPI, the Youth Caucus worked closely with Andrés Soto at the Pacific Center to advocate for the VPI policy goals, including providing advice to the Attorney General's office on its Safe from the Start initiative. "What was important about the Youth Caucus was that we were bringing together youth from all over the state to develop skills and get ourselves ready for where are now," says Morales.

Among youth violence prevention practitioners, there are mixed feelings about how and when it is best to incorporate youth into decisionmaking processes. Some, like Deane Calhoun of Youth Alive in Oakland, say training is essential to enable youth to articulate their experiences and that successful programs must include substantial adult support to avoid having a "youth voice for the sake of a youth voice." But others, like Bernardo Rosa of Community Wellness Partnership in Pomona, feel that young people should take the lead on issues that affect them. Rosa says he tries to take a hands-off approach to youth development: Although he believes that the Youth Caucus members would have become leaders within their organizations anyway, it seems evident that the VPI was a unique context for youth to work together on statewide issues. "Young people were taking it to the next level," says Morales.

one another and also to have a good time among peers. It provided an atmosphere where all were focused on youth violence prevention and, after coming together year after year, the grantees began to develop what looked like a field. In that sense, the Violence Prevention Initiative was not just a foundation-driven grant-making structure; it built a space where grantees could find spiritual nurturing, solidarity, and strong support for their work. "The annual conferences were like a support group, because the type of work we do is so emotionally and physically draining," says Michael Rubio of Youth Radio, a Berkeley-based youth development organization that trained CAP youth in media advocacy. Rubio also appreciated being able to meet with people who shared a common understanding of the issues. "At the annual VPI conference, you didn't have to deal with the racism and ignorance you find in other places."

The tone of each annual conference was set by Ray Gatchalian, an Oakland fire captain and peace activist who led the opening ceremony. He encouraged the Foundation to acknowledge the spiritual basis for grantees' commitment to youth violence prevention. Gatchalian's poetry and style grounded those in attendance in the knowledge that their work was part of a global, multi-cultural struggle for social justice, including the right of youth to grow and thrive in a violence-free society. "The Foundation brought compassion to a situation where there was a lot of lip service," said Gatchalian. "If you can show another way of being in the world, and say there are other things to do with your pain, you can bring hope to young people who are suffering."

The VPI also convened smaller grantee meetings in between the annual conferences. The CAPs had a yearly retreat where they could discuss issues of mutual interest and concern while working on organizational development issues. And although Wellness was not directly involved, there were monthly meetings of VPI policy grantees and other statewide gun control groups to develop strategies for key legislation. The academic fellows, coordinated by the Pacific Center, also met monthly to share their work and focus on acquiring a number of core competencies related to violence prevention.

On a concrete level, the VPI exposed grantees to one another and to the idea that they were part of a larger movement. Prior to the monthly firearms strategy meetings, communication among the state's gun safety advocacy groups was rare, according to Barrie Becker, former executive director of Legal Community Against Violence, a VPI grantee. Once they were all on the same page, it was easier to align strategies and the messages to legislators became more consistent. "The meetings were quite effective," Becker recalls. "Our projects were very complementary so there was a lot of good synergy." For Anita Barnes of La Familia, the VPI was the first opportunity to feel a part of something bigger than the work her agency was doing in Sacramento. Like most of the CAPs, La Familia had not been involved in legislative work before. "We felt supported," Barnes says. "It's great when you can say you are part of a statewide movement."

Not surprisingly, most grantees say the relationship-building occurred primarily within the individual VPI components rather than across components, with researchers, policy advocates, academic fellows, and community grantees keeping some distance from one another. But, the instances of cross-sector collaboration that did occur helped to create a larger violence prevention constituency, as was the case with the CAPs' organizing around the policy objectives and María Alaniz's work with community groups on promoting alcohol-free Cinco de Mayo celebrations.

The challenge of multidisciplinary collaboration within the VPI reflected the difficulty many of the CAPs had in their own communities as they attempted to develop working relationships with schools, city and county agencies, and other local institutions. The Foundation chose not to provide a model or a roadmap for the kinds of community collaboratives it might have hoped would develop. Each CAP went about building collaboratives in its own way. Some organizations developed formal coalitions, as in the case of La Familia, which put together an advisory group made up of local officials and other community representatives who still meet monthly. Others, like Stockton Boys and Girls Club, were less formal about meeting but were adept at bringing groups together at critical moments. Some

CAPs were successful in achieving very specific goals, as in Pomona where Community Wellness Partnership worked with local elected officials, community advocates, and other institutions to secure a citywide ban on the sale and manufacture of cheaply made Saturday Night Specials, or junk guns, and a ban on gun shows at the Los Angeles County Fairgrounds. Escondido Youth Encounter (EYE) got buy-in from community members and even the mayor, for a community-based approach to youth violence, and the collaboration even outlived the CAP, according to Frank Acosta, VPI program officer from 1995 to 2001.

In some communities, cultural norms made traditional collaboration difficult. Sacramento-based Asian Resources served a largely Southeast Asian immigrant community and found that the language barrier was just one of the problems it faced in getting parents to participate in collaborative efforts. "We couldn't set up an advisory board made up of parents," says May Lee, executive director of Asian Resources. "That might have been a model you could apply to people who are used to going to PTA and town hall meetings, but there were many other things that needed to fall into place before we could do that." Racial tensions were another factor in collaborative success: Neighborhood House of North Richmond encountered difficulty in bridging the divide between Latinos and African Americans in its community, causing its coalition to falter. Despite the challenges of forming and maintaining the local collaboratives, the CAPs overall became much more savvy about partnering in their communities to create a common voice for policies affecting youth.

"The VPI was a case study of what sustained, enlightened, and engaged efforts could do to really change the landscape of violence prevention."

Government Researcher

Finding Common Cause

THE PHILOSOPHICAL DIFFERENCES that existed among grantees became most apparent on questions of legislative advocacy. Although they were eventually able to come together around some specific issues, getting there wasn't easy. In the early years of the Initiative, grantees displayed strong disagreement about the role of poverty, racism, and other factors in youth violence. Some CAP representatives felt that gun control was not the most important policy issue and were concerned that increased gun regulations could disarm residents and leave them vulnerable to heavy-handed police tactics. "The CAPs were saying that in their communities, what they really needed was to create jobs, deal with the drug problem, and provide educational and family support," says Frank Acosta. While the Pacific Center for Violence Prevention supported those goals, its leaders felt that the VPI needed to be strategic in prioritizing policy goals, which meant focusing on "winnable" issues, like banning Saturday Night Specials. By building a record of victories, the Pacific Center hoped to create a community power base that would enable youth violence prevention advocates to change state policy. Then, it was believed, they could tackle more fundamental imbalances in the social and economic conditions contributing to violence. "Banning Saturday Night Specials *in and of itself* was never the goal," Andrew McGuire says. "It was simply one of the things that could be done that would build political strength for the Initiative." In response to the CAPs' concerns, however, and recognizing that community-based organizations know their constituencies best, the Foundation made participation in VPI-sponsored policy activities voluntary.

Because the CAPs were not evaluated on their participation in state policy activities, many of those working at the grassroots level were involved with state policy efforts only intermittently. "The Foundation set up these policy objectives, and then they said we didn't have to work on them, that we could do whatever we wanted. That laid the ground for confusion," says Bernardo Rosa. Without a mandate from the funder, each CAP went its own way. While some organizations ignored the policy

objectives altogether, most made attempts to work on the issues locally and still others became actively involved in working toward the VPI objectives. The more active CAPs contributed to a significant accomplishment: widespread passage of some of the most restrictive gun laws in the nation at the local and state levels, which many believe has been partly responsible for the decrease in gun violence against youth over the past 10 years.

In the CAP communities and beyond, local governments began to demonstrate that the state could no longer preempt local gun laws. Although the National Rifle Association had fought hard to maintain the myth of state preemption, in 1995 California's gun control advocates, most notably Legal Community Against Violence (LCAV) and the Pacific Center for Violence Prevention – both VPI grantees – seized the opportunity to bring the message about state preemption to local government. Eric Gorovitz, a lawyer working with both LCAV and the Pacific Center, says the VPI "created the table for people to gather around" and coordinate their strategies. CAP grantees such as Community Wellness Partnership and La Familia bolstered the VPI policy grantees' efforts in communities by providing the local voice needed to convince city council members, county supervisors, and others to pass the ordinances. The VPI's messages about the effect of guns were heard in the city of West Hollywood, which passed the first ban on the sale of junk guns in 1995, setting off a domino effect that would lead to ordinances in more than 300 California cities and counties – all regulating gun sales, licensing, and manufacturing.

In addition to developing legal strategies, VPI grantees were highlighting new information and packaging it in ways that caught the attention of both the public and policymakers. In 1995, VPI research grantee Dr. Garen Wintemute of U.C. Davis published a monograph, *Ring of Fire*, highlighting the disproportionate role of cheap junk guns in violent crime. As Wintemute pointed out, it wasn't merely a coincidence that the largest manufacturers of junk guns were all located in a "ring" around Los Angeles' most violent neighborhoods where they could be easily obtained by youth and adults alike.

The VPI's multi-million dollar public education campaign, produced by Bay Area-based public affairs firm Martin & Glantz was instrumental in amplifying the messages of the policy agenda. The "Prevent Handgun Violence Against Kids" campaign included bold messages about the magnitude of the violence epidemic and the role of guns in an increasingly lethal society. According to Gina Glantz, VPI grantees from various components came together to work on the handgun campaign. "The Pacific Center was key to developing the policy strategy and we developed the messages and figured out how to put them out there," Glantz says. "We worked with Berkeley Media Studies Group and the CAPs to develop strategies to involve more people on the ground and we used the CAP stories as part of our communications. We were all working as partners." Using what Martin & Glantz called "social math," the VPI handgun campaign used paid advertisements to tell the story of how violence was affecting youth in stark, factual terms that resonated with lawmakers, such as "Handguns are the number one killer of children" and "There are eight times more gun dealers than McDonald's in California." Materials providing facts and contextual information and outlining needed policy changes were sent out to more than 10,000 opinion leaders at the local, state, and national levels. The campaign also hosted high-profile events such as press conferences, video conferences, and town hall meetings to release key research and survey findings.

While the Foundation encouraged such activities and even participated in them, it was constrained by restrictions on the ability of foundations to lobby for specific legislation. The VPI supported the work of grantees, such as the Pacific Center and the CAPs, but the Foundation did not get involved in direct action. Nevertheless, strategists behind the public education campaign took their role as far as they possibly could. "We had created a set of people around the state who were educated and motivated and although we couldn't tell them what to do, we could provide tools and send signals," says Glantz. "As long as our lawyers said it was legal, we could do it." The campaign's sound bites were picked up by sympathetic legislators such as U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein and even by those who had not traditionally been aligned with gun control forces,

like Republican Attorney General Dan Lungren. When Lungren opened a conference on violence in the mid-1990s with the statement that handguns were the number one killer of children, Glantz recalls, "it was a seminal moment because we knew then that we had created a language that everyone was using."

In the early 1990s, introducing the language of prevention into policy debates around youth violence was a daunting task, considering the composition of California's legislature. But the legislature was about to undergo a dramatic change that would mean a significant payoff for the work that VPI grantees had put into educating officials about guns. A term limit law passed by voters in 1990 began to show its effects in the latter part of the decade. In 1996, the first year of impact for the Assembly, almost half of its 80 members were new; in 1998, the first year the impact was felt in the Senate, 12 of 40 members were new.[8] Ending the lock that incumbents had on their seats, a more progressive and ethnically diverse group of politicians began making their way to the state legislature, often moving from city councils, school boards, and county boards of supervisors. Several of these new state lawmakers, including senators Nell Soto of Pomona and Deborah Ortiz of Sacramento, had worked with VPI grantees on gun regulation at the local level and continued the momentum at the state level.

