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Problem-Oriented Guides for Police

No. 23

Gun Violence Among Serious Young Offenders

Anthony A. Braga

Center for
Problem-Oriented Policing

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About the Problem-Specific Guides Series

The *Problem-Specific Guides* summarize knowledge about how police can reduce the harm caused by specific crime and disorder problems. They are guides to prevention and to improving the overall response to incidents, not to investigating offenses or handling specific incidents. Neither do they cover all of the technical details about how to implement specific responses. The guides are written for police—of whatever rank or assignment—who must address the specific problem the guides cover. The guides will be most useful to officers who:

- **Understand basic problem-oriented policing principles and methods.** The guides are not primers in problem-oriented policing. They deal only briefly with the initial decision to focus on a particular problem, methods to analyze the problem, and means to assess the results of a problem-oriented policing project. They are designed to help police decide how best to analyze and address a problem they have already identified. (A companion series of *Problem-Solving Tools* guides has been produced to aid in various aspects of problem analysis and assessment.)
- **Can look at a problem in depth.** Depending on the complexity of the problem, you should be prepared to spend perhaps weeks, or even months, analyzing and responding to it. Carefully studying a problem before responding helps you design the right strategy, one that is most likely to work in your community. You should not blindly adopt the responses others have used; you must decide whether they are appropriate to your local situation. What is true in one place may not be true elsewhere; what works in one place may not work everywhere.
- **Are willing to consider new ways of doing police business.** The guides describe responses that other police departments have used or that researchers have tested. While not all of these responses will be appropriate to your particular problem, they should help give a broader view of the kinds of things you could do. You may think you cannot implement some of these responses in your jurisdiction, but perhaps you can. In many places, when police have discovered a more effective response, they have succeeded in having laws and policies changed, improving the response to the problem. (A companion series of *Response Guides* has been produced to help you understand how commonly-used police responses work on a variety of problems.)

- **Understand the value and the limits of research knowledge.** For some types of problems, a lot of useful research is available to the police; for other problems, little is available. Accordingly, some guides in this series summarize existing research whereas other guides illustrate the need for more research on that particular problem. Regardless, research has not provided definitive answers to all the questions you might have about the problem. The research may help get you started in designing your own responses, but it cannot tell you exactly what to do. This will depend greatly on the particular nature of your local problem. In the interest of keeping the guides readable, not every piece of relevant research has been cited, nor has every point been attributed to its sources. To have done so would have overwhelmed and distracted the reader. The references listed at the end of each guide are those drawn on most heavily; they are not a complete bibliography of research on the subject.
- **Are willing to work with others to find effective solutions to the problem.** The police alone cannot implement many of the responses discussed in the guides. They must frequently implement them in partnership with other responsible private and public bodies, including other government agencies, non-governmental organizations, private businesses, public utilities, community groups, and individual citizens. An effective problem-solver must know how to forge genuine partnerships with others and be prepared to invest considerable effort in making these partnerships work. Each guide identifies particular individuals or groups in the community with whom police might work to improve the overall response to that problem. Thorough analysis of problems often reveals that individuals and groups other than the police are in a stronger position to address problems and that police ought to shift some greater responsibility to them to do so. Response Guide No. 3, *Shifting and Sharing Responsibility for Public Safety Problems*, provides further discussion of this topic.

The COPS Office defines community policing as "a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies, which support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques, to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime." These guides emphasize *problem-solving* and *police–community partnerships* in the context of addressing specific public safety problems. For the most part, the organizational strategies that can facilitate problem-solving and police–community partnerships vary considerably and discussion of them is beyond the scope of these guides.

These guides have drawn on research findings and police practices in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. Even though laws, customs, and police practices vary from country to country, it is apparent that the police everywhere experience common problems. In a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected, it is important that police be aware of research and successful practices beyond the borders of their own countries.

Each guide is informed by a thorough review of the research literature and reported police practice, and each guide is anonymously peer-reviewed by a line police officer, a police executive, and a researcher prior to publication. The review process is independently managed by the COPS Office, which solicits the reviews.

