

# THE GRYD INCIDENT RESPONSE PROGRAM: UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF THE GRYD TRIANGLE PARTNERSHIP

The GRYD Triangle Partnership reduces violence by building effective communication and trust between GRYD Regional Program Coordinators, the Los Angeles Police Department, GRYD Community Intervention Workers and communities.

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GRYD RESEARCH & EVALUATION BRIEF NO. 3

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## MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

The GRYD Research Brief Series highlights the accomplishments of the GRYD Office and its community partners as they implement the GRYD Comprehensive Strategy.<sup>1</sup> This research brief examines the impact of the GRYD Triangle Partnership on reducing retaliatory violence. The GRYD Triangle Partnership forges formal and collaborative relationships between GRYD Regional Program Coordinators (RPCs), GRYD Community Intervention Workers (i.e., CIWs; gang outreach workers), and the Los Angeles Police Department to reduce violence in GRYD Zones. This partnership is a fundamental component of the GRYD Incident Response (IR) Program and plays a defining role in our City's approach to public safety by partnering traditional law enforcement strategies with innovative, relationship-based policing efforts.

In Los Angeles, our investment in GRYD Community Intervention Workers combined with the role of our GRYD RPCs makes our approach unique. GRYD RPCs offer both a bridge and a buffer between intervention workers and law enforcement. Collectively, this triad supports violence reduction while also building trust, enhancing legitimacy, and ensuring the voices in the community are heard and acknowledged.

**ANNE C. TREMBLAY, JD**  
 GRYD DIRECTOR



Gang violence represents a long-term public safety issue for Los Angeles. According to the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), there are currently more than 450 active gangs in Los Angeles with a combined membership of over 45,000 individuals. Gangs have been responsible for most of the violent crime within the City of Los Angeles. For example, 53.4 percent of the 294 homicides in 2016 and 62.8 percent of the 282 homicides in 2017 were gang-related.<sup>2</sup> Recently, LAPD Chief Michel Moore reported that gang-related homicides were down more than 20% in 2018 and attributed the decreases to "...LAPD-led youth programs and the work of gang interventionists who try to prevent retaliatory shootings by tamping down rumors and talking gang members out of revenge."<sup>3</sup> Chief Moore's comments highlight the historical role law enforcement and gang interventionists have played in reducing gang violence in Los Angeles.

Despite the importance of LAPD and gang interventionists, coordination between them has varied from highly cooperative to mutually distrustful depending upon time, place, and context. One reason for such inconsistency was the informal nature of these relationships, often based on individuals independently working together toward a common goal. The informal nature of these relationships led to unpredictable levels in trust and effectiveness and ultimately undercut any chance for sustainability.

In 2009, the GRYD Incident Response (IR) Program was launched to bridge the divide between law enforcement and gang intervention workers. The GRYD IR Program focused on building stability and predictability into the relationship between law enforcement and gang interventionists by establishing the GRYD Triangle Partnership. The GRYD Triangle Partnership formally connects the LAPD, GRYD Community Intervention Workers (CIWs; i.e., gang interventionists) and GRYD Regional

Program Coordinators (RPCs) following a violent incident in order to reduce the likelihood of retaliation.

Results from a recent study showed that actions taken by the GRYD Triangle Partnership reduced gang retaliations by 41.2%, representing 27 fewer retaliatory gang homicides and 87 fewer retaliatory gang assaults per year in South Los Angeles alone.<sup>4</sup> These results are promising for the GRYD IR Program, and they raise a number of questions related to why this program is effective. The purpose of this research brief is to identify key themes and shared perceptions from interviews with members of the GRYD Triangle Partnership to characterize the nature of the partnership and why it is an effective component in GRYD's Comprehensive Strategy to reduce gang crime in the City of Los Angeles.

