

# Gang Prevention in Fairfax County: An Updated Strategy to Address Recent Trends

Presented to the Board of Supervisors  
Housing, Health, and Human Services Committee  
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## *Introduction*

Gang activity and gang violence have been present in Fairfax County, and the region, for decades. A rise in gang-related crime last decade led to major new initiatives at the county and regional level. Most of the efforts begun at that time remain in place, and can be credited – along with a strong economy, effective schools and police, and a wide array of accessible prevention and other services for youth and families – with reducing gang crime levels and maintaining a low level of gang crime over the past several years.

A recent uptick in gang activity, punctuated by heinous murders featured in the news, has refocused public attention on gangs in Fairfax, Northern Virginia, and the country. An increase in gang-related crime, particularly among adults (as opposed to youth) has not brought crime and gang involvement to the levels seen in the mid-2000s, despite gangs' stated intentions to increase their presence in Fairfax County. But the safety and well-being of all Fairfax residents is of the utmost importance, and recent trends are troubling and in need of attention.

Gang-related crime in Fairfax County, particularly violent crime, is primarily committed within and among gangs. Nonetheless, gang recruitment occurs in the community and in schools, and recruitment and activity are particularly prevalent in certain neighborhoods. Other factors, including recent trends in immigration, have resulted in risk factors for gang involvement that were not as prevalent a decade ago. Therefore, it is imperative that the County reexamine its gang prevention strategy, to ensure it remains effective and responsive to current needs. Below is an overview of proposed spending of Carryover funds that have been dedicated to this issue. Detailed recommendations, and a discussion of existing efforts, are in the pages that follow.

## *Data to Drive Decisions*

In June 2017, a team of staff presented on gang prevention efforts at the Board of Supervisors Public Safety Committee. An excerpt of those slides related to gang data in Fairfax County is included as an appendix to this document. The full presentation can be viewed at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/bosclerk/board-committees/meetings/2017/responding-to-gangs-presentation.pdf>. In the creation of the strategy plan, the Leadership Team reviewed the presentation and data, including a set of recommended strategies, in order to inform our discussions and recommended approach.

**Our Proposed Strategy:** The Board's investments in and support for a healthy economy and strong systems of education, public safety, and health and human services have been the most effective gang prevention strategies. When combined with the county's ongoing prevention, intervention, and suppression efforts, the result has been consistently low levels of gang activity and crime in Fairfax

County. Recent increases point not to a need to develop a new approach, but to strengthen our existing approach by improving coordination and targeting strategies to the populations most at-risk for gang recruitment, especially reunifying families. Those strategies are emphasized in this proposal.

*Proposed Funding Breakdown*

Strategies are proposed in each of four strategic areas: Education, Awareness, and Prevention; Targeted Prevention and Intervention; Enforcement and Suppression; Data and Coordination.

The Board allocated \$500,000 in Carryover funding to this initiative. However, the Leadership Team recommends a more comprehensive and ongoing approach to address the gang issue and asks the Board to consider funding the proposed set of strategies, which, when combined, are likely to have the greatest potential impact on gang involvement.

The Leadership Team has proposed the strategies be implemented for three years with a reevaluation during FY 2020 to determine the need to continue, adjust, or conclude the recommended programs, activities, or actions.

***Recommended Strategies: Funding Overview***

<b>Strategic Area</b>	<b>Number of Strategies</b>	<b>FY18 Funding</b>	<b>FY19 (Baseline) Funding</b>
Education, Awareness, and Prevention Total	7	\$150,000	\$25,000
Targeted Prevention and Intervention Total	5	\$245,000	\$491,500
Enforcement and Suppression Total	1	\$75,000	\$130,000
Data and Coordination Total	4	\$0	\$0
<b>Total Funding Request</b>		<b>\$470,000</b>	<b>\$646,500</b>

## Education, Awareness, and Prevention

### *Overview*

Key risk factors for gang membership include social isolation, the lack of a sense of belonging, and proximity to others engaged in gangs. Gangs recruit by offering bonding, a sense of family, and a sense of belonging. They specifically target youth who are detached or otherwise don't seem to "belong."

