A Funding Mechanism that Supports Communities

Finding 3: State funding streams for local efforts are fragmented and uncoordinated. They do not support cooperative local efforts, ensure all communities have some resources, or prioritize funding to communities with the greatest needs.

In Finding 2, the Commission recommended ways to unify how the State crafts prevention policies and brings those policies to life. One of the largest and most important ways the State influences prevention is through the funding process.

Current funding procedures reflect the iterative and often experimental approach the State has taken toward prevention. Depending on how "prevention program" is defined, the State has more than 50 individual efforts, administered by a dozen state departments, lead by three constitutional officers.

Some communities have learned to successfully negotiate the money maze. Others have not. Some resources find their way to communities with the greatest violence. Some are tapped by communities that already were succeeding without state help.

To be eligible for funding, the State commonly requires local agencies to forge partnerships and work in collaboration with other agencies. But State funding streams are fragmented and uncoordinated and do not support the collaborative structure of local efforts.

The State needs to streamline its funding process to support the violence prevention goals of local communities. It needs to offer communities coordinated, flexible funding that encourages community-crafted responses to youth violence. It should provide some resources to all communities and additional resources where the needs are greatest – and it should provide accessible information on funding opportunities.

Multiple, Uncoordinated Funding Streams

While communities find financial support from various sources, the State is the largest funder of youth crime and violence prevention programs.[57] Lawmakers – seeking to address persistent problems or respond to a youth violence crisis – initiate most prevention programs. Sometimes state agencies conceive and seek legislative support for prevention programs they wish to administer.

Just how large an investment the State makes in youth crime and violence prevention is hard to say. According to the Department of Finance, the 2001-02 proposed budget seeks to allocate more than $288 million from the state General fund for youth crime and violence prevention programs. At the Commission's request, the department identified 9 state entities administering 27 juvenile justice programs for at-risk youth.

The Legislative Analyst in 1999 identified 13 state entities/departments administering more than 40 crime prevention programs, including some that target adults.[58]

Some of this disparity is the product of definitions. Because programs are administered by different agencies and because some programs have multiple purposes, the "prevention" label fits some programs better than others. But it also is important to point out that some "prevention" programs have funded services that are really after-the-harm interventions.

Beyond the definitional confusion, prevention efforts are muddled by organizational dysfunction. Multiple programs are administered by multiple agencies with little or no coordination among them.

What Counts as Prevention and Why it Matters

In political debates, prevention is often characterized as an alternative to incarceration. In that debate, resources committed to "prevention" are compared to the much larger sums dedicated to jails and prisons.

To strengthen their argument, these advocates tend to narrowly define which programs should be counted as preventing crime and violence. In turn, incarceration advocates are inclined to broadly define prevention programs, narrowing the spending gap.

This polemic frustrates efforts to create a meaningful inventory of programs that would allow policy-makers to better manage public investments in prevention.

It also can diminish the role that many existing social programs have in preventing violence. The director of California's child welfare programs rightly says that effective foster care can heal traumas and break the chain of violence. When community leaders in East L.A. were asked what the State could do to support their prevention efforts, they responded "fix our schools."

To many compassionate practitioners, violence prevention is not an alternative to incarceration, but a partner. Communities that are reducing violence are identifying troubled children and families, and responding to their health, economic, educational, social and emotional needs to the best of their ability. When violence occurs, laws are enforced and perpetrators are prosecuted.

To support these efforts, state policy-makers need an inventory of publicly supported efforts whose primary purpose is crime and violence prevention. It also needs to understand how and how well traditional public programs are holistically serving children and families.

Youth Violence Prevention Programs 2000-2001

(Dollars are in millions. State funds are in bold; federal funds are in italics.) [59]

Superintendent of Public Instruction

Department of Education

$423.62
$57.9

- After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships
- Community Day Schools*
- Conflict Resolution Program
- Continuation Schools*
- County Community Schools*
- Gang Risk Intervention Program
- Healthy Start
- High-Risk Youth Education and Public Safety Program
- Opportunity Schools*
- Partnership Mini-Grants/Safe School Planning
- Safe and Drug Free Schools Program
- Safe School Plan Implementation
- Safety Plans for New Schools*
- School Community Violence Prevention Program
- School Safety and Violence Prevention Act
- School/Community Policing Program
- Student Academic Partnership Program*
- Student Leadership
- Targeted Truancy and Public Safety