## RESEARCH ON STREET OUTREACH AND VIOLENCE INTERRUPTION

Evaluation literature reveals that the most recent U.S. efforts to reduce and prevent youth violence can be traced to the development of the Spergel Model, later renamed the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model, which involves five strategies: community mobilization, opportunities provision, social intervention, suppression and organizational change and development.<sup>5</sup> The Spergel Model/OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model contributed to the development of the GRYD Comprehensive Strategy and gave rise to several additional programs, including CeaseFire-Chicago and the Cure Violence model,<sup>6</sup> Baltimore's Safe Streets program,<sup>7</sup> the Phoenix TRUCE project,<sup>8</sup> Seattle's Youth Violence Prevention Initiative,<sup>9</sup> and Boston's Operation Ceasefire.

Across these programs, a common component involves the use of street-level workers, who intervene in planned and active violence and retaliation, assist those at-risk of gang membership by providing support and access to services, and deliver street intelligence on gangs and possible incidents of violence.<sup>10,11</sup> These individuals are referred to by multiple names depending on the program, including street workers,<sup>12,13</sup> community intervention workers,<sup>14</sup> violence interrupters,<sup>15,16</sup> and most commonly, outreach workers;<sup>17-20</sup> however, they generally fulfill the same role: providing an essential connection to and engaging the trust of the community.<sup>21</sup> Their level of credibility is based on their recognition as notable figures in the community and for many, previous gang involvement. Their experiences within the community, in turn, afford them a better understanding of the overall environment, violence and gang activity.<sup>22-24</sup>

However, the use of street-level workers has not always proceeded smoothly. Historically, law enforcement and intervention workers were expected to work together to reduce the likelihood of retaliation following an incident of gang violence; however, long-standing tensions often made their relationship inherently unstable and volatile. In most cases, gang intervention workers were at one time active gang members, were gang-affiliated, or are likely to have been raised in a context in which the relationship with law enforcement was viewed through an adversarial lens. Likewise, the worldview of law enforcement is guided by the training, professional mandate, and in some cases, moral, personal and/or religious reasons for viewing gang members as adversarial.

Some evaluations of gang violence reduction programs note, but do not discuss, the role of outreach workers at length, while other studies fail to mention them altogether.<sup>25-27</sup> One group of researchers reviewed 129 studies published between 1996 and 2013 and found that only 11 studies focused on components beyond a police enforcement strategy, included rigorous methodology examining outcomes, and specifically targeted serious violent crimes using firearms.<sup>28</sup> Of these, nine studies included street outreach as an important component of the intervention.<sup>29</sup> Several studies provided a critique of outreach workers' effectiveness, questioning whether the use of organized outreach strengthens or weakens the gang identity and/or the legitimacy of law enforcement in the community.<sup>30</sup> Conversely, others have argued that organized outreach programs coordinated with law enforcement are more effective than outreach workers working independently from law enforcement.<sup>31</sup>

Research supporting organized outreach efforts stresses the need to improve the relationships between outreach workers and law enforcement. For example, the City of Seattle conducted an analysis of nine rigorous evaluations on gun violence interventions and concluded that the relationship between street outreach workers and law enforcement "requires healthy ongoing communication, role clarification, and mutual respect."<sup>32</sup> The National Network for Safe Communities also reported improvement in violence intervention work when high ranking law enforcement leadership served as a buffer for communication between outreach workers and patrol officers.<sup>33,34</sup> Taken together, this literature calls for a new model for street outreach with improved relationships and communication between law enforcement and outreach workers, assigned roles and protocols, and involving third parties with the authority to mediate interactions. The GRYD Incident Response (IR) Program directly addresses this call by introducing the GRYD Triangle Partnership.

## 21ST CENTURY STREET OUTREACH AND VIOLENCE INTERRUPTION: THE GRYD TRIANGLE PARTNERSHIP

The GRYD Incident Response (IR) Program is a key part of GRYD's violence interruption efforts. The fundamental purpose of the GRYD IR Program is to reduce retaliation following a violent incident using the GRYD Triangle Partnership. The GRYD Triangle Partnership stabilizes the relationship between the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and GRYD Community Intervention Workers (CIWs; i.e. a mix of members of the community or ex-gang members working for GRYD Intervention providers in GRYD Zones) by introducing GRYD Regional Program Coordinators (RPCs) and clearly outlining roles and responsibilities for each partner. The GRYD Triangle Partnership is particularly unique to previous intervention efforts because it combines the assessment and intervention strategies reflected in CIWs work, the investigative and targeted suppression strategies within law enforcement's response, and the social work and community organizing principles of crisis intervention reflected in the GRYD RPCs work.