In addition, says Eric Gorovitz, the mid-1990s saw a major shift in perception of guns as a political issue, with more politicians willing to stand up and be counted as gun control advocates. The National Rifle Association was gradually becoming more isolated from mainstream America. In the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing, the release of an NRA direct-mail piece that called agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms "jack-booted thugs" further distanced the NRA from its traditional support among most centrist politicians. But this trend did not include California's Governor Pete Wilson, who repeatedly vetoed gun control bills that came to him from the legislature. So it wasn't until 1999, after the election of Democrat Gray Davis to the governorship (and the killing of 15 people at Columbine High School in Colorado) that the legislature passed and the governor signed what gun control advocates hailed as a "landmark" set of laws, including a ban on junk guns, a one-gun-a-month purchasing restriction, and the requirement that gun dealers place state-approved child safety locks on all firearms. Six years after the inception of the VPI, important progress had been made toward the firearms goal, due in large part to the efforts of grantees.

"I don't want to idealize the VPI – it wasn't perfect – but it created good tension and strong partnerships. It didn't get enough attention nationally, maybe because they focused on working, not promoting."

Researcher

Expanding the Policy Focus

WITH THE FIREARMS ISSUE at the forefront of VPI policy efforts, grantees largely postponed work on the objective related to expanding resources for youth, until the second five years of the Initiative. The focus on state funding made it difficult to do the kind of local organizing that had energized the community grantees around firearms. And by the time the VPI began to seriously focus on this objective, the Initiative had undergone some important changes. Only nine CAPs were funded for another full five years[9] as all but a couple of the co-funders had completed their commitments.[10] A new grant area

8 Source: National Conference of State Legislatures.

9 Two of the original 18 had dropped out and seven were given two-year bridge grants.

10 The co-funders were partner foundations that made varying commitments to the VPI. Their grants to the CAPs lasted between two and 10 years.

THE POWER OF DATA TIMES TWO

"One of the most dramatic things we did with our grant was to develop a useful and unique database that combines the information from death certificates with the information from homicide reports. To state it simply, the death certificates have information about the victim and the homicide reports have information about the perpetrator, the circumstances, and the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. Putting that information together creates a very rich database and researchers have already started to use it."

– Dr. Alex Kelter
Epidemiology and Prevention for Injury Control Branch, California Department of Health Services

Without sound data, it is impossible to devise effective strategies and tactics for addressing violence. But even when data exists, it doesn't always tell the whole story. That's particularly true in the case of homicide, which involves a victim, a perpetrator, and a unique set of circumstances surrounding each incident.

For years, researchers in the California Health Services Department's Epidemiology and Prevention for Injury Control (EPIC) branch had been queried about how, where, and why homicides involving youth occurred. Responding to these requests for data was becoming more onerous, says EPIC director Dr. Alex Kelter, and there was no funding set aside for it. "It's very labor-intensive, because everybody wants the data cut in a different way," says Kelter.

While EPIC researchers could provide information about murder victims using death records, which are kept by the Health Services Department, and they could get access to information about perpetrators and crime circumstances from the Department of Justice, researchers recognized that combining the two databases would create a powerful set of data. But without a mandate and funding for the project, there was little EPIC could do. "We didn't have the horsepower to do it and we didn't have as much motivation," says Kelter. "The questions that were being asked about this data were largely being asked by people outside of policymaking. No one in management told us to do this."

That changed in the late 1990s when EPIC received grants from The California Wellness Foundation's Violence Prevention Initiative and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. These funds enabled EPIC to combine data from the Department of Justice's Supplementary Homicide Reports (part of the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports) with information contained in death certificates, to create the Linked Homicide Database. Today, this database, which includes the years 1990 through 1999, is available on EPIC's web site (data through 2001 is still being added to the database). On the web site, visitors can cross-tabulate the information in a variety of ways, including by weapon, crime status (actual homicide, justifiable homicide by a citizen, justifiable homicide by a police officer, or manslaughter), location (victim's residence, commercial business, park, etc.) and the relationship of the victim to the primary suspect.

No other state has ever been able to create a linkage between death certificates and Supplementary Homicide Reports. EPIC was able to link 93 percent of all homicide files to death records, which is an extremely high rate of matching for different, complex, computerized records. Now, researchers from other states are doing extensive analysis of this information. "Putting this kind of information together allows us to analyze complex policy questions that we couldn't even think about before, particularly those that revolve around the relationship between murderers and their victims and the circumstances surrounding homicides," says Kelter.

within the community component, Promising Practices, brought in 12 additional youth violence prevention programs around the state, but with much lower levels of both funding and integration than the original CAPs. And the research component was discontinued. With fewer CAPs, the Initiative's constituency was not as large or as broad-based as it had been in the early years and, thus, could not play the same role in policy efforts that it had when advocating for strengthening gun control laws.

The resources goal involved lobbying to address youth violence prevention by increasing spending, a notion rarely popular with legislators unless they can show where funds will be saved elsewhere. To understand what savings the state might see as the result of a reduction in youth violence would have required extensive tracking of both youth incarceration rates and participation in prevention programs over several years – a time frame too long to help a politician win an election bid. While the Foundation would have liked to prepare a large-scale public education campaign to demonstrate the value of resources for youth, it needed to weigh that funding against the need for increased technical assistance for grantees to become more sustainable.

One of the major thrusts of the Pacific Center's Resources for Youth campaign was a bid to create a youth violence prevention authority, a modified version of an agency created in Illinois to coordinate all state government planning and programs. Illinois' youth violence prevention authority was co-chaired by the state's attorney general and public health director, and many advocates in California believed that a similar entity could greatly improve the effectiveness of the state's youth violence prevention efforts. But this would never come to be. "The youth violence prevention authority was a critical step toward strengthening the state's commitment to violence prevention." says Kathy Jett, a former official in the state attorney general's office who is now director of the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs. "Without that piece, you're left without any institutional responsibility for youth violence prevention." Later, the Pacific Center called for earmarking some of the state's health services spending for youth violence, in the same way that funds are allocated toward domestic violence, AIDS, breast cancer, and other health problems. Senator Nell Soto authored legislation to create what some saw as a "mini-VPI," complete with community grants, a fellowship program, and a policy center, but the bill never made it out of committee.

Unlike the firearms issue, the VPI policy grantees had not found a way to make funding for youth violence prevention programs an urgent priority for policymakers, or for the community-based grantees. Whereas banning the cheaply made Saturday Night Specials was a relatively quick and painless way for lawmakers to send a clear message that they were in favor of gun control, increasing spending on youth violence prevention by earmarking money for programs did not show the same promise. How much would it cost? Which programs would be most effective? And how would the state evaluate such programs? Without any obvious answers to these questions, only a few legislators in Sacramento were willing to take ownership of the issue.

But VPI grantees were able to make some gains. In 2000, after a hard-fought battle with Governor Gray Davis, the Schiff-Cardenas Crime Prevention Act was passed, providing the most significant appropriation for youth violence prevention in California's history: more than $120 million per year. Tony Cardenas, the San Fernando Valley assembly member who co-sponsored the bill, says that although there was talk in the legislature about increasing resources for youth violence prevention in the late 1990s, no one was willing to make it a top priority. Cardenas, a Latino legislator who represented his home town of Pacoima, a blue collar city near Los Angeles, had been trying to drum up support for a youth crime prevention funding measure when Senate President John Burton convinced him to couple his legislation with funding for COPS, a popular measure that helped fund law enforcement salaries. The way the Schiff-Cardenas bill was written, money for both programs had to be equal. "We intertwined them so tightly that you couldn't touch one dollar of the COPS money without touching a dollar of the juvenile prevention funds, and vice versa," says Cardenas. "It was a phenomenal idea and something that I'm going to remember as long as I'm making laws." A key

behind-the-scenes figure in crafting the "unbreakable" formula of the law was David Steinhart, a juvenile justice advocate who worked closely with Burton and received VPI funding for most of the 10 years. Governor Davis did try to cut the prevention funds out of the bill before signing it, but after being threatened with a lawsuit alleging he was overstepping his authority to legislate, he backed down and signed Schiff-Cardenas in August 2000. Steinhart believes that the law was a major step forward. "The Foundation stayed with this issue for so long that it enabled youth violence prevention advocates to find opportunities that weren't there in the short term," Steinhart says. "When those opportunities came up, we were geared up and ready to go."

"Violence Prevention is now an institutionalized part of public health. It won't go away. I no longer have to give a speech to make the case that it's a public health problem."

Public Health Advocate

And VPI grantees did make some headway in increasing resources through other channels. Barrios Unidos, a CAP based in Santa Cruz, worked with a local coalition and their state assemblyperson to pass the California Gang, Crime, and Violence Prevention Partnership Program in 1997, which set aside $3 million per year to support community-based youth violence prevention programs. While much of the credit goes to Barrios Unidos, the VPI umbrella made it easier for lawmakers to see that a statewide youth violence prevention constituency existed. And in 1999, the After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program was signed into law, boosting funding for after-school programs. Although the law was aimed at improving academic performance and not expressly developed as a youth violence prevention program, many observers saw it as a positive step toward increasing youth resources overall. By the time the issue came up again in 2002, the campaign for Proposition 49, which greatly expanded funding for after-school programs (although at the expense of other programs), emphasized a dual message of improved school performance *and* a reduction in juvenile crime to convince 56 percent of voters to approve it.

The VPI saw some mixed results in its efforts to change the portrayal of violence in both the news and entertainment media. Although the VPI's funding resulted in some groundbreaking work, its effects are hard to gauge. Mediascope, a grantee with ties to the entertainment industry promoted positive portrayals of conflict resolution. High turnover in the industry created an ongoing need for outreach to network and studio executives and creative staff. Mediascope also developed a film school curricula that incorporated violence prevention concepts. "The challenge was formidable," says Marcy Kelly, former executive director of Mediascope, and in the end, the organization opted to publish a book on ethics in entertainment that would be appropriate for film schools.

In addition to Mediascope, the VPI funded a journalism education program aimed at changing the way the news media covers violence, and particularly youth violence, to incorporate the public health perspective. With funding from the VPI, Berkeley Media Studies Group conducted a landmark study of television coverage of youth violence in 1995. The organization also produced a handbook for journalists and conducted workshops at newspapers around the state. Although the group was able to gain access to major metropolitan papers such as the *San Francisco Examiner, Sacramento Bee*, and *San Jose Mercury News*, the reactions of most journalists showed that deep divisions existed within the news media about the issue. The traditional structure of news operations, according to journalist Jane Stevens, who wrote the handbook and designed and led the workshops, tends to reinforce single-event reporting rather than a data-driven approach that would provide context to better inform readers. And given the increasing influence of 24-hour cable channels, which favor live and breaking news over in-depth analysis, it is unlikely that the media will be open to providing greater coverage for violence prevention issues.

OVER THE PAST DECADE, juvenile and general arrest rates have declined, with the most dramatic improvements coming after 1996. However, researchers have been unable to agree on what prompted that drop in violent crime (or why crime seems to be increasing again today). The strength of the economy, demographic trends such as a decline in the number of adolescent boys as a percentage of the whole population, the implementation of California's Three Strikes law, increased funding for after-school programs, and the Violence Prevention Initiative – no one factor seems to have been the *most* influential. Can VPI grantees say they were responsible for bringing about measurable change in the face of all of these factors? Almost certainly, because the VPI supported grantees who were key figures in strengthening California's gun laws and making more resources available for youth violence prevention.

The investment the VPI represented in this resource-starved field may have created unusually high expectations about what it could accomplish in the face of formidable challenges and changes in a rapidly growing and diverse state. Although the VPI was a significant investment when compared to most private initiatives, its entire 10-year commitment still represented only about one-quarter of the California Youth Authority's budget just for one year.

Still, the VPI succeeded in demonstrating that, by using a significant amount of resources to focus on one issue, it could move the needle, not from incarceration all the way to prevention but at least part of the way. In 2003, California's electorate and policymakers are expressing greater interest in prevention. Since the VPI's inception, they have embraced increased funding for after-school and violence prevention programs such as the After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program, Schiff-Cardenas, and Proposition 49. Fundamental social change – which is what the VPI sought in the long run – occurs incrementally over many years. The VPI is best understood as a critical step toward changing society's understanding of youth violence so that we no longer accept it as an inevitable fact of life.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Creating a paradigm shift in the way a community thinks about its problems and solutions is an ambitious goal that requires patience and commitment. But the potential to incrementally change public opinion is possible with strategically placed resources, locally based knowledge, and passion from committed individuals.
- Beginning a large-scale initiative around a fragmentary and developing field requires significant planning. Complex social issues require input from a wide range of "experts" – both those working to understand the issue and those directly affected by it – all of whom must be communicated with in ways sensitive to their unique needs.
- The importance of sustained funding over a period of several years cannot be overstated, as it enables organizations to coalesce around common goals and build a strong network, prepared to act as opportunities materialize. But with long funding periods, the challenge of integrating new people and ideas also needs to be addressed.
- Supporting a multidisciplinary, collaborative approach to an issue is challenging and may not always result in close partnerships across disciplines. But it will open up new possibilities for grantees who have had little exposure to other ways of thinking. Foundation initiatives can provide some of the rare opportunities for grantees to see how others in the field approach key issues and how they might work with one another to achieve common goals.
- Face-to-face contact between grantees is essential to building a strong network of advocates who will work together on behalf of key policy objectives. An annual conference can allow grantees to meet, share experiences, hash out their differences, and celebrate their progress.
- Private foundations should exercise a strong voice in demanding that government address issues of importance by supporting policy and public education campaigns. They can play a key role in providing information and data to policymakers who lack the time and funding to conduct their own in-depth research, and by citing concrete examples of where improvement in public programs might be made.