Governor

Office of Planning and Research

$10
$0

- Academic Volunteer and Mentor Service Program

Military Department

$9.8
$4.2

- Angel Gate Academy
- Turning Point Academy

Office of Criminal Justice Planning

$17.4
$35.1

- Community Delinquency Prevention
- Domestic Violence
- Drug Suppression in Schools
- Gang Violence Suppression
- Juvenile Accountability Incentive Program
- Juvenile Justice – Project Challenge
- Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention - Title II
- Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention - Title V
- Multi-Agency Gang Enforcement Consortium
- Serious Habitual Offender Program

Attorney General

Department of Justice

$3
$0

- California Gang, Crime and Violence Prevention Program

Health and Human Services Agency

Employment Development Department

$1.3
$0

- At-Risk Youth Demonstration Project

Department of Mental Health

$61.9
$4

- Children's System of Care*
- Early Mental Health Initiative

Department of Social Services

$465.6
$735.1

- Child Abuse Prevention Program
- Comprehensive Youth Services Act
- Foster Care Program*
- Juvenile Crime Prevention Program
- Promoting Safe & Stable Families*
- State Family Preservation Program*
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) for Probation Services*

Department of Alcohol & Drug Programs

$0
$10.2

- Adolescent Treatment Program
- California Mentor Initiative
- Friday Night Live/Club Live
- Law Enforcement/Education Partnerships and Gang Violence Suppression Program

Department of Community Services & Development

$1
$1

- California Mentor Program

Department of Health Services

$32.1
$28.7

- Adolescent Family Life Program
- Comprehensive Community-based Prevention Programs
- Out-of-Wedlock and Teenage Pregnancy Prevention
- TeenSMART Program

Youth & Adult Correctional Agency

Board of Corrections

$164.8
$0

- Juvenile Crime Enforcement and Accountability Challenge Grant Program
- Repeat Offender Prevention Project
- Schiff-Cardenas Crime Prevention Act of 2000 (Local Govt. Financing)

Department of the Youth Authority

$8.1
$0

- Gang Violence Reduction Program
- Tattoo Removal Program
- Volunteers in Parole
- Young Men as Fathers Parenting/Mentoring Program
- Youth Centers and Youth Shelters

* See endnote 59.

In the past, the Office of Criminal Justice Planning administered most state-funded juvenile justice and prevention programs. But over time, lawmakers became increasingly critical of the ability of the office to competently administer these programs. There were concerns that the agency failed to effectively oversee the programs it funded and that evaluations were inadequate. To observers, the organization appeared to be in disarray and lacking leadership. Morale was low and staff turnover was high.

As the State's interest in prevention grew, the roles of education, justice and human service agencies in violence prevention expanded. As a result, the number of programs increased and authority for their administration was spread among more state agencies. For example, the Office of the Attorney General administers the $3 million Gang Violence Prevention Partnership Program; the Department of Social Services administers the $10 million Juvenile Crime Prevention Demonstration Project, and the Board of Corrections is responsible for $48 million in Juvenile Crime Enforcement and Accountability Challenge Grant programs.

Most youth violence prevention funds are awarded through competitive grants. Of 21 grant programs administered by the Office of Criminal Justice Planning, Office of the Attorney General and departments of education and social services, 18 are awarded competitively. Exceptions to that practice are the recent $121 million Schiff-Cardenas Crime Prevention Act funds, which are allocated to all counties on a per capita basis.

Importantly, while the State's investment in prevention has grown, its funding process has not evolved to ensure that the resources are well spent and the needs of communities are met.

Five Key Problems

The Commission identified five key problems with the way the State funds its youth violence prevention efforts. Resolving these problems would result in more efficient expenditures of state resources and enhance the ability of communities to effectively pursue their prevention goals.

1. Funding streams are fragmented and uncoordinated.

Understanding that youth violence prevention requires community-wide responses, state agencies often require local agencies to collaborate with one another to be eligible for funding. Police departments, probation departments and schools are required to work together to qualify for school safety grants. For after-school programs, schools partner with parks and recreation, mental health and community-based organizations, even neighborhood businesses.

But multiple state agencies administer multiple, categorical programs – mostly in isolation from one another. This fragmentation frustrates the ability of community organizations to obtain information about state funding opportunities and to easily pursue those opportunities. Inflexible, categorical funding streams thwart community efforts to develop comprehensive solutions to complex youth violence problems or even to address specific problems unique to their neighborhoods.

Different programs ask for much of the same information, but in slightly different ways. Programs even define "youth" differently for the purpose of determining who can participate, and who cannot.

Five Key Problems

The Commission identified five key problems with the way the State funds youth violence prevention efforts.