These risk factors can be magnified by the process of reunification, when a young person comes to the United States to rejoin his or her family after an extended period of separation. Rising numbers of reunifying families over the past several years have contributed to the local gang problem. **Reunifying with one's family does not, in and of itself, make one more susceptible to gangs.** But when loneliness and a lack of belonging are exacerbated by the reunification process, those risk factors are enhanced, and individuals become targets for gang recruitment.

The annual Fairfax County Youth Survey has identified assets or protective factors that, when present in a young person's life, make the young person less likely to belong to a gang (or use drugs, or have thoughts of suicide, or engage in virtually any other risky behavior or experience any other poor outcome). Many of these protective factors would specifically counteract the risk factors for gang membership identified above. They include having parents and other community adults available to help them, having teachers who recognize when they do good work, and engaging in community service and extracurricular activities. According to the 2015 Youth Survey, nearly 14% of students reporting they had zero of six assets also reported gang membership. Among those reporting three assets, under 3% reported gang membership. And below 1% of students reporting six assets reported ever belonging to a gang.

Prevention activities must focus on developing the protective factors within youth and families that help them positively engage with others (especially caring adults), and develop a sense of attachment and bonding. Awareness activities should target "gatekeepers," parents, teachers, friends, and others who can recognize when a young person may be gang involved and can access help.

### *Ongoing Strategies*

- **Awareness:** Fairfax County Police, the Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, and multiple partners continue to make presentations and conduct awareness activities throughout the community. They often meet with specific key stakeholders (e.g., school administrators, program providers) to increase awareness regarding recent trends, warning signs, and available services and resources.
- **School Curriculum:** FCPS has included components on gang prevention and sex trafficking prevention into the health curriculum that all students participate in.
- **Out Of School Time Programming:** A wide range of out of school time (i.e., after-school and summer) programs help to keep youth positively engaged and to develop essential protective factors within their participants. The largest investment has been in the Middle School After School Program, which now operates – for free – five days a week in all middle schools, with transportation provided three days a week. Each middle school is required to identify specific gang prevention activities as a part of their annual programming plan. Other programs throughout the community, including Boys and Girls Clubs, teen centers, School-Aged Child

Care, sports programs, and many others, are critical to prevention efforts. A new Out of School Time Network links providers and is a common source of resources, training, and technical assistance to private and public providers.

- *Three to Succeed*: Through Healthy Minds Fairfax, the County and FCPS are collaborating on the development of a new messaging campaign focused on Three to Succeed, targeting parents to increase awareness of what they can do to improve their children's resilience.

*Proposed Strategies: No New Funding Requested*

- Develop a strategy for a coordinated approach – across FCPS, human services agencies, and federal and resettlement agencies – to early intervention screening and services for reunifying families. The strategy will be presented to the BOS for future funding consideration, if necessary. (Lead: DFS and FCPS)
- Update the gang prevention website to establish it as a cross-system hub of information, consolidating existing sites. (Lead: OPA)
- Offer gang awareness and prevention training and technical assistance to after-school program providers, faith-based organizations, and other community organizations and stakeholders through the Out of School Time Network. (Lead: NCS)
- Develop and implement a standard training on gang awareness for all FCPS principals. (Lead: FCPS)
- Complete the ongoing assessment of the Middle School After School program's effectiveness regarding gang prevention and propose recommendations to improve prevention efforts through the program. (Lead: DMB, FCPS, NCS)

*Proposed Strategies: New Funding Requested*

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>FY18 Funding</i>	<i>FY19 (Baseline) Funding</i>
Develop a social media strategy to counter recruitment activities by engaging young people at risk. Funding would support training, consultancy, and technical assistance to identify and engage in relevant social networks.	PD and OPA	\$50,000	\$0
Expand community education activities, including printed and social media materials and outreach efforts. Messaging should be created for youth and the general public, but should also include targeted messaging in English and Spanish focused on increasing awareness among parents of the issue, gang involvement warning signs, and available resources. Funding will support translation, targeted ad buys, and printing.	OPA	\$100,000	\$25,000
Education, Awareness, and Prevention Total (High and Medium Priorities)		\$100,000	\$25,000

## Targeted Prevention and Intervention

### *Overview*

As described above, some individuals and communities can be at greater risk for gang involvement. Risk may be heightened due to the presence of specific risk factors or because of new or existing interest in or contact with gangs. Targeted services are necessary to serve these individuals and communities; they require more intensive intervention to reduce or prevent gang involvement. Unsuccessful reunifications (when youth and their families fail to bond after reuniting) are a significant risk factor for gang involvement; hence, these strategies emphasize working with reunifying families.