CROSSING THE DIVIDE

Violence and Philanthropy

> "If every private foundation did what Wellness did with the Violence Prevention Initiative – building a coalition and letting health and wellness be its lead – they would turn this state around."

Loretta Middleton, San Diego County Office of Education

THE VIOLENCE PREVENTION INITIATIVE (VPI) – a multimillion-dollar, decade-long investment by The California Wellness Foundation – is widely viewed as a bold departure in grantmaking, not only because the Foundation chose to take on the hitherto underfunded issue of youth violence, but because it embraced a multidisciplinary approach that was so comprehensive. With the VPI, Wellness embarked on a new model of grantmaking – funding across disciplines, providing decade-long grants, emphasizing policy change, convening a diverse group of grantees to create partnerships, and supporting advocacy through local and statewide action, public education, and the media. The Foundation was innovative and focused – funding not only organizations, but also grassroots organizers and peacemakers. But above all, Wellness is credited with understanding how it could leverage its resources by taking a risk that few funders had been willing to explore and by addressing an identified health crisis previously overlooked by nearly all private foundations.

The California Wellness Foundation emerged in the 1990s, at a time when violence, and particularly youth violence, was skyrocketing in California and throughout the nation. Juvenile arrest rates for violent crime had reached all-time highs and homicide had become the leading cause of death for young people of color. Policymakers, seeking to satisfy the public's hunger for immediate responses, sought tougher criminal justice measures, even though such measures had not been shown to be successful in stemming the tide of violence – some even felt such measures only fueled the problem. Despite mounting data, press attention, and anecdotal information from grantees about the impacts of violence on communities, established foundations had yet to act in any significant way to address the issue. Many philanthropists perceived youth violence – from gangs to school shootings – as such a deep and complex problem that only government had the resources to make a difference. But government's approach to the problem was punishment and incarceration. So, while criminal justice and prison budgets ballooned, government funding for innovative approaches to both controlling violence and preventing its spread remained minor.

Meanwhile, a small but growing cohort of influential public health professionals had begun to call for a new response to violence, one that differed from traditional government policies. These professionals viewed youth violence as a critical public health problem: They felt that the number of young people dying was alarming and believed treatment without prevention was not a long term option. The public health approach defined youth violence as an epidemic, the causes of which needed to be studied in order to design prevention and intervention programs that would help reduce its prevalence. Central to this approach was an emphasis on changing systemic and environmental factors that contribute to violence.

Although a handful of foundations had made small investments in programs and/or research focused

specifically on preventing violence, most were stymied by the lack of information about effective prevention strategies. The California Wellness Foundation stepped boldly into this void, seizing an opportunity to boost the potential to prevent youth violence and to do it in a totally new way.

When it created the Violence Prevention Initiative[1], with an immediate commitment of $30 million for five years (and eventually investing more than $70 million over 10 years), The California Wellness Foundation called attention not only to the urgency of youth violence as a public health problem but also to the need for other foundations and government to make investments in the field. "It put a lot of money on the table, which demonstrated to others that this issue was important," says Deane Calhoun, a VPI Peace Prize[2] winner in 1995 and executive director of Youth Alive in Oakland. "The Foundation marketed the issue and brought together other foundations to support it. This had a tremendous impact in that it educated the foundation world about the importance of preventing violence." The VPI also demonstrated for the first time the importance of building the capacity of prevention-oriented, anti-violence organizations and of supporting individuals who were struggling to create and sustain community-based programs. The VPI set out to research the factors contributing to youth violence and potential solutions; to change perceptions about how to reduce youth violence; and to advocate for new policies throughout the state.

Key decisions about the structure of the Initiative and the Foundation's recognition of the importance of collaboration contributed to the VPI's success as a grantmaking venture.

"The level of community violence was appalling and it directly affected the ability of funders to make change."

National Funder

Seizing a Moment, Surmounting the Risks

THE CALIFORNIA WELLNESS FOUNDATION made an unusual entry onto the philanthropic playing field and almost instantly, with an endowment of $300 million, became one of the largest funders in California and the United States. Unlike many new foundations which can plan for gradual growth in their start-up years, the Foundation granted $12 million in its first year, an extremely large disbursement for any foundation in 1993. Following in the footsteps of major health funders such as the Robert Wood Johnson and Kaiser Family foundations, The California Wellness Foundation decided to focus its grantmaking on multi-year initiatives[3] in areas that would strategically fulfill its mission of promoting the health and well-being of Californians. Eager to make a difference, the Foundation sought an opportunity to address unmet needs and under-resourced areas in a variety of health arenas, and violence became the first of five issues tackled in the early years of its work.

At a time of highly publicized violence by and against youth and of policymaking that favored retribution, the Foundation sought to bring attention to opportunities for prevention and to a public health approach. Largely overlooked by major funders in the early 1990s, this approach was beginning to get the attention of the medical and public health establishments. Members of the Foundation's board, which included prominent public health officials and practitioners, were impressed by both the *Journal of the American Medical Association's* pronouncement in 1992 that

1 The VPI was divided into four components in its initial five years: the community action program for locally based organizations; a policy and public education program; a research program; and a leadership development program, which offered grants to individuals. The research program was discontinued after the first five years of the Initiative.

2 As part of its leadership development program, the VPI awarded three Peace Prizes every year of the Initiative, honoring individuals identified as leading youth violence prevention efforts in California.

3 Initiatives generally involve commitments to strategic goals through an integrated approach to grantmaking, often across sectors and over several years, around a focused theme or topic.

violence was "an epidemic" and by the Centers for Disease Control's decision to establish a Division of Violence Prevention within its National Center for Injury Prevention and Control in 1993. And in communities around the state where residents grappled daily with children being injured and dying, local efforts were emerging to make neighborhoods safer. New programs such as conflict resolution and community policing were being tested. Community-based organizations and individuals scattered around the state were beginning to develop local interventions they believed could prevent youth violence from occurring. But despite the promise of prevention to counter violence – whether in research, policy, or community services – funding remained scarce. "There was growing awareness of violence prevention in the early 1990s, but very little money was available, and there were limited expectations that any would materialize," says Larry Cohen, an advisor to the VPI who was then leading a violence prevention coalition in Contra Costa County, just east of San Francisco.

"I was amazed that the Foundation's board was even letting the staff think about funding something like this."

National Advocate

While it is difficult to determine precisely how much was being spent on violence prevention (a term defined differently by different stakeholders[4]) prior to the implementation of the VPI, one report from 1993 provides some insight. At the same time that The California Wellness Foundation was refining its plans for the VPI, a small but influential group of philanthropists, led by Luba Lynch of the A.L. Mailman Family Foundation and David Nee of the Ittleson Foundation, convened funders to examine the extent of violence-prevention grantmaking nationally and to determine what role private foundations might play in moving the issue closer to center stage. A study commissioned by the group revealed that in 1990, less than 2 percent of all grant dollars nationally (or $78 million of nearly $4.6 billion distributed by U.S. foundations) was destined toward what was described as "the prevention of violence." In fact, the vast majority of this spending went to programs for people already victimized, such as shelters for battered women and services for victims of child abuse. Primary prevention, which the study's authors defined as "efforts to reduce the risk of violence to the entire population," was awarded only 5 percent of that $78 million, or $3.9 million nationally, in 1990.

Within that context, The California Wellness Foundation's proposal to invest $30 million over five years – in California alone – had the potential to change the funding picture for youth violence prevention significantly. It was this possibility that inspired the board's willingness to put the Foundation out front on the issue. "Foundations are more conservative than they need to be," says former board member Jonathan Fielding. "They're a critical resource for supporting new approaches and being innovative, and that's an important part of the opportunity The California Wellness Foundation had."

Seeking to raise the visibility of youth violence among both public and private funders, the Foundation determined that its focus should be on bringing the small, fragmented field together in an initiative around common goals to change the traditional paradigm for addressing youth violence in California. This decision was unusual in the philanthropic world for reasons perhaps best summarized by Dr. Mark Rosenberg, executive director of The Task Force for Child Survival and Development and former director of the CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. "Why do I think foundations aren't willing to take on violence prevention? Five reasons," he says. "First, people think that violence is evil and they believe that there's really nothing you can do about

4 The term "violence prevention" is associated with an array of programs, including those that target past offenders or victims, those that address at-risk populations, and those that attempt to change environmental and social factors affecting the entire population. Critical to The California Wellness Foundation's approach was the idea of *primary prevention,* which focuses on changing environmental factors that contribute to violence and supports diverse strategies, from gun control legislation to alcohol regulations to mental health counseling and after-school programs.

it. Second, foundations would rather deal with people with more resources, more wealth, and simpler problems – because it's easier to have and to see an impact. The connection between poverty and violence is very, very strong and it means that you have a messy problem that's very complex and hard to sort out. Third, foundations don't want to deal with the fact that the interventions are not particularly well evaluated. Fourth, people don't appreciate the magnitude of the problem of violence and the potential for prevention. And, fifth, it's a heavily politicized area. It's been attacked both from the left and from the right. From the right, the attacks have been mostly by people who don't want their guns pried out of their hands. And from the left, it's been attacked by people who think that it is a way to *control* poor people by taking away their civil rights and liberties."

Even among those working on youth violence prevention, there was little agreement about the appropriate role for foundations. Recognizing that the term "violence prevention" suggests a deficit model requiring "fixing" what's wrong with communities rather than strengthening existing assets, many funders preferred then and perhaps even today to focus on "youth development" or "community building" approaches which may contribute to violence prevention. Because violence cuts across so many fields of programming and research, including mental health, alcohol abuse, economic development, and education, there is a wide range of potential strategies for addressing the problem. But supporters of youth violence prevention are disturbed by the reluctance of foundations to use the term "violence prevention" in their grantmaking, saying that substituting other terms downplays the significance of the issue. Gary Yates, president and CEO of The California Wellness Foundation agrees, saying that when the VPI was launched, "Funders often said they were supporting violence prevention when they were funding things like juvenile justice and other areas. They weren't assessing programs based on whether they were preventing violence and that's key. It wasn't violence prevention, and that's why there wasn't a field."

What was different about the VPI, according to Luba Lynch, was that it put forth a vision for an emerging field of violence prevention that would enable its disparate elements to come together and work for common goals in a way that had not previously been possible. But there were risks for Wellness in this approach. According to UCLA violence researcher and VPI grantee Susan Sorenson, Wellness' unprecedented commitment to a still loosely defined discipline meant that the VPI was up against considerable odds. The Foundation's leadership had "this combination of optimism and arrogance, which is very much in line with the public health outlook," Sorenson adds. The Foundation was willing to play the trailblazer role. "Wellness was essentially a guinea pig, not just in violence prevention but in taking on something as complex as the VPI," says Linda Wong, program director at the Community Development Technologies Center in Los Angeles and a member of the VPI advisory committee.

Most foundations confronting the question of whether to fund violence prevention would be discouraged by the complexity of violence and the difficulty in demonstrating successful solutions that could then be sustained through government or other funding. From a foundation perspective, explains Gwen Foster, program officer at The California Endowment, "It's hard to feel as if your work is making a difference on this issue because violence never goes away." Other foundations had assessed the obstacles to tackling youth violence prevention and found them insurmountable. According to Sierra Health Foundation vice president Dorothy Meehan, despite increasing youth and gang violence in Sacramento in the early 1990s, her foundation felt it lacked the expertise and the dollars needed to make a significant impact on such a complex issue and, thus, had not made any grants in violence prevention prior to the VPI. (The Violence Prevention Initiative became an opportunity for Sierra Health to contribute as a co-funder within a larger effort that Meehan and the board believed was likely to produce results.)