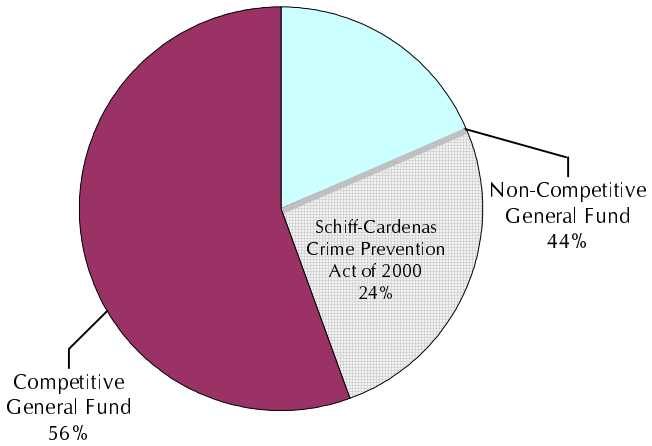
1. Funding streams are fragmented and uncoordinated.
2. Most funding is awarded through competitive grants.
3. Resources are not strategically allocated.
4. Funding cycles are too short.
5. Communities are not encouraged to adopt best practices.

Conceived and administered on a piecemeal basis, each state program has its own unique eligibility criteria, application process and requirements for collaboration. At a community forum in Fresno, a participant described the difficulty in completing multiple grant applications each requiring different collaborative partnerships. A police chief described being "courted" to support multiple collaboratives, each competing with the other for state funds.[60]

The administrator of a grassroots organization working to prevent gang violence said his program operated for 15 years without state funding. He needed the additional resources, but it was too difficult to identify funding sources and complete multiple, lengthy and complicated applications. The small nonprofit organization cannot employ individuals specifically to track down state funding sources and write grant applications.[61]

2. Most funding is awarded through competitive grants.

The State awards funds competitively in part because funds are limited and in part because prevention programs – to limit political opposition – are often sold as pilot programs rather than a statewide commitment of resources. Despite the evidence that prevention works, policy-makers remain skeptical about making long-term commitments to prevention initiatives.



Lawmakers and state agencies also view competitive grants as a way to ensure that state funds are well spent. When assessing the merits

of a grant proposal, state agencies try to assess whether an organization can effectively manage the program and be fiscally accountable. A track record of administering similar programs can weigh heavily in an applicant's favor.

The Superintendent of Public Instruction testified:

> *The strongest predictor of program success seems to be the extent of local commitment. This is evidenced in two factors that are emphasized in most grant processes. First are local resource commitments. Most grants require some level of local match. Agencies that go beyond the minimum in the amount and kinds of match they provide tend to have strong commitments to program success. A parallel important factor is the community support structure.* (The full text of the Superintendent's testimony is available on the Commission's Web site: www.lhc.ca.gov.)

The department funds only programs it considers to be high quality – based on good data, guided by clear goals, with research-based designs, and thoughtful evaluation plans.

While this strategy may help to steer resources to where they will be put to good use, it does not provide for the resources to be steered to where they are needed the most, and in turn where they could do the most good. Youth facing the greatest risks often live in communities lacking experienced service providers. Small, community-based organizations often lack managers with good fiscal management skills.

State program managers and local youth service providers agree that competitive grant-making rewards communities with the most skilled grant writers, rather than those with the greatest needs. Large agencies with the resources to either develop grant writing competence internally or hire consultants to write grants are at a distinct advantage over small agencies and those in rural communities.

The competitive process also encourages communities to identify needs and craft proposals for problems that the State – not the community – has identified. If, for example, the Legislature appropriates money for domestic violence, counties apply for the funds. If the State funds anti-gang programs, communities redefine their needs to qualify for those funds.

3. Resources are not strategically allocated.

Fragmentation frustrates the State's ability to quantify its investment and manage it as a portfolio of programs. Categorical violence prevention programs are conceived, funded and administered independently of other violence prevention efforts.

When making funding decisions, state agencies do not evaluate the needs of one applicant within the context of statewide needs and available resources. Individual grant applicants are typically required to provide information that demonstrates their needs, but the criteria is not uniform across state agencies and the evidence provided is often subjective. As a result, the funding process does not ensure that the State's prevention resources are allocated where the juvenile violence problems are the greatest – or projected to be the greatest in the future.

At the same time, the State does not assess who receives funds from the various programs and who does not. As a result, no effort is made to ensure that all communities have the minimal resources necessary to serve their youth or that communities with the greatest needs receive additional funding.