### *Ongoing Strategies*

- The IPE program, operated by Northern Virginia Family Service (NVFS), is an effective approach to reduce youth violence and help prevent gang involvement for high-risk youth. The program, free to participants, works closely with families to provide the supports needed for youth to find positive connections in the community. It has a phenomenal track record of reducing gang involvement, but currently has a waiting list for participation.
- Place-based initiatives (e.g., Opportunity Neighborhoods, Culmore Partners, Neighborhood Networks) focus resources on specific communities with identified needs (not necessarily gang-related). These efforts enhance coordination, outreach, and access to services, and can be adapted to meet unique community needs.
- The Road DAWG summer camp program annually serves approximately 100 youth identified as at-risk for gang activity, connecting them to caring adults and increasing their awareness of the realities of gangs and ways to stay out of gangs and engaged in healthy behaviors.
- The Alternative Accountability Program (Restorative Justice) has been shown to be effective at keeping first-time juvenile offenders from penetrating the juvenile justice system, which increases their risk for gang involvement.
- Youth who are reunifying with their families in the United States are at significantly higher risk for gang recruitment and involvement than others. The Families Reunite Program, developed by FCPS, is a six-hour program involving the whole family that is being implemented throughout the county by FCPS, community partners, and grantee community organizations through the County's Partners in Prevention Fund Program. With especially vulnerable populations, FCPS has implemented Families Reunite, followed by the evidence-based 10-session Parent Project program. Parent Project was designed for parents struggling with teenagers with "destructive" behaviors. Participants learn and practice specific prevention and intervention strategies for destructive behaviors. Parents become preventers of gang affiliation, alcohol and drug use.
- As gangs have focused more of their efforts on sex trafficking, the County and FCPS's efforts to address domestic violence and sex trafficking – through awareness, law enforcement policy change, school curriculum updates, collaboration, and more – have become intricately tied to gang prevention efforts.
- A countywide and cross-system effort on providing trauma-informed services is leading to better engagement with, or more effective services for, individuals at-risk for gang involvement.

### *Proposed Strategies: No New Funding Requested*

- Implement year-long follow-up and "booster sessions" of the Road DAWG camp. (Lead: NCS, Police, FCPS)

*Proposed Strategies: New Funding Requested*

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>FY18 Funding</i>	<i>FY19 (Baseline) Funding</i>
Expand Northern Virginia Family Service’s Intervention, Prevention, and Education (IPE) Program to serve more youth and young adults identified as at high risk for gang involvement. Funding would support 2.0 FTE to add capacity and reduce waitlists by providing services to an additional 200 individuals each year (80 referred youth and 120 family members including parents and siblings).	NVFS	\$80,000	\$185,000
Enhance Parent Liaison programs in five school pyramids with high need for parent liaison support to intervene with families whose children are at risk for gang recruitment and victimization. Funding would increase the number of parent liaison hours to support both school-wide outreach to these families and the implementation of an intensive parenting program for families who have recently reunified.	FCPS	\$80,000	\$140,000
Expand NVFS’s intensive services for reunifying families. Funding would support 1.0 FTE Family Reunification Youth Counselor, and 0.5 FTE Trauma-Informed Individual and Family Mental Health Counselor, providing culturally competent case management, group services, and parent workshops for 130 youth and their families.	NVFS	\$65,000	\$146,500
Develop and implement a sustainable and systemic approach to implementing strategies targeted to elementary schools in pyramids with the highest levels of student-reported gang involvement, including: school administrator training, teacher and support staff training, and parent and student awareness. Funding will support the printing of materials.	FCPS	\$20,000	\$20,000
Targeted Prevention and Intervention Total (High and Medium Priorities)		\$245,000	\$491,500

**Enforcement and Suppression**

*Overview*

A major part of Fairfax’s ability to keep gang activity low is the effectiveness of police in suppressing crime. Adequate data collection and analysis, though, are critical to this effectiveness. Gangs are becoming less “visible,” as they learn ways to avoid law enforcement. Improved intelligence and data analysis will support police efforts to continuously improve suppression. Furthermore, enhanced data collection and analysis capacity will support ever-evolving prevention, intervention, and suppression strategies that can better be targeted to emerging trends and issues.