The GRYD Triangle Partnership is initiated once a violent incident occurs and is communicated to the GRYD RPCs and CIWs. Following the notification, all partners immediately connect with one another and coordinate their efforts related to rumor control and crisis intervention. GRYD Triangle Partners then work collaboratively to engage members of the community as quickly as possible to disseminate accurate information and prevent additional violence.

The GRYD Triangle Partnership is based on relational triangles drawn from family systems theory. In family systems theory, a two-person relational system (a dyad) is viewed as inherently unstable when subjected to sufficient levels of tension.<sup>35</sup> When a stressed dyad triangulates around a third entity, the level of tension reduces if the relational triangle is comprised of roles that are interchangeable and affirming. A relational triangle effectively facilitates collaboration when it reflects competence, and trust (i.e., stability) across all partners.

The use of a relational triangle directly applies and arguably facilitates a better relationship between law enforcement and GRYD CIWs by incorporating GRYD RPCs to support and mediate the relationship between gang intervention workers and law enforcement. The interaction across the partners affirms the roles and boundaries of each, while

adding flexibility to each entity's response to gang violence. Consequently, their relationships and interactions are stable and sustainable as they work collectively to reduce gang violence.

## RESEARCH METHODS

To explore how the GRYD Triangle Partnership works, a qualitative research design with Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval<sup>36</sup> was employed to collect, review, analyze, and describe feedback from GRYD Community Intervention Workers (CIWs), the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), and GRYD Regional Program Coordinators (RPCs) from June 2017 to June 2019. Narrative research techniques were used to collect data.<sup>37</sup> A description of how data were collected from each group is provided below.

### GRYD COMMUNITY INTERVENTION WORKERS

Twenty in-depth interviews and seven focus groups with a total of 52 participants were conducted with CIWs at 11 GRYD Zones to provide a comprehensive account of the GRYD Triangle Partnership. The CIWs each held a minimum of two years of experience working as GRYD providers. Some of the CIWs worked as outreach workers prior to GRYD and had up to 22 years of experience.

### GRYD REGIONAL PROGRAM COORDINATORS

All GRYD RPCs and two GRYD Regional Program Managers were interviewed. The GRYD work experience of the RPCs ranged from 2.5 to 9 years, and the two Regional Program Managers had worked for GRYD for 7.5 years and 10 years respectively.

### LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT COMMAND STAFF

Six members of the LAPD Command Staff with ranks spanning from Commander to Assistant Chief were interviewed. All six served in the department for multiple decades, played multiples roles in gang reduction efforts during the trajectories of their careers, and worked directly with the GRYD Office at some point in their careers.\*

## RESULTS

Analysis of data collected through interviews, focus groups and observations yielded ten themes depicting the dynamics of the GRYD Triangle Partnership and how it contributes to the reduction of violence across the City of Los Angeles. Each of these themes is explored below.

\* For a more detailed description of the analytic methods used for this study, please contact Jorja Leap at [jleap@ucla.edu](mailto:jleap@ucla.edu)

### **THE GRYD TRIANGLE PARTNERSHIP IS FORMALIZED BY AND ANCHORED TO OFFICIAL NOTIFICATIONS OF INCIDENTS**

All partners received notifications of critical incidents and shootings from the LAPD Department Operations Center (DOC) as they occurred. Receiving these official notifications engendered feelings of partnership and, as one GRYD Regional Program Coordinator (RPC) described, “the belief we’re all on the same team.” Sharing official information in real time reinforced a sense of trust between partners, emphasized by a GRYD Community Intervention Worker (CIW) who said, “in the past, sometimes we would get calls from the LAPD and sometimes we wouldn’t. Now we know we’re gonna get a call. We don’t worry about being left out—we’re in the loop.” LAPD command staff officers expanded upon this, offering that notifications “allowed for higher levels of communication in the aftermath of IR.”