The funding process also fails to assess whether resources are allocated in the right proportions across the continuum of prevention and intervention strategies. Many individuals working with young people believe the State is too heavily invested in intervention compared to prevention, but that is hard to determine when the State's efforts are not organized and managed comprehensively.

In an attempt to address some of these shortcomings, the $121 million appropriated for juvenile crime prevention in fiscal year 2000-01 – under the Schiff-Cardenas Crime Prevention Act of 2000 – was allocated to counties on a per capita basis. This model ensures that every community receives some funds, which should be one goal of a state funding policy. But the per capita formula by itself does not target resources at communities with the greatest juvenile crime problems, or those expecting increases in their adolescent populations, or other socioeconomic factors that could identify need more accurately than total population.

Additionally, there are concerns about inequities within communities. State funds allocated through the Schiff-Cardenas Crime Prevention Act of 2000 are distributed by local planning groups headed by chief probation officers, giving law enforcement greater control over allocations. In the words of an advisory committee member, community-based organizations compete with the entire criminal justice system and "come away with nothing."[62]

Speaking generally about state funding, the director of a faith-based community organization in Los Angeles said that faith- and community-based organizations cannot effectively compete with law enforcement.[63] Implicit in the comments of both individuals are concerns that when the bulk of local resources are controlled by law enforcement, intervention rather than prevention strategies are emphasized and local efforts are not as collaborative as they should be.

4. Funding cycles are too short.

Many state managers and local service providers believe that funding cycles are too short. Most grant programs are for periods of one to three years. This practice is intended to limit state commitment, and to encourage local governments to assume financial responsibility for programs that bring value to their communities. But new initiatives may not be fully operational until the third year of funding. If grant funding ends after three years, meaningful outcome evaluation becomes impractical and promising programs end, rather than becoming self-sustaining.[64] Many individuals said that grants for significant initiatives should be five years or more.

5. Incentives to adopt best practices are not provided.

Because many prevention programs are envisioned as "pilot" projects, they are often conceived as experiments whose purpose is to prove or disprove whether a certain prevention program works. Alternatively, when competing for limited funds, community organizations told the Commission they feel pressured to characterize their programs as innovative and on the cutting edge.

One consequence of this approach is that community groups are not encouraged – and perhaps even discouraged – from adopting strategies that are known to be effective and have been refined and replicated by others.

Streamlining the Funding Process

For most of the last decade the solution to this increasing fragmentation was thought to be consolidation. A primary reason why programs were spread throughout the state structure was that no one entity was dedicated to youth, and youth crime and violence prevention in particular.

In *The Juvenile Crime Challenge: Making Prevention a Priority* (September 1994), the Little Hoover Commission recommended that the Governor and Legislature consolidate juvenile anti-crime efforts in a single agency to provide strong leadership and accountability. Similarly, the California Task Force on Juvenile Crime and the Juvenile Justice Response in 1996, and the Legislative Analyst, in the recent report, *Crime Prevention in California: Building Successful Programs*, also recommended consolidating crime and violence prevention programs in a single agency.

But there is little support among state or local agencies for consolidation. Recent legislative proposals to consolidate the State's prevention efforts have been defeated in the Legislature or on the Governor's desk. State agencies oppose consolidation because they would have to forfeit programs. Local agencies, while they are frustrated with the current system, do not

want to jeopardize their relationship with funding sources. The agencies that have been successful in drawing down state money have found value in having more than one agency – more than one discipline – involved.

Still, there is broad support and good reasons for developing a coordinated funding mechanism that captures the benefits of multi-disciplinary responses to youth violence and supports the efforts of communities. Integrating procedures – rather than consolidating programs – could garner the support of agency leaders and community organizations and may prove in the end a better solution than consolidation. The goals should be a comprehensive yet flexible funding process that informs policy-makers about violence prevention needs statewide, about the adequacy of current funding, and about how well resources are targeted at problems. Reforms could include the following:

Coordinating Prevention in Oregon

Under landmark legislation creating a comprehensive investment in youth and families, state agencies in Oregon are working together to develop a common planning and single grant application process for local agencies.

They are "braiding" – bringing together – separate state funding streams that support common purposes.

Oregon, like California, tried unsuccessfully to consolidate categorical funding streams. A member of the Oregon governor's staff told the Commission that they are now trying to accomplish the goal of coordinating and streamlining by evolution – not revolution.