For more information about problem-oriented policing, visit the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing online at www.popcenter.org. This website offers free online access to:

- The *Problem-Specific Guides* series
- The companion *Response Guides* and *Problem-Solving Tools* series
- Special publications on crime analysis and on policing terrorism
- Instructional information about problem-oriented policing and related topics
- An interactive problem-oriented policing training exercise
- An interactive *Problem Analysis Module*
- Online access to important police research and practices
- Information about problem-oriented policing conferences and award programs

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The project team that developed the guide series comprised Herman Goldstein (University of Wisconsin Law School), Ronald V. Clarke (Rutgers University), John E. Eck (University of Cincinnati), Michael S. Scott (University of Wisconsin Law School), Rana Sampson (Police Consultant), and Deborah Lamm Weisel (North Carolina State University).

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Karin Schmerler, Rita Varano, and Nancy Leach oversaw the project for the COPS Office. Phyllis Schultze conducted research for the guide at Rutgers University's Criminal Justice Library. Suzanne Fregly edited this guide.

The Problem of Gun Violence Among Serious Young Offenders

This guide addresses serious youth gun violence, describing the problem and reviewing factors that increase the risks of it. It then identifies a series of questions that might help you analyze your local problem. Finally, it reviews responses to the problem, and what is known about them from evaluative research and police practice.

Criminal misuse of guns kills or injures tens of thousands of Americans every year. This violence imposes a heavy burden on our standard of living, not only on groups that have the highest victimization rates, but also on the community at large. By one estimate, this burden amounts to $80 billion per year.[1] Although overall U.S. homicide rates declined between the 1980s and 1990s, youth homicide, particularly gun homicide, increased dramatically. Between 1984 and 1994, juvenile (younger than 18) homicides committed with handguns increased by 418 percent, and juvenile homicides committed with other guns increased by 125 percent.[2] During this time, adolescents (ages 14 to 17) had the largest proportional increase in homicide commission and victimization, young adults (ages 18 to 24) had the largest absolute increase, and there was much crossfire between the two age groups.[3] Gun homicide accounted for all of the increase in youth homicide. The youth violence epidemic peaked in 1993 and was followed by a rapid, sustained drop over the rest of the 1990s.[4] However, in 2000, more than 10,000 Americans were killed with guns, and guns are much more likely to be used in homicides of teens and young adults than in homicides of people of other ages.[5]

In urban areas, gun violence takes a particularly heavy toll, as vastly disproportionate numbers of young minority males are killed and injured, and increasing fear drives out businesses and disrupts community social life. Research has linked urban youth gun violence to gang conflicts, street drug markets, and gun availability.[6] Youth gun violence is usually concentrated among groups of serious offenders and in very specific places.[7]

The police can prevent youth gun violence by focusing on identifiable risks. While gun violence seems to pervade our society, it is remarkably clustered among high-risk people, in high-risk places, at high-risk times. This concentration of violence provides an important opportunity for police to strategically address a seemingly intractable problem.

Related Problems

For police agencies, the most pressing concerns regarding youth gun violence are why offenders target particular people, at particular places, at particular times. However, it is also important to recognize that youth gun violence is often linked to a variety of risk factors beyond the scope of problem-oriented policing. For example, it has been linked to changing demographics, adverse economic conditions, family disruption, media violence, and poor parenting skills.[8] These are sometimes considered the "root causes" of the problem. However, by the time gun violence problems come to police attention, the broader questions of why youth offend are no longer relevant. While police often help people access social services, they are best positioned to prevent youth gun crimes by focusing on the situational opportunities for offending rather than trying to change those socioeconomic conditions on which other government agencies primarily focus. Thinking about how likely offenders, potential victims, and others are to make decisions based on perceived opportunities is more useful in designing effective problem-oriented policing interventions.[9]

Youth gun violence is only one of many youth-related problems police must handle. The following require separate analysis and response:

- Gang formation
- Gang intimidation
- Gang crime
- Youth drug dealing
- Youth drug use
- Underage drinking
- Gun availability to youth
- Gun possession by youth
- Illegal gun markets
- Street drug markets
- Disorderly youth in public places
- Assaults in and around bars
- Street cruising
- Truancy