### **MULTIPLE COMMUNICATION METHODS AND STRATEGIES HELP MAINTAIN RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS GRYD TRIANGLE PARTNERS**

Official notifications were augmented by phone calls, informal conversations and monthly formal GRYD Triangle Partnership meetings. LAPD, CIWs and GRYD RPCs all emphasized the significance of partners communicating with one another, with effective communication dependent on mutual respect and trust. As one GRYD RPC stated, “We have to keep the lines open at all times.” Leadership and personnel changes in the LAPD often posed short-term challenges, but effective communication and adherence to protocol helped minimize the problem.

### **GRYD TRAINING SUPPORTS A PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY FOR CIWS**

In the past, both law enforcement and gang-impacted communities have mistrusted CIWs, based on their mutual belief that CIWs maintain gang ties. However, as part of the GRYD Triangle Partnership, CIWs participate in training and are viewed as equal partners. As a result, CIWs have internalized a new identity as professionals engaged in the gang reduction effort. CIWs have discovered their meaningful role in community public safety efforts, with one CIW noting that, “Now it’s different—when we roll up to a crime scene, we know why we’re there. We are part of GRYD, we’re in a partnership.” Significantly, LAPD and CIWs collaborate in training opportunities together, which contributes to mutual understandings of one another. As one LAPD command staff officer explained, “it shows we’re all professionals in this together.”

### **GRYD RPCS PLAY A KEY ROLE AS MEDIATORS IN THE GRYD TRIANGLE PARTNERSHIP**

Historically, relationships between CIWs and LAPD have been characterized by varying degrees of trust and suspicion. GRYD RPCs play a vital role in communicating and mediating communication between LAPD and CIWs. When there is wariness or doubts expressed by either side, GRYD RPCs alleviate the tension. Resolving these tensions and developing trust between partners resulted in GRYD champions within the LAPD who recognized the value of the relationships.<sup>38</sup> As part of this, LAPD understood when to utilize GRYD RPCs, allowing CIWs to operate in the community effectively. One command staff officer explained, “The RPCs are the secret sauce.”

### **GRYD RPCS HELP CIWS MAINTAIN CREDIBILITY AND TRUST WITH THE COMMUNITY**

CIWs emphasize the need to maintain their License to Operate (LTO)<sup>39</sup> and their reputation for credibility in the communities they serve. GRYD RPCs act as a buffer between the LAPD and CIWs to avoid accusations of CIWs “snitching” or “selling out” as police informants. The GRYD RPCs protect CIW credibility and, in some cases, their lives, with one CIW observing, “I don’t know how we made it without the RPCs.”

### **THE GRYD TRIANGLE PARTNERSHIP HELPS BUILD COMMUNITY COMPETENCE AND RELATIONSHIPS**

GRYD RPCs rely on CIWs to provide key background information, neighborhood knowledge and historical context to guide the actions taken within communities. Guided by this knowledge, past relationships and community conflicts with LAPD change as trust grows. One LAPD command staff officer acknowledged, “GRYD has helped us to achieve better relationships with the community.” Additionally, the needs of the community and its residents serve as an on-going, primary focus of all three partners. In this light, a CIW offered, “You’ve got to focus on the community, you can’t be a part-time partner.”

### **THE GRYD TRIANGLE PARTNERSHIP LISTENS TO THE COMMUNITY IN RESPONDING TO VIOLENCE**

The interrelationship between the CIWs, LAPD and GRYD RPCs continues to be integral to communicating community resident needs and responding to those needs. All three partners were sensitive to behaviors around crime scenes controlled by the LAPD, which often involve large community responses and the threat of retaliation. An LAPD Command Officer explained, “we depend on the CIWs and the RPCs to communicate community concerns when we don’t hear them directly.” Responses to, and

management of, rumors and community frustrations were integral to the GRYD Triangle Partnership effectiveness because RPCs and CIWs conveyed the community needs to law enforcement, which RPCs described as “bring[ing] community voice into the relationship.”