*Ongoing Strategies*

- The County’s Gang Unit is sophisticated, professional, and effective. Criminals get caught and prosecuted. Police collaborate with the community, partner organizations, other jurisdictions, and the federal government.
- The Regional Task Force, while underfunded, still serves an important purpose, providing a forum for regional law enforcement and prosecutorial collaboration.

*Proposed Strategies: New Funding Requested*

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>FY18 Funding</i>	<i>FY19 (Baseline) Funding</i>
<i>High Priority Strategies</i>			
Establish a Data Analyst position in the Police Department to better track and predict gang activity and target opportunities for prevention and intervention. Coordinate the extraction and utilization of data from disparate sources to prevent and address gang related issues.	PD	\$75,000	\$130,000
Enforcement and Suppression Total (High Priority)		\$75,000	\$130,000



## Data and Coordination

### *Overview*

Regional coordination, and strong regional funding are necessary because gangs don't respect county borders. Successful early efforts at addressing the gang issue in Fairfax and Northern Virginia were greatly enhanced by the regional and countywide coordination efforts.

Cross-system efforts are also strengthened by consistent and accessible data, which help promote common messaging and a common understanding of the issue among partners.

### *Ongoing Strategies*

- Fairfax County Police are the primary collector of gang crime data and regularly share updates with local and regional partners.
- The Northern Virginia Regional Gang Task Force has been effective at sharing information, police intelligence, and resources across the region, and in standing up important services such as IPE. Federal funding cuts, however, have limited the Task Force's role in recent years. The Board of Supervisors, on December 5, 2017, revised its "Recommended Strategies and Principles for the 115th Congress," which advocates for additional funding for the task force.
- Fairfax County continues to have a Gang Prevention Coordinator, who helps share information, convene partners, and serve as a countywide point of contact, while also performing other duties for the Court Services Unit of the Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court.

### *Proposed Strategies: No New Funding Requested*

- Develop and implement a cross-agency team to focus on intensive information sharing and coordination. (JDRDC)
- Establish standard and regular data collection and reporting procedures. (Police, JDRDC)
- Advocate for improved data sharing with ORR to help focus local efforts and target early intervention services. This may require legislative changes. (Legislative Affairs)
- Advocate for renewed federal funding and support for the Northern Virginia Regional Gang Task Force. (Legislative Affairs)

**Appendix A: Leadership Team Members**

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**Appendix B: Gang Data**

These slides were presented to the Board of Supervisors Public Safety Committee in June 2017 as part of a larger presentation on gang prevention. See <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/bosclerk/board-committees/meetings/2017/responding-to-gangs-presentation.pdf> for the full presentation.

FAIRFAX COUNTY VIRGINIA

## Regional data shows a recent increase, but gang activity is hard to quantify.

- **Gang-motivated** – Crime that is carried out due to organized gang direction. This activity is specifically carried out for the furtherance of the gang.
- **Gang-related** – These are events in which persons involved are known to be a gang and/or associate members. These are not gang motivated crimes. This data is used for criminal intelligence purposes.

Police Department intelligence data indicates there are at least 2,000 gang members and associates, involved with over 80 gangs, in Fairfax County.

See <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/police/citizen-awareness/gangs-faq.htm> for more information.

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FAIRFAX COUNTY VIRGINIA

### Homicides in Fairfax County

Year	All homicides	Gang-motivated homicides
2012	14	0
2013	9	0
2014	10	4
2015	13	2
2016	19	0
2017*	7	3

—●— All homicides    —●— Gang-motivated homicides  
Dates are calendar years.  
\*2017 Year-to-Date

### Incident Based Reporting: Persons Involved in Gang-Related Events in Fairfax County

	2015	2016
Adult	395	636
Juvenile	83	91
Unknown	65	96
<b>Total</b>	<b>543</b>	<b>823</b>

Source: FCPD

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