A daunting aspect of allocating such a large amount of resources toward youth violence prevention was the prospect of documenting and assessing successes and failures. Wellness put significant resources – $6 million, by its own

THE VPI BRAIN TRUST

Recognizing it was entering new territory – a new foundation with a new way of looking at what some considered an intractable problem – The California Wellness Foundation regularly sought insight, feedback, and support from a group of about 20 people from throughout California and the U.S. who were seen as experts on the subject of youth violence prevention. They met as an advisory committee at least annually from the inception of the VPI through 2003. "The Advisory Committee was a way for the Foundation to stay connected to the real world," says Gary Yates.

"My experience on the advisory committee taught me that no one has all the answers. The academics don't know all the answers and neither do the community people. In order to really make a dent in violence, we have to start listening to each other, much more than we are used to doing."

– Darnell Hawkins
Sociology Professor,
University of Illinois, Chicago

Like the VPI itself, the composition of the Advisory Committee cut across sectors and disciplines. It included leaders of community-based organizations, officials from school districts and law enforcement, violence prevention advocates, university-based researchers; physicians; and parents whose children had been murdered. "Having community people on the committee, particularly people who were personally affected by violence, was key because it meant that you couldn't treat violence in a detached way," says committee member Darnell Hawkins, a sociology professor at the University of Illinois. The Foundation also saw the Advisory Committee as a way to bring a national perspective to the VPI which although focused on California, was clearly the most significant investment by a private funder in youth violence prevention ever made in the U.S. up to that time. For many on the committee, the meetings were a rare opportunity for exposure to ideas from around the country as well as to spend time with colleagues and to learn how the VPI was progressing.

During the early years of the Initiative, the role of the Advisory Committee was fairly well defined and there was a lot to accomplish. Members provided input on policy objectives, the public education campaign, plans for the evaluation, nominees for Peace Prizes and fellowships, and many other aspects of the Initiative.

Some Advisory Committee members recall contentious discussions, where divisions fell along lines of race, class, and length of time in the "field" (which was still emerging), as well as between academics and practitioners. There was disagreement about whether the VPI's policy objectives should focus on root causes of youth violence including the lack of economic opportunity and access to education. "The majority of the people on the committee wanted to focus on gun control, but some of us felt that you needed to take a broader approach to youth violence," says Hedy Chang, now a senior program officer at the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund.

The purpose of the Advisory Committee was less clear in later years, once the major decisions about the VPI had been made. Although the Foundation continued to convene the committee, some members felt they became marginalized and were discouraged from playing an active role in helping the Foundation transition to a post-VPI era. Despite these feelings, the Advisory Committee continued to be a key influence on the thinking of Foundation staff. "I walked away from the committee meetings able to make better decisions because of that collective thinking," says Frank Acosta, VPI program officer from 1995 to 2001.

calculations – toward evaluation of all four VPI components during the first five years of the Initiative. Besides measuring the progress of each component and its grantees, the Foundation hoped the evaluation would determine the extent to which interactions among the four components produced synergies that might not otherwise have occurred. Three prominent institutions – Johns Hopkins University, Stanford University, and RAND Corporation – undertook the evaluation, but encountered numerous challenges in attempting to quantify the impacts of the VPI on youth, communities, policy change, research, and leadership development in the field.

Another challenge was presented by the Foundation's determination to support policy change as a strategy to reduce youth violence. By venturing into policy advocacy, the Foundation also had to ensure that its stance on public policy issues and its support for policy research and analysis fit the terms of IRS laws related to lobbying for specific legislation. Foundations have a long history of contributing to public policy debates, but few have been willing to support the kind of public education and media efforts that the VPI contemplated. While the Foundation was willing to provide resources and muscle toward ensuring that its messages were heard throughout the state and beyond, they knew this strategy was likely to invite greater scrutiny of their activities.

The Foundation and its public education grantee, Martin & Glantz, were successful in steering clear of lobbying. Nevertheless, the Prevent Handgun Violence Against Kids campaign was noticed by supporters of the National Rifle Association, who sent angry letters and called both Martin & Glantz and the Foundation to express their displeasure with the messages. "NRA supporters came to our press conferences and asked harassing questions," recalls Laurie Kappe, who directed the public education campaign at Martin & Glantz from 1994 to 1997. "And the first time we ran a public service announcement with a toll-free number to call for citizen involvement kits, they jammed the phone line with calls from as far away as Texas and Michigan. We had to start blocking people who called twice from the same number and from out of state." In the end, the perils of taking a high profile stance on the gun issue were far outweighed by the legislative gains that the VPI grantees helped bring about.

Though the VPI represented an opportunity to show that a prevention model could be effective, it also carried the risk of failure given the difficulties of making discernible headway on the problem. This possibility of failure may have been a consequence few foundations would have been willing to contemplate, but Wellness saw it differently: In California, where handguns were fast becoming the number one killer of children[5] and where in the early 1990s, an average of 22,000 juveniles were arrested for violent felonies every year,[6] there was an urgent need for a bold strategy. "We'd always known that you can't address youth violence just by providing services and intervention; you also have to deal with policies and systemic issues, but we were limited in what we can do alone," says Anita Barnes, executive director of La Familia Counseling Center in Sacramento, a VPI grantee. "When we saw the Foundation's plans, we felt it was a chance to do something more. We were excited about having someone take the lead who understands the broader perspective and had the resources to back it." Rubén Gonzales, an advisory committee member, agrees: "Wellness was creating a path that didn't previously exist."

In embarking on the Initiative, Wellness provided hope to violence prevention advocates that foundations could and would play a key role in identifying and funding alternatives to conventional criminal justice approaches. This was a very new message, according to Luba Lynch, because until the VPI emerged, violence was viewed – by foundations as well as policymakers and the general public – as an intractable part of life in the United States.

5 Source: Centers for Disease Control.

6 Source: California Department of Justice.

Designing a Framework that Fits

PLACING VIOLENCE PREVENTION FUNDING within an initiative structure proved to be both an advantage and a challenge of the decade-long investment. At its inception, the Foundation believed an initiative would provide the necessary framework for its major components[7] and for the three underlying aspects of the funding strategy: educating the public about the issue; encouraging community-led solutions; and working for state and local policy change. "Creating an initiative made it clear what the Foundation wanted to do and what it wanted to accomplish," says Deane Calhoun. "And we knew it was a serious effort because it was going to be supported for 10 years."

> **"Initiatives present a coherent theory, but there's also the illusion that you have some control that you don't have with other grants."**
>
> *National Funder*

The initiative format seemed logical in that the violence prevention field was still young and lacked a core of visible, established organizations with a history of focusing on violence prevention; this meant that the Foundation could play a useful role as the nexus for this nascent field. "The VPI required an initiative structure because there wasn't much on the ground," says Yates. "If we used another form of grantmaking in 1992, I don't think we would have gotten the kind of strategic work that the issue needed. Looking back on it, the VPI helped create a movement that had a real effect on statewide and local policy, which would not have been possible with another style of grantmaking."

When planning the Initiative, Wellness brought together a range of stakeholders – from academics and researchers to community activists, police officers, youth, and gang members – to participate in a discussion about what the Initiative might look like. By convening people and organizations who had never previously worked together, Wellness provided a model for the kind of cooperation it hoped to see later among grantees. Recognizing the value of the group's input, the Foundation's board of directors heeded the recommendation of stakeholders that the VPI entail a 10-year commitment to violence prevention in two five-year funding cycles. It was believed that the promise of sustained funding would bring people to the table and keep them engaged long enough to build the kind of trust needed to advance the VPI's policy agenda related to firearms, alcohol, and public funding for youth programs. To help guide this effort, the Foundation created the Pacific Center for Violence Prevention to provide data and policy analysis, develop strategies, and coordinate the work of VPI grantees toward meeting the VPI's three policy objectives. The Foundation also lent its voice to support grantee advocacy when appropriate. This willingness to work alongside grantees was "courageous," according to John Bess, executive director of The Valley Inc., a New York-based youth development organization, and VPI Advisory Committee member.

While a well-planned initiative held the promise of a coherent, consistent, and comprehensive approach to grantmaking, it also presented some challenges which at times complicated the Foundation's efforts. Although the VPI provided a theoretical framework into which grantees and their activities were supposed to fit, the level of grantee buy-in varied greatly. Some community-based grantees did not fully agree with the VPI's policy objective related to firearms and others felt that using quantitative evaluation tools to assess outcomes was unfair. That the creation of community collaboratives was driven by a foundation rather than by youth violence prevention practitioners or by community members themselves bothered some grantees. Father Greg Boyle says that while the initiative structure was extremely valuable in terms of providing momentum for policy change, it felt "disconnected" at the local level because "it came from on high, rather than being born from below."

Not so much a disadvantage, but perhaps the Achilles heel of the long-term funding arrangement was the issue of staff turnover at grantee organizations and at the Foundation. The idea of building organizational capacity to advance a youth violence prevention agenda over several years

depended on the stability of grantee organizations and the people who led them. Over the course of the Initiative, many of the community-based organizations had multiple program directors overseeing their VPI grant. Successive program directors sometimes felt less connected than their predecessors to the broader Initiative and to other grantees. There was also a loss or re-invention of institutional memory. But grantees were not alone in facing the challenge of turnover; the Foundation's staff turnover was also high. In the first five years of the Initiative, the VPI was led by four different program officers. It was a demanding job because of the large number of grantees and the myriad activities the VPI supported, not to mention the difficulties of monitoring a massive and sometimes controversial evaluation. Some staffing transitions were smoother than others, but with each new program officer, a personalized perspective on the VPI evolved and made its mark. New relationships had to be built from the ground up, with evaluators, technical assistance providers, collegial foundations, and, most critically, grantees.

Leveraging Resources for the Field

THE FOUNDATION repeatedly leveraged its funding and influence to engender additional financial and political support for a prevention-oriented approach. In this way, it was hoped, the effects of the VPI and its grantees could be multiplied, as other foundations stepped in as co-funders; as investments in public education, policy advocacy, and training led to greater and more savvy attention to related issues; and as the Initiative itself strengthened the field with a model framework where governments, communities, researchers, and individuals all lent their power to the cause.

Mindful of how short 10 years is in the context of social change, The California Wellness Foundation began working early on to parlay its investments in youth violence prevention by building alliances with other funders. Having received nearly 68 proposals for community action program grants,[7] Wellness needed greater resources than it alone could provide to support a significant base of local organizations throughout the state. With its own funds, the Foundation had estimated it could provide grants to 10 community action programs (CAPs). Eager to meet the greater need in diverse communities across California and to demonstrate that it respected the expertise of more established and experienced foundations and recognized the power of collaborating with them, The California Wellness Foundation invited other funders to become part of the VPI by co-funding the CAPs.[8] "Wellness really wanted to be seen as having its work vetted by peers," says Crystal Hayling, VPI program officer from 1992 to 1994.

Hayling and Yates spent a good deal of time explaining the Initiative to other funders once the request for proposals (RFP) process was underway. The pitch wasn't easy, as some foundations viewed the public health approach to violence prevention as unorthodox, and many were reluctant to make a long-term commitment to the issue. "A 10-year initiative is just the beginning of what needs to be done in violence prevention, but it's hard for foundations to commit and stay committed to a single issue for a long time," says Dorothy Meehan of Sierra Health Foundation. Still, several foundations were intrigued by the VPI's approach, seeing it as an innovative opportunity to collaborate on a new topic area and to bring substantial resources to bear on a critical issue. Eventually, seven foundations joined with Wellness in the first five-year phase, enabling the VPI to support 18 CAPs, rather than 10.[9]

7 One of four components to receive funding through the VPI, the community action program was originally budgeted for about $8 million of the total $30 million Wellness set aside for the initial five years of the Initiative.

8 Co-funder investments were originally limited to the CAPs, reflecting the tendency of most foundations to invest in community and service organizations rather than in research, leadership, or advocacy programs. Later in the VPI, a single co-funder, The California Endowment (another health-focused foundation) provided grants for other Initiative components as well as the CAPs.