### **STRONG COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS FOSTER COLLECTIVE EFFICACY AND PUBLIC SAFETY**

Fostering collective efficacy<sup>40</sup> was an unexpected dividend of the partnership. Both CIWs and GRYD RPCs noted increased community participation in public safety events, positive responses to partnership efforts, and actual efforts to communicate about problem areas and gang conflicts. In turn, the LAPD noted how they relied on the partnership to foster stronger relationships and ensure public safety, explaining, “We’re grateful to GRYD helping us work together.” CIWs viewed their roles as helping to build community, noting “Your visibility in the community on a constant basis is what makes the difference, so anyone can call you and ask for your help.” And GRYD RPCs described how working with the partners is what facilitated community safety, stating, “We earned their trust and helped strengthen the community.”

### **FIDELITY TO THE GRYD IR PROGRAM IS CRITICAL TO THE PROGRAM'S SUCCESS**

All three partners were invested and believed in both the GRYD Incident Response (IR) Program and the GRYD Triangle Partnership. CIWs were particularly rigid in their adherence to the GRYD IR Program, with one explaining, “We believe in the partnership. We believe in the GRYD.” The combination of adherence to the GRYD Incident Response Protocol and ongoing training that required the attendance of CIWs, LAPD and GRYD RPCs—at times together—ensured that the GRYD IR Program was not only followed but also institutionalized across partners as a standard response to the reduction in violence.

### **INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE GRYD IR PROGRAM CHANGES INTERNAL CULTURES**

As rates of violent crime and gang-related crime fell, CIWs and GRYD RPCs shared a sense of ownership and responsibility for the success that was reinforced by the LAPD. This was attributed to the trust that existed between the three partners. Their efforts were publicly acknowledged by the Mayor’s office and the LAPD Chief of Police and were accompanied by informal community support. All of this translated to CIWs, LAPD and GRYD RPCs identifying with and internalizing the GRYD IR Program. As one GRYD RPC described, “It’s like any relationship—you got to put time into it, and it develops and grows. We trust each other. The Triangle is a beautiful thing.”

The internalization of the GRYD Triangle Partnership has been integral to a cultural shift within the LAPD. Command staff officers described the GRYD Triangle Partnership as the “new norm” for the LAPD. While command staff offered that many were “skeptical and doubted the model at first,” they now view the partnership as part of a larger paradigm shift in law enforcement. When skepticism arises on occasion, command staff officers serve as role models of acceptance as well as stewards of program fidelity.

## **SUMMARY**

To date, no other violence intervention program has outlined and supported a structured partnership between street outreach workers, law enforcement, and a third, neutral entity. The GRYD Incident Response (IR) Program is founded on the principle that an unstable relationship between outreach workers and law enforcement can be stabilized with the addition of a third entity, a GRYD Regional Program Coordinator (RPC). An earlier study demonstrated the effectiveness of the GRYD Triangle Partnership on reducing retaliations to violent incidents in GRYD Zones. The current study attempted to explore the “black box” of the GRYD Triangle Partnership to better understand why this formal partnership may be a valuable and necessary part of gang reduction strategies.

Findings from this study produced ten themes characterizing and providing insight on how the GRYD Triangle Partnership improves upon previous attempts to build relationships between outreach workers and law enforcement. Collectively, these themes lead to three major findings related to its success.

### **THE GRYD TRIANGLE PARTNERSHIP BUILDS TRUST AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

Past relationships, particularly between law enforcement and GRYD Community Intervention Workers (CIWs) have often been troubled. However, with the shared purpose of reducing gang crime, there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between all three partners that is based on multiple lines and strategies for communication. All partners receive official notifications, which further builds trust and reinforces CIWs’ sense of the professionalism. This is aided by the unique role played by GRYD RPCs, who serve both as mediators to resolve tensions between CIWs and law enforcement and buffers from accusations of CIWs being accused as snitches.

### **THE GRYD TRIANGLE PARTNERSHIP BUILDS TRUST AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH THE COMMUNITY**

All three partners leverage their interrelationships to build communication and foster trust with communities. The success of these efforts depends on understanding past

history and prior relationships between partners and the community, particularly in communities that have had a complex past relationship with law enforcement. The community also serves as an invaluable source of feedback; partners ensure that community voice informs GRYD Triangle Partnership responses. Both GRYD RPCs and CIWs work to foster community participation and engagement while working with LAPD to create and reinforce feelings of community safety and well-being. These efforts create added value by building collective efficacy and community strengths.