Factors Contributing to Gun Violence Among Serious Young Offenders

Understanding the factors that contribute to your youth gun violence problem will help you frame your own local analysis questions, determine good effectiveness measures, recognize key intervention points, and select appropriate responses. Research has shown that crime problems tend to cluster among a few offenders, victims, and places. Youth gun violence is similarly concentrated among a few offenders in a few places. This section reviews what is known from criminal profiles of youth gun offenders and victims, addresses the importance of gangs and criminally active groups in youth gun violence, and discusses the clustering in location and time of youth gun violence. It is important to note that the problem frames vary across the studies described below. In many jurisdictions, an initial interest in "juvenile violence" or "gun violence" shifted, as the problem assessments proceeded, to a focus on understanding and controlling violence, regardless of age or weapon type. However, in all cities, youth gun violence was the most important component of the problem. For example, in Minneapolis, problem-oriented research conducted on an emergent total homicide problem found that homicide was largely committed by youth ages 24 and under, who used guns and were known to the criminal justice system.[10]

Previous Offenses

Youth gun violence is concentrated among serious offenders well known to police and other criminal justice agencies. In Boston, an interagency group of law enforcement personnel, youth workers, and researchers examined the criminal histories of youth ages 21 and under killed by gun or knife in the city between 1990 and 1994, and of the youth offenders responsible.[11] Of the victims, 75 percent had been arraigned for at least one offense in Massachusetts courts, and 20 percent had served time in a youth or adult detention center. Nearly 50 percent had been on probation in the past, and many were on probation when they were killed. Of the offenders, a little over 75 percent had been arraigned for at least one offense in Massachusetts courts, 25 percent had served time, over 50 percent had been on probation in the past, and 25 percent were on probation when they committed the crime. Victims and offenders known to the criminal justice system had an average of nearly 10 prior arraignments, and nearly 50 percent had 10 or more arraignments. They had been arraigned for a wide variety of crimes, including armed violent offenses, disorder offenses, and drug offenses. In gang literature, this wide range of offending is described as "cafeteria-style" offending.[12]

A number of other jurisdictions have reported similar findings. In Minneapolis, Baltimore, Los Angeles, Indianapolis, and Stockton, California, gun violence was largely committed by and against youth with extensive criminal backgrounds.[13]

Gangs and Criminally Active Groups

Youth gun violence is concentrated among feuding gangs and criminally active groups. The Boston interagency group examined the circumstances of the youth gun and knife murders and found that nearly two-thirds were gang-related.[14] Most of the murders were not linked to drug dealing or other "business" interests; instead, most resulted from relatively long-standing gang feuds. In Minneapolis, nearly two-thirds of youth murders between 1994 and 1997 were gang-related.[15] In the Boyle Heights section of Los Angeles, slightly less than two-thirds of youth gun homicides were gang-related. Another 25 percent involved gang members as victims or offenders, but were motivated for reasons other than gang rivalries.[16]

Even in neighborhoods suffering from high rates of youth gun violence, most youth are not in gangs and criminally active groups. In addition, some gangs are more dangerous than others. To better understand the city's gang problem, the Boston interagency group mapped gang turf and estimated gang size.[17] They identified 61 different crews with around 1,300 members. Gang members represented less than 1 percent of all Boston youth, and less than 3 percent of youth in high-risk neighborhoods. The mapping also documented rivalries and alliances among gangs. Gangs had identifiable "beefs" with particular rival gangs, not all rivalries were active (i.e., shots were not currently being fired), and certain gangs were much more involved in conflicts than others. In Minneapolis, researchers identified some 2,650 people in 32 active street gangs as being central to youth gun violence; they represented less than 3.5 percent of Minneapolis residents between the ages of 14 and 24. The gangs tended not to be territorial; they operated fluidly across Minneapolis and nearby jurisdictions. In Boyle Heights, researchers identified 37 criminally active street gangs as being involved in youth gun violence.

However, gangs are not always behind youth gun violence. In some cities, criminally active groups who are not considered "gangs" are major gun offenders. In Baltimore, violent groups active in street drug markets were involved in numerous homicides in 1997.[18] Most of the murders occurred in or near a street drug market, and many victims and suspects were part of a drug organization or a recognized neighborhood criminal network. Researchers identified 325 drug groups that ranged in nature from rather sophisticated organizations, to structured neighborhood groups, to loose neighborhood groups. While drug disputes and street drug robberies contributed to Baltimore's gun violence problem, homicides often resulted from ongoing, non-drug-related disputes among people in drug-selling groups.