9 The co-funders were the Crail-Johnson, Alliance Healthcare, Sierra Health, David and Lucile Packard, S.H. Cowell, James Irvine, and San Francisco foundations. The California Endowment became the eighth co-funder, joining after the first five years of the Initiative.

By the time the co-funders committed to the VPI, Wellness had screened the first round of proposals. After visiting some of the 33 proposed CAP sites under consideration, each co-funder selected the CAPs it wanted to support and determined the level of funding it would provide. "Our hands were full with other priorities, including our own initiatives, so we were perfectly happy to be the limited partner with Wellness as the general partner," Meehan recalls. All of the co-funders elected to share funding responsibilities with Wellness, providing a portion of the $175,000 each CAP received annually (with the exception of the James Irvine Foundation, which fully funded two CAPs). Each co-funder determined the length of its funding commitment, which varied from the entire first phase of the Initiative to shorter cycles with the possibility for renewal, an approach that smaller foundations tended to prefer.

"When we got the opportunity to co-fund, we jumped on it because we knew we couldn't work on an issue like violence prevention alone."

Co-funder

In addition to almost doubling the number of CAPs that could be part of the VPI, co-funder investments helped spread awareness of youth violence prevention programs and of the VPI within philanthropic circles. Observers saw the co-funding arrangement as an impressive new foray into progressive, collaborative grantmaking. And while some co-funders considered the arrangement a true partnership, beneficial to the grantees as well as to the grantmakers, others felt communication was not as strong as it needed to be. At times, these grantmakers were challenged when dealing with their own grantees who were dually funded. The co-funders were primarily interested in how well their own grantees were doing, yet such data were not consistently available from the VPI evaluators, who provided aggregate information. Some co-funded grantees complained that it was burdensome to provide progress reports to two funders and to figure out which co-funder needed what information. "It was sometimes confusing to have all these cooks in the kitchen," says former VPI program officer Michael Balaoing. This sentiment is echoed by some co-funders. "The organizations Irvine funded were in a Wellness initiative and they weren't quite sure who we were," says Craig McGarvey, former program officer at the James Irvine Foundation, which was the sole funder of two CAPs. "The money came from us but the grantees' primary relationship was with Wellness, not with us." Each co-funding arrangement was different, adding yet another layer of complexity for Wellness as it attempted to coordinate its wide range of relationships.

In the end, and for varying reasons, only two of the original co-funders remained with the VPI for the full 10 years of the Initiative and several ended their commitments before the first five years had passed – some by original design, others because of concerns about the grantee organizations. Youth violence prevention did not become a top priority for all the co-funders, but many say that the VPI fundamentally changed the way they look at youth violence. "The VPI was a successful experiment that enabled me to see that the public health model can be applied in a powerful way to the issue of violence," says Gwen Foster of The California Endowment.

The VPI's support for policy change, in some instances, paved the way for other foundations to utilize new tactics. Interpretations of restrictions on lobbying had caused many foundations to avoid advocacy funding, but Wellness showed how foundations could take action through research, policy, public education, media, and strategy development. For Alliance Healthcare Foundation, the VPI was "liberating," according to its president Ruth Riedel, because "we were able to show our board that advocacy really works. Now we regularly meet with public officials, both locally and at the state level." That elected officials began adopting the VPI's public health terminology was powerful proof to the Alliance's board of the effectiveness of VPI efforts. Alliance Healthcare Foundation has since launched two advocacy projects, one on health insurance and one on harm reduction, using many of the strategic tactics employed in the VPI campaigns. "Combining

INSPIRED BY THE VPI'S POLICY SUCCESS

When The California Wellness Foundation sought other foundations to become Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI) co-funders, one of the first to express interest was Alliance Healthcare Foundation. "I didn't even know about the advocacy component at that time," says Ruth Riedel, president and CEO of the San Dingo-based foundation.

"Anybody who was working in violence could see that two years after the Wellness Foundation launched the VPI advocacy campaign, all of the elected officials, including Governor Gray Davis when he was running for office, used the campaign talking points. Most people had no idea where they came from, but we knew. We believed in the power of advocacy before, but we were able for the first time to show our board that it really works and that it's worth putting a lot of money and a lot of time into it."

– Linda Lloyd
vice president of programs, Alliance Healthcare Foundation

But it was the VPI's support for advocacy, including the decision to fund policy groups and a public education campaign, that would ultimately make the greatest impression on Riedel. The VPI policy and public education grantees used a variety of advocacy methods, including polling, video conferences, press conferences, paid television commercials and other media placements, and direct action. "The most exciting thing to me was using advocacy to show that we are all responsible for youth violence," says Linda Lloyd, Alliance Healthcare's vice president of programs. By 1997, says Riedel, it was clear that the VPI firearms campaign was having an impact, as state policymakers adopted campaign factoids and messages and cities around the state passed ordinances restricting gun purchasing, licensing, and manufacturing.

Alliance Healthcare Foundation has since funded its own advocacy campaigns in San Diego. One campaign sought to reduce the spread of disease and other health problems caused by injection-drug users sharing needles, through the adoption of a harm-reduction approach that includes clean syringe exchange; the other focused on changing attitudes about the uninsured and increasing support for low-cost insurance programs. For both campaigns, the Alliance Healthcare Foundation has supported local collaboratives and media campaigns, and Riedel and Lloyd have taken a proactive role in working with local elected officials. "We really changed how we did advocacy as a result of the VPI," says Lloyd. "We hired professional media and political consultants to help us winnow down our messages to include specific actions that needed to be taken."

The advocacy campaigns have required persistent efforts over several years, but those efforts have paid off. In 2001, the San Diego City Council declared a public health emergency and authorized a syringe-exchange pilot program. This was a significant victory given that the program faced strong opposition from many prominent officials, including the mayor. The Foundation provided more than $300,000 to set up the program and now supports other services for injection drug users, from street outreach to treatment. "Through the advocacy work, we became more acquainted with the problem of needle sharing than we would have through more traditional grantmaking," says Riedel.

Both Riedel and Lloyd have become advocacy "evangelists" among their fellow funders. "In particular, the role of advocacy at regional foundations is really important," says Riedel. "We don't do enough local advocacy work even though there's a better chance for success than for statewide or national foundations if you know the issues and the players really well."

intense advocacy with grantmaking focused on a health policy issue was cutting-edge for us," says Riedel.

Other foundations, too, followed Wellness' lead, but to varying degrees. In Philadelphia, the Penn Foundation launched its own three-year, youth violence prevention initiative in 1997, in some ways mirroring the VPI, with a focus on community programs and activities designed to limit youth access to guns. And Patti Culross, who joined the David and Lucile Packard Foundation after two years as a VPI academic fellow, spearheaded a program there that supported research and advocacy on children and access to guns. "Although I didn't try to recreate what Wellness had done, I tried to build on it," she says.

Wellness also shared its experiences with other funders, in particular with the National Funding Collaborative on Violence Prevention[10], which developed out of the group convened by Luba Lynch and David Nee in 1993. The Funding Collaborative brought together foundations such as Ford, W.K. Kellogg, and Annie E. Casey, to pool and redistribute funding for violence prevention in order to provide grants to organizations throughout the country. Several observers remarked on the similarities between the collaborative and the VPI, with the Funding Collaborative promoting and funding at the national level some of what The California Wellness Foundation was accomplishing in the country's most populous state.

A founding member, Wellness developed a close realationship with the Funding Collaborative over time. Wellness VPI staff played a consistent leadership role on the Funding Collaborative's board. This interchange enabled the Funding Collaborative to benefit from experiences in California, according to executive director Linda Bowen. "I was very impressed with the VPI as a model because of the focus on community engagement and pushing for policy change at the community level," she says. Without diminishing the key role that Bowen herself played in shaping the Funding Collaborative's focus, the VPI's experience convening people and organizations from a variety of disciplines to address youth violence had a strong influence on the Funding Collaborative's efforts. Today, the Funding Collaborative is struggling to keep foundations focused on violence prevention, but its efforts have led to the successful diffusion of a comprehensive, prevention-oriented approach to violence among philanthropists.

Because of the size of the VPI, there are some concerns that the Foundation produced an unintended effect: creating the perception that it had the issue of youth violence prevention "covered." During the 10 years of the VPI, "there was little a foundation could do in violence prevention in California that would not be seen as Wellness," Larry Cohen notes. Moreover, the VPI evaluation results didn't provide sufficient incentives for other funders to take on the issue of youth violence.[11] However, while the evaluation did not show quantitatively that the VPI reduced youth violence in California, the gains that grantees did make – in policy, public awareness, and recognition of violence prevention as an essential youth service – demonstrated that the multidisciplinary, prevention-oriented approach conceived by the Foundation was effective. These accomplishments, say many VPI grantees, have yet to be communicated to other funders.

YOUTH VIOLENCE RATES have dropped significantly since 1992 and media attention to the issue has fallen off. Many youth violence prevention supporters are concerned that neither the general public nor lawmakers see the issue as urgent any longer. Although some point to greater resources for education (from child care through the transition from high school to college) as evidence that foundations are committed to primary prevention strategies, others say that funding for at-risk youth – particularly those most susceptible to becoming either victims or perpetrators of violence – is more difficult to obtain than ever. A steep drop in assets in recent years has

10 The Funding Collaborative is now the Institute for Community Peace.

11 The evaluation of the first five years of the Initiative determined that it was impossible to draw a direct link between the efforts of VPI grantees and positive outcomes such as the drop in youth violence in California and the achievements in violence-prevention policymaking, largely because there were too many external variables that could not be scientifically controlled for.

prompted many foundations to focus on issues they view as more fundamental than youth violence, such as shoring up health services ravaged by cuts in public spending. But while few foundations consider youth violence prevention a specific focus area, there is a major change from 10 years ago: many funders have now incorporated violence prevention into their own sets of goals in public health – a model that was fostered by the VPI. And throughout the foundation world and the youth violence prevention field, those familiar with the VPI say it was a benchmark in statewide philanthropy that demonstrated several key ideas: youth violence *is* an urgent public health issue; it *can* be prevented; and foundations *do* have a role to play in reducing the likelihood that youth fall prey to violence.

LESSONS LEARNED

- One funder's willingness to overcome obstacles and break new ground can spark other funders to take action on an issue, contributing to a potential sea change in perceptions or a new movement in philanthropic giving.
- Substantial, multi-year grants for issues outside the traditional funding realm can help draw needed public and private attention to a timely, pressing issue.
- Multi-year grants enable organizations to "think big" and to rely on their own expertise to make decisions. The security of knowing funding is forthcoming in subsequent years enables organizations to do better planning and to be prepared for challenges.
- Foundations can play a critical role in funding data and policy analysis and use their prominence to make public policy positions more visible.
- Complex social and public health problems like violence may be poor candidates for quantitative evaluation, thus qualitative assessments including well-planned documentation of activities and a "story-telling" approach should be considered as ways to capture nuances overlooked by numbers-driven analyses.
- Initiatives can be useful funding mechanisms when coping with complex and emerging fields that lack a core group of organizations focused on the given topic. However, it is important for funders to be flexible to accommodate changing realities, new ideas, and even perceived failures, along the way.
- Grants to individuals, an unusual form of grantmaking for most foundations, can be effective in developing leaders who will continue to make change in communities, long after the grantmaking is complete.
- Leading a co-funded initiative can expand resources and provide peer support for funders, but maintaining relationships with co-funders is labor intensive, requiring onoing dedication of foundation staffing and other resources.