### INSTITUTIONALIZING THE GRYD IR PROGRAM SUPPORTS FIDELITY TO ITS INTENT AND PROTOCOL

All three partners exhibit investment and trust in both the GRYD IR Program and its Triangle Partnership. Ultimately, though, the long-term effectiveness of the GRYD IR Program and its sustainability in the face of changes in mayoral or law enforcement leadership depends on its institutionalization across the GRYD Triangle Partnership entities. Institutionalization has been accomplished by clearly defining the GRYD IR Program and the roles and responsibilities of the GRYD Triangle Partnership partners, participating in on-going, cross-disciplinary training, and maintaining the fidelity of the GRYD IR Program throughout its implementation. All three partners have recognized the impact of institutionalizing the GRYD IR Program on nudging cultural shifts in how to approach gang reduction in the City of Los Angeles. Changing cultures to embed a partnership approach to violence is ultimately necessary to insulate the GRYD IR Program from changes in mayoral administrations or law enforcement leadership.

## MOVING FORWARD

This research brief builds upon an earlier evaluation of the GRYD Incident Response (IR) Program's impact on retaliatory crime by exploring how the GRYD Triangle Partnership contributes to violence reduction in communities served by GRYD. Study findings offer a guide to the other jurisdictions interested in forging a similar partnership. Specifically, key characteristics of any partnership that involves street outreach and law enforcement include:

1. *Partnerships need a third, neutral party.* The third party should be positioned both in role and authority to help mediate tensions between outreach workers and law enforcement and protect outreach workers from the perception that they have been co-opted by law enforcement. This third party provides a buffer for outreach workers within the community so they can be effective without losing credibility and trust within the community.

2. *Outreach workers must be viewed as legitimate partners with law enforcement.* The work of the GRYD Triangle Partnership is driven by the effective alignment and interaction of partners. Their participation as partners confers legitimacy and credibility on CIWs, creating their new professional identity: they are no longer gang members. Additionally, CIW access to ongoing training ensures professionalization, ameliorating law enforcement suspicion regarding past gang ties.
3. *Communication must be continuous between all three members of the partnership.* This begins with law enforcement sharing their notification system with all partners. There should also be the consistent scheduling of formal partnership meetings. All of this is reinforced with ongoing informal exchanges between partners and with third party partners, thus dispelling tensions that arise by facilitating interactions.
4. *The partnership must prioritize and value community inclusion.* The residents and stakeholders who comprise gang-impacted communities play an active role in partner effectiveness. Community feedback cannot be ignored. When residents express concerns about safety or perceived risk, these concerns must elicit ongoing responses in order to build communication and trust. Partners must always seek ways to ensure that community members feel they are part of their efforts, ensuring feelings of enhanced and increased public safety.
5. *The program must be implemented with fidelity and internalized by all partners.* The process of internalization depends on fidelity to the protocol, with a shared vocabulary consisting of terminology all partners use and no exclusionary language. Additionally, internalization fosters a cooperative atmosphere with all three members of the partnership respecting their unique roles and the value of collaboration.
6. *Institutionalization of the partnership by policymakers and in the community is essential.* Institutionalization is contingent on a reciprocal relationship with internalization and depends on acknowledgment of the partnership's effectiveness. With the interaction of these two processes, a program similar to the GRYD IR Program will persist through changes in any partner organization (i.e., new Mayor, new law enforcement leadership, new lead agency director, new GRYD Intervention providers, and so on).

Addressing violence effectively requires partnership and trust within the community and between the community and law enforcement. Accomplishing collaboration across

different entities can be challenging and difficult to sustain. The GRYD IR Program's Triangle Partnership illustrates how cities can bring together groups with different roles and perspectives to find a common ground. In turn, these partnerships augment more traditional law enforcement approaches and include the community as part of the solution. Although the GRYD Triangle Partnership is unique to the City of Los Angeles, lessons learned from how this

partnership operates is instructive to other localities focused on building comprehensive and effective gang violence reduction strategies.

#### SUGGESTED CITATION

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