In thinking about the nature of your youth gun violence problem, it is important to recognize that the direct links between youth gangs, drugs, and violence are usually overstated.[19] Even in Baltimore, where most youth gun violence occurs in a drug market setting, most youth gun homicide is not drug-related. Gang and group violence is usually retaliatory or expressive (defending gang honor, status, and members). Today's offenders are often tomorrow's victims, and vice versa. Youth gun violence victims treated in Boston emergency rooms often had scars from past gun and knife wounds.[20] Youth gun violence in many cities appears to be a self-sustaining cycle among a relatively small number of criminally active youth. They are at high risk of being confronted by gun violence, so they tend to try to protect themselves by getting, carrying, and using guns; forming and joining gangs; acting tough; and so forth.[21] This behavior adds to the cycle of street violence.

The research confirms a high degree of overlap between victim and offender populations. It is important that you determine whether this overlap exists in your jurisdiction.

Geographic and Temporal Distribution

Like most crime problems, youth gun violence is clustered in specific places. Between 1987 and 1990, half of Chicago's gang-related homicides occurred in only 10 of its 77 communities.[22] In Minneapolis, nearly two-thirds of homicides were clustered in only eight of its 95 neighborhoods. In Boston, gang turf covered only 3 percent of the city's total area, but over 25 percent of the city's youth homicides, gun assaults, weapons offenses, and shots-fired calls for service occurred there. In Boyle Heights, spatial analyses revealed that youth gun homicide was concentrated in specific hot spots, in and around gang hangouts. Most of the Boyle Heights youth gun homicides were considered to be predatory, as perpetrators invaded rival gang territory to commit them.[23]

Youth gun violence often clusters in time. For example, in Boston, most youth gun violence occurred in the afternoon hours immediately following school release, as well as during weekend evenings. In Kansas City, Missouri, computer analysis of gun crime hot spots within a beat revealed that most gun violence occurred between 7 PM and 1 AM.[24]

Understanding Your Local Problem

The information provided above is only a generalized description of youth gun violence. Research has shown that criminal and disorderly youth gangs and groups vary widely both within and across cities.[25] (For example, Boston gangs were small, loosely organized, mostly neighborhood-based groups, unlike Chicago and Los Angeles gangs.) You must combine the basic facts with a more specific understanding of your local problem. Analyzing the local problem carefully will help you design a more effective response strategy.

Analyses of youth gun violence should combine official data with street-level knowledge to provide a dynamic, real-life picture of the problem. The experiences, observations, and historical perspectives of police officers, street workers, and others in routine contact with offenders, communities, and criminal networks are underused resources for describing, understanding, and crafting interventions aimed at crime problems. Collecting data through interviews and focus groups can help you refine existing practitioner knowledge.[26] For example, you can greatly enhance official data on youth gun violence by systematically reviewing and recording the circumstances of each incident in a working-group setting. Crime mapping is also an important tool in assessing youth gun violence. It can provide important insights on the locations of gun crimes, gang turf, and drug markets.[†]

Asking the Right Questions

The following are some critical questions you should ask in analyzing your particular problem of youth gun violence, even if the answers are not always readily available. Your answers to these and other questions will help you choose the most appropriate set of responses later on.

Victims

- Before the shooting, was the victim ever arrested, arraigned, or incarcerated? If so, how many times, and for what offense(s)?
- Was the victim ever on probation or parole? Was he or she on probation or parole when the shooting occurred?
- Was the victim a member or associate of a gang or criminally active group?
- What were the circumstances surrounding the victim's death or injury? Was it gang- or drug-related? The result of a spontaneous argument or other interpersonal conflict?

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† Interested readers should consult the National Institute of Justice Mapping and Analysis for Public Safety website, at www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/maps/.

- Did the victim know the offender?
- Did the victim or his/her associates have a conflict with the offender or his/her associates? If so, what was the conflict about? Was there prior violence associated with the victim's death or injury?
- Was the victim an innocent bystander killed or injured during a dispute between two gangs or groups?
- Did the victim own or carry a gun? If so, where did he or she get it, and why? Was the victim concerned about personal safety? Seeking status on the street?

Offenders

- Before the shooting, was the offender ever arrested, arraigned, or incarcerated? If so, how many times, and for what offense(s)?
- Was the offender ever on probation or parole? Was he or she on probation or parole when the shooting occurred?
- Was the offender a member or associate of a gang or criminally active group?
- What type of gun did the offender use, and where did he or she get it?
- Did the offender routinely carry a gun? If so, why? Was he or she concerned about personal safety? Seeking status on the street?