ELUSIVE EVIDENCE

Measuring the Impacts

> "Just starting the VPI was a catalyst that saved many lives. I know that's not easily measurable. But when I listen to the young people who talk about their pain and see how they gained self-esteem and are inspiring their peers, I just know this worked. I can't give you precise numbers, but it worked."
>
> *Ray Gatchalian, Captain, Oakland Fire Department, and member of the VPI Advisory Committee*

THE DECISION TO INVEST a considerable percentage of The California Wellness Foundation's grant dollars toward a 10-year, youth violence prevention initiative was made neither quickly nor easily, and once it was made, a natural question ensued: How would the Foundation know if the Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI) had an impact? The answer was to be found through an evaluation that would examine each of the four Initiative components: community action, policy, research, and leadership development programs. While the Foundation was interested in understanding the effect of its funding on all of its program areas, it was especially interested to know if its grants to the 18 community action programs (CAPs) had a direct impact on reducing youth violence in the communities served by these grantees. The California Wellness Foundation was not alone in its desire to understand the impacts and results of this investment in youth violence prevention. For at least a decade prior to the funding of the VPI, both public and private funders had been dedicating more resources to program evaluation, seeking to determine which strategies worked and which ones didn't. Founded in 1992, the health-oriented Wellness Foundation was especially curious to see and eager to demonstrate the impact of its strategic grantmaking. In particular, the Foundation hoped to show that a prevention-oriented, public health approach to understanding and addressing the problem of youth violence could be more effective in the long term than a law enforcement approach that emphasized incarceration. By funding a comprehensive and rigorous evaluation conducted by a respected institution, the Foundation believed it could also persuade skeptical policymakers to support prevention programs on a broad scale (or at least reverse the decline in state-funded programs for youth that California had experienced since the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978).[1]

The evaluation of the first five years of the VPI was perhaps the most controversial facet of the Initiative. It presented tremendous challenges not only for the grantees, who raised concerns about whether the results would be used to determine future funding levels from the Foundation (or whether they would be funded at all), but also for the evaluators who struggled to establish their credibility with grantees. For many grantees, especially the community-based grantees, understanding the purpose and role of the evaluation and building constructive relationships with the evaluators was a long and difficult process. Many were naturally suspicious of the motives of both the Foundation and the evaluators. Yet some others saw the findings, and even the process, as potentially useful in

1 Proposition 13, a state ballot initiative that slashed property taxes by two-thirds and capped future increases, also forced California to drastically cut funding for education, health and human services, law enforcement, and many community-based social programs.

furthering their struggle to make youth violence prevention a priority in their communities.

Questions remain as to whether the predominantly quantitative evaluation (which was discontinued after the first five years) fully captured the accomplishments that resulted from the Foundation's sustained funding for many of California's youth violence prevention organizations and advocates. The evaluation methodologies led to heated discussions among members of the VPI advisory committee, a group of about 20 people who advised the Foundation throughout the Initiative. Concerned that such methods were not adequately telling the complex story of the VPI, the Foundation eventually decided to abandon quantitative methods in the second phase of the Initiative, to rely instead on qualitative measures to assess the impacts of its funding.

The evaluation – initially led by researchers from Johns Hopkins University and later coming under management by Stanford University and RAND Corporation – embodied all the tensions and divisions inherent in an initiative that brought together so many different kinds of people. To some extent, the mere introduction of an evaluation designed by institutions far removed from the day-to-day thinking and activities of the grassroots grantees was a Catch-22 from the onset. Independent of the design of the evaluation measures and scope, the very existence of an evaluation forced grantees, evaluators, and the Foundation to confront issues of culture, race, class, and educational level, and it highlighted the many contrasting viewpoints included in the Initiative. These tensions surfaced most clearly with the CAPs, many of whom worried that the impacts of their work could not easily be quantified. "We were trying to build community and improve the quality of life in our neighborhood so people could get access to resources, and it's hard to find numbers that show that," says May Lee of Asian Resources in Sacramento, a CAP grantee that was not re-funded for the full second five years of the VPI. Ultimately, the VPI evaluation provided some clear and important lessons about the nature of grantmaking designed to bring about community and policy change.

"How do you design an evaluation that allows you to take a whole set of lessons and approaches and experiences and use those to contribute immediately – and continue to contribute – to a field that is still emerging?"

Public Health Advocate

Assembling the Team, Defining Methodologies

IN 1993, when Wellness issued the request for proposals (RFP) for an evaluation of the VPI, Foundation staff members were well aware that they faced many challenges. It was only a few years before the launch of the VPI that public health leaders had begun to define violence as a serious health problem. As the RFP noted, few violence prevention efforts had been evaluated rigorously. Few in government and philanthropy had experience in these sorts of evaluations, and there was skepticism about the ability of quantitative evaluations to reveal the social impacts of programs. At the same time, a lack of technical assistance on the part of practitioners and a lack of funding for evaluation prevented the development of a body of research on effective violence prevention.

In addition, the evaluation envisioned by Wellness was complex. Rather than focus on just a few of the activities funded by the VPI, the Foundation hoped to evaluate all of the components as well as their interactions during the course of the 10 years. This ambitious plan, the Foundation hoped, would provide data and information that would be credible and highly visible in the public health and criminal justice fields, as well as in the foundation world.

As it turned out, finding one institution in California that had the expertise and staff resources to evaluate the wide variety of activities funded by the VPI was impossible. Because of the wide range

of VPI activities, the Foundation asked Johns Hopkins and Stanford Universities, which had submitted a joint proposal, to work with RAND to combine their respective strengths in evaluating the Initiative. Wellness selected The Injury Prevention Center at Johns Hopkins University, which had experience researching and evaluating injury prevention policies, particularly in the area of violence and guns, to evaluate the policy component and the research component. The Foundation also asked Johns Hopkins to manage and coordinate the entire evaluation. The Stanford Center for Research in Disease Prevention would evaluate the third component, the community action program and the CAPs themselves, while RAND would evaluate the fourth component, leadership development, while also analyzing criminal justice data from the CAP communities. It was a forced marriage, to be sure, but one the Foundation felt had to be made since RAND "had strong experience in evaluating prevention programs in the criminal justice sector," according to the staff's grant recommendation, while Johns Hopkins and Stanford had assessed community health impacts and studied how ideas get diffused through communities. They also emphasized the need for a culturally sensitive evaluation process. About two years into the evaluation, however, this forced marriage ended in divorce, with head of the household Johns Hopkins leaving because of differences with the Foundation over how best to measure VPI-related outcomes. At the request of the Foundation, RAND agreed to add to its scope the evaluation of the policy and research programs (begun by Hopkins), while Stanford continued in its original role.

"Wellness always maintained a high degree of reverence for the complexity of violence prevention. Because they did, they never settled for simplicity."

Community Grantee

Most social science researchers believe evaluations are expensive if they are done well. From the beginning, the Foundation was committed to undertaking a rigorous evaluation of the VPI, using scientifically valid measurement methods, which it understood would be costly. Initially budgeted at $4 million, the evaluation eventually ended up costing closer to $6 million – about 20 percent of the program budget for the first five years. In an early report to board members, Foundation staff wrote that by making this commitment to such an extensive evaluation, the Foundation was "breaking new ground," which entailed some risk-taking. In an area where evaluation had been drastically under-funded, here finally was a major foundation committed to advancing the field by earmarking a significant portion of the grant budget to finding out what programs were effective. Although an important goal of the evaluation was to inform the Foundation's own grantmaking, it also sought an evaluation "of process, outcome and impact with the intention of assisting local communities and the people of California to become more effective in preventing violence."[2]

Evaluating the Community Action Projects (CAPs)

IN ITS REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS, the Foundation laid out 11 questions it hoped the evaluation would answer. The questions were, as RAND evaluator Peter Greenwood put it, "extremely challenging" because Wellness wanted to determine "with a high degree of certainty" the role of the grantees in affecting complex societal changes, from crime reduction to moving bills through the legislative process. This would require the ability to distinguish the effects of grantee interventions in environments already being influenced by numerous factors beyond the VPI. Included among the questions the evaluation would investigate were "Which community action projects (CAPs) reduced violent behaviors in their respective communities?" and "What local (city/county) or state policies to reduce violence were developed or implemented as a result of this Initiative?" Among

2 Source: Evaluation RFP from The California Wellness Foundation.

other things, the Foundation also wanted to know whether VPI-funded research contributed new information about the causes and effects of violence, whether the work of community fellows had an impact on their communities, and whether the academic fellows continued to work in violence prevention once their fellowships ended.

Although Wellness had the best of intentions in seeking to prove the value of investing in violence prevention, the Foundation may have overshot its expectations in the hope that the evaluation would provide definitive answers to the questions it posed. This was particularly true with regard to the impact of the community action programs – individually and in the aggregate – on their communities. To maximize scientific validity, the evaluators would have had to compare the CAP communities to randomly assigned control groups equivalent to the CAP focal areas, to ensure that the results didn't reflect selection bias or factors external to the program. But besides the difficulty of finding appropriate control groups for the CAP communities, this type of evaluation design also creates an ethical dilemma: To what extent are real people with real needs being treated as "guinea pigs" to prove a program's impact? Some say this problem could have been overcome by providing incentives and compensation for control group participants, but that approach was not a comfortable one, especially for an initiative whose aim was to emphasize community approaches to violence prevention. Instead, the VPI evaluators opted for a case study approach complemented by a quasi-experimental design for the CAP evaluation, which they hoped would provide the necessary information to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs. But the 11 questions laid out in the RFP remained the same, despite the overwhelming challenge of proving a causal relationship between the work of the CAPs and the reduction of violence in their communities.

The evaluation, like the VPI itself, was an endeavor that the Foundation felt was worth the expense and the risk if it could contribute significantly to a better understanding of whether violence prevention programs work at the community level. In 1993, the science of evaluating community-based organizations with the intention of revealing quantitative evidence of outcomes was in its infancy. This form of evaluation continues to evolve today. "The VPI evaluation tried to quantitatively measure an area that was still being defined, where they were still developing indicators and clear objectives," according to Dr. Mark Rosenberg, former director of the CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, who advised Wellness during the planning phase of the VPI. But, complicating things further, the VPI pushed the CAPs to engage in activities (e.g., advocacy) beyond typical youth programming. The VPI grant had a clear objective to push the CAPs to expand their direct service work to include community outreach, engagement, and support for policy change at the local and state levels. This objective was a much more complex proposition, and measuring outcomes associated with these various activities would prove to be one of the greatest challenges for Wellness throughout the VPI.

The evaluation strained the relationship between the Foundation and grantees, both introducing new tensions and exacerbating tensions that already existed. This was particularly true for the CAPs, many of whom viewed the evaluation as an attempt to "grade" their performance using criteria they didn't fully understand or support. Despite the Foundation's commitment to multiple years of funding for the CAPs, the notion that taking VPI funding would subject CAPs to what they deemed "unprecedented scrutiny" was not easy to accept. It became an ongoing irritant to the CAPs that the evaluators represented an elite, academic world far removed from both the everyday challenges and struggles of people in low-income communities where violence is a daily occurrence and from the organizations themselves.

The evaluators spent much of their time working to overcome this problem with varying degrees of success. They needed the support of CAP program staff in order to develop relevant process and outcome measures that would meet their needs as well as the those of the Foundation. "For many CAPs, it took a long time to buy into the evaluation, to think it mattered and that the money spent on evaluation wouldn't be better spent on them," says

Caroline Schooler, the Stanford project director. Some say the grantees never completely bought into the evaluation in the format designed by Stanford and RAND. "In some cases, there was real animosity between the grantees and the evaluators about whether the research was beneficial to the people who were being evaluated," says Frank Acosta, VPI program officer from 1995 to 2001. Though the evaluation was originally designed to be more hands-off, the Stanford team took some steps to build a sense of ownership of the process among the CAPs, visiting the sites four times each year, meeting with administrators at schools where youth surveys would be conducted, and occasionally attending community events. Stanford also tried to include locally-based California State University students to assist with data collection in the CAP communities. But many of the CAPs remained skeptical about whether the evaluators understood their challenges and their points of view because of the racial and class divisions that existed between them and because the evaluators didn't observe their work in communities on a daily basis. Bernardo Rosa of Community Wellness Partnership of Pomona says he appreciated the efforts made, but never came to feel that the evaluators were adequately knowledgeable about the impacts of racism on youth violence in his community. "If you can't understand how racism affects our community, you cannot effectively evaluate what happens in our community," Rosa says.

"There was an assumption that the evaluation was connected to whether or not you'd get funding, and that really slanted and skewed the process."

VPI Advisory Committee

Some CAP staff members complained openly about RAND's politics and notoriety, stemming from its origins in the U.S. Defense Department, and the evaluation teams were consistently hampered by the reputations of their organizations as conservative, elite institutions. While RAND had little face-to-face contact with the CAP program directors, the fact that the Stanford team visited the sites raised its credibility among some grantees. In the end, the evaluators were able to forge working relationships with only a few of the CAPs, while others adamantly maintained their distance. Bernardo Rosa believes that although the evaluators made some attempts to understand the communities' perspectives, occasional site visits weren't sufficient. "I don't think the evaluators ever really understood what we feel," he says, echoing a sentiment shared by many other CAPs.