A single needs assessment. One response is for all state agencies that fund youth violence prevention programs to adopt consistent criteria for one community needs assessment that would be used to apply for all violence prevention funds. For example, the Board of Corrections requires Local Action Plans for communities applying for the Juvenile Crime Enforcement and Accountability Challenge Grant.

Similarly, to qualify for Challenge Grant funding counties were required to form multi-agency Juvenile Justice Coordinating Councils and develop a local action plan. Counties had to describe their existing continuum of responses to juvenile crime and identify gaps in that continuum. To assess their systems, communities used juvenile justice and demographic data, community surveys and questionnaires, and conducted focus groups and interviews with youth, families and community leaders.[65]

The Schiff-Cardenas Crime Prevention Act of 2000 requires the county juvenile justice coordinating councils to implement comprehensive multi-agency plans.

These planning processes could be refined and standardized for use by all state agencies. They could be modified to provide the State with basic information about community needs and capacities, and they could be the first step toward a unified – rather than just streamlined – funding process.

Open-ended applications. Additionally, rather than chasing categorical funds that reflect state determined priorities, communities could be permitted to seek funds for solving the problems they have identified as most important.

The California Endowment has implemented a funding process that could provide a model for the State. The Endowment's CommunitiesFirst program provides communities the flexibility to identify their needs and develop solutions. Budget limits are not placed on programs and multi-year funding requests are accepted. Applications are evaluated on their merits and for compliance with broad foundation criteria, including relevance to the Endowment's mission and a demonstrated understanding of the issues affecting the target population. The Endowment has simplified the application process and will work with potential grantees to gain a better understanding of a proposal, offer advice on how it might be strengthened and even visit the organization prior to making a decision.

Joint evaluation by state agencies. Using a single needs assessment, standardized rating criteria and shared data, State agencies could jointly evaluate the requests of all applicants. Funding decisions that provide some resources to all communities and that allocate funds where the needs are greatest could then be made. State agencies could begin to "braid" and, over time, integrate funding streams that support common purposes. In turn, the Legislature and the Governor would have a better way of determining which needs are not being met and where additional investment is warranted.

Summary: Strategic Funding

The State's funding policy thwarts the efforts of communities to implement the most effective strategies, does not meet the basic prevention needs of all communities, or provide additional resources to communities with the greatest needs. Coordination and integration of state funding streams would enhance the ability of the State to organize and manage its prevention efforts and meet the needs of communities.

Recommendation 3: The State should reorganize the way it funds youth violence prevention to permit smart investments in community efforts. Specifically, the State should create a funding strategy that would:

- ***Streamline, coordinate and integrate state programs.*** Funding for youth violence prevention programs should be coordinated and, where appropriate, consolidated. Youth violence prevention appropriations to state agencies should be contingent upon their coordination with other state agencies. The State should develop simplified grant applications based on single, comprehensive needs assessments and, over time, single applications for joint and simultaneous consideration by state agencies with grant programs.
- ***Provide some funding to all communities.*** The funding mechanism should provide all communities with base funding for community-crafted prevention efforts. Local juvenile justice coordinating councils should develop and submit to county boards of supervisors and the Youth Violence Prevention Coordinating Council plans for prevention expenditures. The plans should identify the community health indicators to be addressed and the prevention strategies to be implemented. Communities should document what strategies are likely to be successful. Incentives, such as reduced evaluation requirements for strategies showing strong evidence of success, should be provided. Rewards also should be provided to prevention providers who develop new approaches that are proven to be cost-effective and are utilized.
- ***Provide additional resources to communities with the greatest needs.*** Additional funding should be available to communities with the greatest needs. To receive additional funding, communities should be required to target prevention efforts to youth most at-risk for violence or victimization and implement strategies with strong evidence of effectiveness. Funding to communities with special needs should be of adequate duration and not summarily terminated once programs show success.
- ***Include an inventory of state programs.*** An effective funding strategy should include an inventory of programs managed to inform the budget process, the policy-making process and the grant-making process. An on-line inventory of programs should be available to communities statewide.

Immediate Steps

- The Governor and the Legislature could direct agencies to develop a single application that provides common and basic information for all prevention programs, and if necessary a second form for unique information required by a specific program.
- A pilot project could be created involving one county or one region in which a single application is submitted to the State. All state agencies with prevention programs could review the application and determine which programs could support the community's efforts. The county could be given priority for available state funds that support its goals.
- The State should not renew any expiring prevention programs without a clear plan for how that program will be integrated into a coordinated prevention effort in terms of a unified planning and application process, streamlined reporting and effective evaluation.