The CAPs were outspoken about the evaluation plans. Despite repeated assurances from the Foundation that future funding decisions would not be based on evaluation results, few CAPs were convinced, and thus, were eager to ensure the evaluators didn't measure outcomes that were beyond the CAPs' control. RAND's examination of crime data was particularly troubling to the CAPs who felt that the data were subject to numerous influences having minimal relationship to their work. These concerns led to the development of the Principles of Cooperation, a set of guidelines for CAPs to provide input on the evaluation process and on the evaluators' reports to the Foundation. In one of the most significant of these principles, the Foundation agreed that the evaluators' interim reports would mask the identities of the individual CAPs. The CAPs, of course, could share their individual agency data with the Foundation but such disclosures were not required. Although this concession made the CAPs more comfortable with the evaluation process, it left the Foundation without the kind of specific information needed to assess the successes of particular interventions. It also prevented the VPI co-funders – foundations which had each provided grants to one or two CAPs – from obtaining specific information about their grantees. "I was trying to figure out what was going on with the agency we had funded; we were able to get some of the evaluation information we needed as a grant requirement, and we paid for an organizational assessment," says Gwen Foster, who was then at the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, a co-funder of one CAP.

Developing outcome measures for the community

agencies was no minor task since there was considerable variation in program structure, design, and outreach. Even programs that appeared to be similar from agency to agency were actually based on very different approaches. Some organizations, like Community Wellness Partnership, were focused on community organizing, while others, such as Riverside's Inland Agency and West Oakland Health Council, viewed their mission largely as providing direct services to youth. And although Santa Cruz-based Barrios Unidos and Innercity Struggle (Los Angeles) worked predominantly with Latino youth, there were substantial differences between the beach town environment of Santa Cruz and Boyle Heights in the heart of L.A. The evaluation team also had to take into account varying definitions of "community" in determining each CAP's "focal area" (from which evaluation data would actually be collected). Sacramento-based Asian Resources, for example, viewed its service area not geographically but in terms of the Southeast Asian immigrant community which was spread throughout the Sacramento metropolitan area. As a result, there appeared to be no template for setting goals; each agency's process was unique and responded to the needs of their local communities.

Stanford's methods included surveys, interviews, and focus groups in the CAP communities as well as analysis of archival data. RAND contributed the criminal justice data analysis, which was then linked to the other CAP data. Stanford surveyed CAP staff, CAP youth and adult participants, collaborative members, community opinion leaders, community members, and youth in local high schools – 30 high schools in all – once per year. Obtaining permission to conduct the high school surveys was an enormous task, requiring outreach to school administrators, who weren't always receptive. "A lot of schools and program directors very legitimately wondered why another group of researchers wanted to come into their community to find out what's going wrong," recalls Kris Putnam, a member of the Stanford team. Developing questionnaires that would satisfy both the CAPs and school administrators – while also fulfilling the evaluation requirements – was yet another challenge. An "80-20 rule" was adopted, dictating that at least 80 percent of evaluation instruments would be the same for all CAPs, while no more than 20 percent would be tailored to meet the unique characteristics of the individual CAPs.

There were other data collection challenges. Archival data, which the evaluators hoped would show the difference between the CAPs' youth violence prevention activities prior to and during the VPI, was self-reported, with differing levels of detail along with what the evaluators believed were biases. And the crime data that RAND was analyzing did not fit the needs of the evaluation. Violent crime statistics from the FBI were not available for all of the CAP-specific focal areas (only citywide statistics are reported) and did not provide age-specific information. Thus, the data were not useful in creating a baseline from which to measure the CAPs' impacts on reducing youth violence in their communities.

Although the limitations of the data were disappointing, according to Peter Greenwood of RAND, that was a less fundamental problem than the fact that the CAPs' process and outcome goals were not explicitly linked to a reduction in youth violence. Yet, according to many observers, expecting the CAPs to demonstrate the impact of their work on youth violence rates was unrealistic, especially in a period as short as five years. "When we were working on smoking issues in Contra Costa County, we were not asked to show that our anti-tobacco work decreased the number of deaths attributed to cancer," explains Larry Cohen, former director of the Contra Costa County Health Prevention Program and long time member of the VPI advisory committee. "We were only asked to show that the amount of cigarette purchases decreased. This was because there were generally accepted standards that if cigarette sales and tobacco consumption were reduced, lives would be saved. Similarly, if the CAPs reduced the number of federally licensed gun dealers, that would save lives and show that they were successful in their efforts."

In fact, most of the outcome measures were linked to the CAPs' direct services, not to intermediate outcomes related to the community change that the Foundation hoped would bring about a reduction in youth violence. For example, although the Foundation hoped to see the CAPs

move beyond direct services to build multi-sector collaboratives and to work toward changing environmental factors that contribute to youth violence, what was actually implemented by many CAP agencies looked more like typical youth development services, such as homework clubs and mentoring without any overt anti-violence focus. Despite the VPI's encouragement of community-building activities, the CAPs were accustomed to demonstrating their progress in terms of the number of youth they "reached." Ultimately, the process and outcome measures they and the evaluators agreed upon were linked to direct service provision. "There was a disconnect: The Foundation was looking for community change, but the majority of the community groups were geared toward setting up youth peace groups and those kinds of programs involving a smaller number of youth," says Kris Putnam. With some exceptions[3], the CAPs were not intensely engaged in the kind of community-organizing efforts that led to policy change, although many did increase their capacity to collaborate in the community and reach out to new partners.

"You had all these evaluators who didn't have the tools to evaluate our passion and our pain, and yet that's exactly what they were trying to do."

Community Grantee

The gap between program design and implementation is a common problem in determining the validity of evaluation results, according to Delbert Elliott, director of the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado. "There's more program failure associated with the failure to properly implement a program than there is with the program not being well thought-out or well-designed," Elliott adds. In the case of the VPI, implementation at the community level was defined differently in each community and expected outcomes were so varied that a standard evaluation was extremely challenging. For many of the CAPs, forging partnerships to improve local youth services delivery proved more fruitful than working on the VPI policy objectives.[4] For example, local elected and law enforcement officials weren't interested in stricter gun control in Riverside, but the CAP, People Reaching Out (PRO), pushed for the creation of a city-wide youth advisory council, made up of service providers and city agencies that would meet monthly to coordinate their activities. PRO has also developed a strong relationship with the school district, which provides the group with offices and administrative support. "People Reaching Out hasn't done as much policy work as other CAPs, but we serve youth by finding ways to institutionalize our program within our community," says former executive director Kimberly Thomas.

Some of the CAPs' reluctance to aggressively engage in the VPI's stated policy goals may have been due to the fact that these policy goals were determined without their input, or it may be attributed to the pressures of an evaluation that focused on measuring services. The challenges the CAPs faced in their efforts to bring about community change on a complex issue such as youth violence have also been cited by observers as an obstacles to CAP involvement in policy goals. Looking solely at quantitative surveys and police data, it can appear as if the CAPs were not effective in mobilizing their communities to address youth violence in a comprehensive way. With the benefit of hindsight, many within and external to the Foundation believe the CAPs and the Foundation would have been better served by an evaluation that measured the CAPs' progress toward more reasonable goals. Examples of these measures might have been encouraging community involvement in the creation of constituencies for whom youth violence prevention is a priority, or focusing on the reduction of risk factors for violence (such as young

3 Community Wellness Partnership, La Familia Counseling Center, and Barrios Unidos are cited most widely by Foundation staff and evaluators as having been most involved in advocacy.

4 The Foundation "strongly encouraged" the CAPs to actively participate in statewide and local policy efforts, but did not force them to. The VPI policy objectives – reducing youth access to guns to prevent injuries and deaths and increasing state resources for youth violence prevention programs – were determined prior to the awarding of the CAP grants.

people's lack of meaningful relationships with adults, or an increase in protective factors, such as a strong community infrastructure). Still others think the evaluation should have been more of a documentation of change in the CAP communities. "The evaluators weren't practitioners and they didn't understand prevention or intervention. They could have measured the reduction of risk factors and the increase of protective factors in building resiliency," says Loretta Middleton, a youth violence prevention director in San Diego schools who was a member of the VPI Advisory Committee. "I was very proud of what the CAPs were doing in terms of working with schools, law enforcement, community workers, and youth. But they didn't get credit for it."

Advisory committee member Rubén Gonzales believes that a participatory evaluation, a model designed to provide regular feedback to organizations which can then use that information to improve their programs along the way, would have been more valuable for the CAPs and for the Foundation. "Unfortunately, the evaluation was not geared toward informing the people being evaluated; it was really about informing the Foundation," Gonzales says. Nevertheless, some participatory mechanisms evolved during the five years of the VPI evaluation process, including regular meetings at the CAP sites where Stanford reviewed the data and provided advice on how to use it to achieve funding or program goals. For some of the CAP program directors, the VPI evaluation was the first time they'd had access to any real data about their programs and about the neighborhoods they served, data they "would never otherwise have been able to get," according to Anita Barnes, executive director of La Familia Counseling Center in Sacramento. Once the evaluation results were released, they may have provided some benefit to the CAPs as they sought funding for their programs, but it is unclear whether the data had much of an impact on their programs in the long term.

To some observers, the sheer scale of the evaluation precluded any real self-evaluation among the CAPs. Because they were focused on meeting the information demands of the evaluation, the CAPs did not develop their own internal capacity to evaluate their progress in reaching the goals they'd set out for themselves. Thus, the disappointment was even greater when the evaluation – despite the huge amount of data gathered – was unable to definitively determine if the CAPs' community change efforts had been effective, even in communities like Pomona, where Community Wellness Partnership had been a major part of successful campaigns to pass ordinances limiting access to guns.

Long before the first five years of the Initiative ended, the Foundation and the evaluators had reached a stalemate over the CAP evaluation. The Foundation, concerned that the evaluation results were not definitive and anxious to know about the CAPs' experiences, requested more descriptive information from the evaluators. But the evaluators felt they could not change methods midstream and were limited to merely adding to the list of questions used in interviews and focus groups as a way to obtain more qualitative information. Aside from the impossibility of drawing a direct link between the CAPs and a community-wide reduction in violence, the evaluation was also unable to clearly define the role of the CAPs in bringing about community change or to demonstrate the effectiveness of specific CAP prevention programs. Given the lack of clear indicators of the CAPs' impacts, dissemination of the evaluation results became a low priority.

Aside from a handful of conference presentations, the wealth of data and other information about youth and violence prevention in the 16 CAP communities simply sat on a shelf, due in some measure to staff changes at both the Foundation and within the evaluation team. To some active supporters and participants in the VPI, especially members of the Advisory Committee, it was as if the evaluation might not have happened at all. "The story of what The California Wellness Foundation was doing was not being told," says Larry Cohen. "What needed to be said was that the Foundation took on a very sensitive and difficult issue. They went right into it with a community premise and many leaders around the state accomplished a lot of things that would not have happened without the support, mentoring, and confidence that was shown by the Foundation."

So, did the CAPs' apprehension that the evaluation would be used to determine future

funding come true? According to the Foundation, the decision to phase out funding for some of the 16 CAPs in 1998 had more to do with the completion of many of the co-funders' commitments and the desire to use Foundation funds to reinvest in the strongest organizations and support them with quality, sustained technical assistance. After a review of the CAPs' progress and activities, the Foundation decided to provide seven CAPs with "bridge funding" for two years while the other nine were awarded five additional years of funding.

As the Foundation began the second five years of funding, it added a new community grants program: Promising Practices. Recognizing that the elimination of several CAPs left a void in some communities and that the youth violence prevention field outside the VPI had grown since the start of the Initiative, the Foundation funded 12 community-based Promising Practices organizations around the state. However, these groups were not integrated with the VPI policy program and their work was not evaluated.

"The evaluation results were helpful, but they didn't help us understand what was working elsewhere."

Community Grantee

Distinguishing Impacts on Policy

IF IT WAS DIFFICULT to delineate the CAPs' role in community change, it was equally challenging to parse out the contributions of the VPI policy program, led by the Pacific Center for Violence Prevention[5] in cooperation with other policy grantees as well as the CAPs. The mid- to late- 1990s saw a rapidly changing political landscape in California, shaped by term limits and new demographics, a post-Three Strikes electorate willing to consider some preventive approaches, and a growing national gun control movement shifting its attention to state-level policy. All of these factors may have influenced the California legislature as it considered firearms legislation (as well as the election of a Democratic governor, Gray Davis, who unlike his Republican predecessor was willing to sign off on the Legislature's passage of gun control laws). The convergence of favorable trends and events was clearly a lucky break for the Violence Prevention Initiative's policy agenda, but it also demonstrated the importance of committing significant, sustained funding in order to capitalize on political opportunities and to bring about legislative reforms.

At the start of the Initiative, the three VPI policy goals as outlined by Foundation leadership and the Pacific Center for Violence Prevention were to:

- advocate for public policies that reduce firearm injury and death among youth;
- shift Californians' definition of youth violence to emphasize a public health perspective and increase resources for youth violence prevention; and
- advocate for public policies that reduce access to alcohol.

Although the VPI was simultaneously funding alcohol and violence studies through its research component, the Pacific Center focused on just two of the three goals: restricting firearms and increasing state resources for youth violence prevention programs. According to Andrés Soto of the Pacific Center, a strategic decision was made to build momentum around gun control and to hold off on the youth resources goal until the later years. The efforts of the policy grantees were supported by a public education campaign spearheaded by the Bay Area public affairs firm Martin & Glantz

Preventing handgun violence against youth by promoting stronger gun control laws dominated the policy agenda during the first five years of the Initiative, in large part because momentum was building on the issue nationally. By the end of the first phase of the Initiative, 67 cities and six counties in California had either passed or were considering firearms-related ordinances, including "junk gun" bans, dealer restrictions, and other measures. These gains were clearly helped by the work of the Pacific

5 The Pacific Center developed strategies and coordinated VPI grantees in support of the Initiative's policy objectives.

Center and other VPI policy grantees, such as Legal Community Against Violence and Charles and Mary Leigh Blek of the Million Mom March. "California's always been a Wild West state and very pro-gun, yet there has been a significant change in attitudes and norms here in recent years," says Larry Cohen. "That's an outcome, in part, of the VPI work." In its evaluation, RAND credited the Pacific Center with having supported efforts to pass local ordinances, bringing law enforcement into the fold, and developing strategies at the state level to bring about changes in firearms legislation. Despite all these achievements, the evaluation says only that the Pacific Center's work had a "modest" effect on getting gun control measures passed into law since the beginning of the VPI. And although the evaluators did say the Pacific Center's gun control efforts may have been a crucial first step toward reducing youth violence, they stopped short of attributing California's steep declines in youth firearms violence during the 1990s to the Foundation-funded strategies. It was simply too difficult to control for extenuating factors – such as the booming economy and the effects of the 1994 Three Strikes law in keeping violent offenders behind bars – for the evaluators to reach conclusions about the effect of VPI-funded efforts on bringing about policy change.

But observers consistently associate California's place at the forefront of states that are serious about limiting access to firearms with the work of VPI grantees. Despite the pro-gun forces' attempts to portray the local and state gun laws as unconstitutional, an increasing number of legislators in the 1990s showed their willingness to stand up and be counted in favor of stricter gun control. Without the data, model policies, messages, and grassroots connections provided for them by VPI's policy grantees, legislators might not have been so proactive in moving a gun control agenda forward. In a serendipitous chain of events, the mid- to late-1990s also brought an influx of more ethnically diverse and liberal state legislators following the adoption of term limits in 1990. Many of the city council members, county supervisors, and others who had voted for gun control measures at the local level entered the legislature unafraid to take on the issue. Andrew McGuire, the director of the Pacific Center for Violence Prevention, believes the significance of VPI grantees winning against the pro-gun lobby cannot be overstated, despite the evaluators' assessment that there may be no direct link between VPI-funded policy work and the passage of stricter gun-control laws. To a certain extent, the willingness to fund grantees working for policy change has to be accompanied by the understanding that it is not always easy to see exactly how such change happened. Unlike service provision, efforts to change policy can be stalled for years despite the hard work of advocates, and only move forward with a change in administration or an unforeseeable event such as the killings at Columbine High School, both of which drastically changed the fate of gun control legislation in California.

Examining Violence Prevention Research

IN ASSESSING the VPI's research program, the evaluators met with some of the same challenges they had encountered with the policy program: Demonstrating the impacts of the VPI-funded research on policy was difficult when so many external factors couldn't be controlled for. The intent of the Foundation was to fund research on the factors contributing to youth violence in order to influence policy debates. According to the RAND evaluation, that happened in just a few cases. Research highlighted by RAND as having come closest to the intent of the VPI's research component included Jim Mosher's work on a model alcohol policy control act; María Alaniz's studies of the relationships between advertising, alcohol, and violence in Latino communities; Susan Sorenson's work on the role of guns in youth violence; and Garen Wintemute's report *Ring of Fire*, which identified a small group of Southern California companies involved in the manufacture of "junk guns" that were used in a disproportionate number of crimes. Alaniz's work (and her willingness to be present at public meetings) was seen as supporting the efforts of Latino groups attempting to reduce alcohol advertising and consumption in their

communities, in particular at the annual Cinco de Mayo celebrations throughout the state, which had become synonymous with heavy drinking. Wintemute's research – the subject of numerous media reports around the country – was a key piece of information used to show policymakers that concrete steps could and should be taken to limit the ease with which weapons get into the hands of young people. Some advocates go so far as to proclaim Wintemute's research as the most critical element in creating successful policies around gun legislation. But while these studies readily lent themselves to policy interpretations, other studies funded by the VPI did not make the same kind of public or policy splash. Their impact could not be evaluated easily and might not be evident for years to come, and as a result, the Foundation discontinued the research program after the first five years of the Initiative.

"It's hard to measure the VPI's impacts, but you know it benefitted California's work on firearms legislation."

Government Researcher

Understanding the Return on Investments in Individuals

EVALUATING THE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM, which included the community and academic fellowships, proved a much more useful exercise for the Foundation. Unlike the other components of the VPI, the leadership program goals were not tied to a reduction in youth violence or to any concrete policy goals. Instead, the purpose of the evaluation was to determine whether the pool of fellows represented the intentions set by the Foundation and to describe how the awards affected grantees' youth violence prevention efforts and accomplishments during the course of the grant. The academic fellowship program was intended to attract medical and public health scholars, particularly women and ethnic minorities, to the field of injury control and violence prevention; the community fellowships were designed to recognize the accomplishments of community-based youth violence prevention practitioners and enable them to take on new challenges in their work. During the five years that the evaluators studied the leadership component, the Foundation supported 40 community fellows and 32 academic grantees. The evaluators used a case-study approach to evaluate impacts. For the community fellows evaluation, RAND relied on in-depth interviews with the fellows, interviews with youth for whom the fellows served as mentors, and observations of fellows within their communities and programs. Although some community leaders initially expressed the same suspicion of the evaluation process that the CAPs did, according to RAND's assessment, the fellows were able to demonstrate to the evaluators their continued and often expanded work in violence prevention; "a strong commitment to mentoring youth;" and how their association with the VPI increased their access to resources and to policymakers.

Like the community fellows, the academic fellows received favorable evaluations. The evaluators described the academic fellows program as effective in reaching the Foundation's goal of increasing the number of "professional, trained health workers committed to violence prevention." The academic fellows were evaluated based on self-reports from phone interviews, interviews and other sources of information provided by the principal investigators at each of the nine sponsoring institutions, observation of fellows at meetings, and reviews of each fellow's portfolio documenting his/her command of core competencies relevant to violence prevention. Over the 10 years, the VPI provided support for more than 130 community and academic fellows, a substantial contribution to leadership of the field.

The Evaluation in Retrospect

A COMBINATION OF FACTORS contributed to the shortage of definitive findings about the VPI over the five-year period during which the four Initiative components were evaluated by Stanford and RAND. Communication between the Foundation and the evaluators wasn't as consistent as it should have been, and evaluators struggled to make their findings compelling for the Foundation and for grantees. Stanford would have benefitted from the communications expertise that Martin & Glantz provided to the VPI public education campaign, says Kris Putnam, a member of the Stanford team: "We could have benefitted from assistance translating our findings so they were more accessible." Still, the evaluation cannot be dismissed as merely a cautionary tale about evaluating community-based programs. It was valuable in many unintended ways, helping to shape subsequent evaluation processes both at Wellness and at other foundations, and the challenges it presented do not reflect any inherent problems with youth violence prevention approaches. "Hardly anything that happens in the arena of public policy is ever evaluated, and there's no reason to hold violence prevention programs to a higher standard," says Alex Kelter, director of the Epidemiology and Prevention for Injury Control branch in the state Department of Health Services. "No one knows if mandatory sentences or standardized testing works, but it's important to keep moving forward."

Despite its disappointment with the Stanford/RAND evaluation, the Foundation was determined to continue funding both the VPI and other youth violence prevention grantees. Before moving into the second five years, however, the Foundation wanted to get a better understanding of how the VPI grantees perceived their own challenges and accomplishments, and so it provided funding for a quick, qualitative assessment of the VPI by Fern Tiger Associates (FTA) in 1997. During a period of four months, FTA conducted one-on-one interviews with about 45 grantees as well as interviews with staff, evaluators, and other consultants, and also observed grantee meetings. Through that process, FTA identified a series of VPI accomplishments, including:

- legitimizing prevention activities;
- creating communities and organizations dedicated to youth violence prevention;
- increasing recognition of community-based data as a valuable tool for youth violence prevention groups;
- winning policy battles in local communities around the state;
- bringing new resources to the issue of youth violence prevention; and
- creating opportunities for peer learning, particularly through collaboratives.

The Foundation did not take up the evaluation again until late 2001, when it awarded grants for qualitative evaluations of the remaining VPI components to three organizations: Children's Hospital of Los Angeles, Leadership Learning Community, and Portland State University's School of Community Health.

Despite the challenges, the evaluation of the first five years of the VPI contains many valuable lessons for The California Wellness Foundation and other funders, including the potential for qualitative reviews of grantee work and accomplishments.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Funders must be strategic in determining the purpose of an initiative evaluation taking into account the unique characteristics of both the initiative itself and also of the diverse grantees within it. It is important to consider how practitioners might benefit from understanding its impacts. The evaluation may answer key research questions, helping advance both the field of the grantee programs and the field of evaluation; however, those questions should be determined prior to the start of grantmaking.
- Publication and dissemination of results (quantitative and qualitative) of innovative programs and grantmaking activities are beneficial to foundations and grantees, enabling practitioners in the field to better understand the intentions and results of projects they have not experienced.
- In developing a project evaluation impacting complex social issues, it is critical to be clear about what is being evaluated. If community change is a desired goal, it is important to define what kind of specific changes are sought.
- When evaluating the efforts of community-based organizations to bring about community change, it is helpful to assure the grantee of the foundation's confidence in the grantee and to clarify that the evaluation is designed to answer broader questions such as 'what community conditions need to be in place for policy changes to take place' or 'how to ascertain community readiness to change.'
- Evaluators generally measure "outcomes" and foundation program staff tend to focus on "process" measures. Often, an evaluation can determine whether there is any connection between "good process" and "good outcomes."
- Quantitative evaluations may not capture the many important elements or processes of community change. A process that provides a role for grantees in designing the evaluation, ties technical assistance closely to outcomes, and invests in the capacity of grantees to develop new skills to evaluate their own programs may produce more satisfying results – and in the longer term, greater knowledge and experience on the part of grantees to use their learnings more broadly as their agencies mature.
- It is essential to choose evaluators whose experience, as well as cultural and ethnic backgrounds, allow them to relate to grantees and to gain their trust. Grantees' likely perceptions of evaluators should be carefully considered and discussed with both grantees and evaluators.
- Dissemination of the results of a comprehensive evaluation such as the VPI's, is important and should be based on a well-planned strategy that includes identifying audiences and developing key messages. Evaluators should not be relied on to disseminate their findings to broad audiences.
- An evaluation of a foundation-funded initiative could be strengthened by an assessment of the foundation's own role. It is useful to understand which aspects were particularly helpful, to grantees or to promote the goals of the funder, as well as which ones resulted in additional challenges.
- Just as program work will ultimately build the capacity of organizations to design and deliver better programs, evaluations can and should inform the "art of evaluation," creating a more informed and culturally competent field of evaluators.