Gangs and Criminally Active Groups

- How many members does the gang or group have?
- Does the gang or group have any conflicts with other gangs or groups? If so, what are the conflicts about (retribution, race, turf)?
- Does the gang or group have any alliances with other gangs or groups?
- What types of crimes do gang or group members commit?
- Does the gang or group claim turf in particular areas of the city?

Locations/Times

- Where do gun assaults, gun homicides, and shots-fired calls for service cluster? Do they occur on public or private property?
- Do the incidents occur where youth commonly congregate? If so, why do youth congregate there? What do they do there?

- What accounts for the location's attractiveness? Closeness to home? Access to restaurants, telephones, or video games? Lack of visibility to the police and others? Absence of management or authority?
- Are other crimes occurring at the location? Is it a street drug market?
- At what times do gun assaults, gun homicides, and shots-fired calls for service cluster?
- Why are violent youth converging at specific locations at particular times? Does the timing involve school release, sporting events, parties, or some other common social opportunity?

Measuring Your Effectiveness

Measurement allows you to determine to what degree your efforts have succeeded, and suggests how you might modify your responses if they are not producing the intended results. You should take measures of your problem *before* you implement responses, to determine how serious the problem is, and *after* you implement them, to determine whether they have been effective. All measures should be taken in both the target area and the surrounding area. (For more detailed guidance on measuring effectiveness, see the companion guide to this series, *Assessing Responses to Problems: An Introductory Guide for Police Problem-Solvers.*)

The following are potentially useful measures of the effectiveness of responses to youth gun violence:

- Reduced youth gun homicides
- Reduced youth gun assaults
- Reduced shots-fired calls for service
- Reduced gun recoveries from youth†
- Reduced youth gun injuries (emergency room data are available from hospitals and state public health departments)
- Reduced severity of youth gun injuries
- Greater perceptions of safety among neighborhood youth, other community members, and local merchants

† It is important to recognize that gun recoveries may initially increase when police start a gun violence-reduction program. If the responses are effective, this initial increase will be followed by a decrease in gun recoveries.

Responses to the Problem of Gun Violence Among Serious Young Offenders

Your analysis of your local problem should give you a better understanding of the factors contributing to it. Once you have analyzed your local problem and established a baseline for measuring effectiveness, you should consider possible responses to address the problem.

The following response strategies provide a foundation of ideas for addressing your particular problem. These strategies are drawn from a variety of research studies and police reports. Several of these strategies may apply to your community's problem. It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances, and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem. Do not limit yourself to considering what police can do: give careful consideration to who else in your community shares responsibility for the problem and can help police better respond to it.

Recent evaluation research has revealed that police can prevent gun violence. While this guide categorizes police responses by whether they are primarily focused on offenders or on hot spots, in practice, they overlap. For example, when police focus on offenders in gangs, they sometimes also focus on gang turf and drug market areas. When police are deployed to prevent gun violence in particular places, they often focus on controlling the behavior of particularly dangerous offenders there. The distinction between the focuses matters less than the fact that police can prevent youth gun crime by strategically addressing identifiable risks.

The Richmond (California) Comprehensive Homicide Initiative demonstrates the benefits of an approach combining offender- and place-oriented responses.[27] This problem-oriented policing project entailed a wide range of community-based and enforcement actions involving local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. Offender-oriented strategies included intensive investigations, the apprehension of violent fugitives, immediate responses to gang violence to prevent retaliation, and the strategic use of prevention and intervention programs. Place-oriented strategies included towing potential getaway cars in areas with high numbers of drive-by shootings, enforcing building codes at drug nuisance locations, and assigning officers to particular schools. An evaluation of this multifaceted program revealed that it significantly reduced homicides in Richmond, particularly those involving guns.[28]

Offender-Oriented Responses

A number of jurisdictions have been experimenting with new problem-oriented policing frameworks to prevent gang and group gun violence among serious young offenders. Pioneered in Boston, this approach is known as the "pulling levers" focused deterrence strategy. It was designed to influence the behavior, and the environment, of the groups of chronic offenders identified as being at the core of the city's gun violence problem. The pulling-levers approach attempted to prevent gang and group gun violence by making would-be offenders believe that severe consequences would follow such violence and change their behavior. A key element of the strategy was the delivery of a direct and explicit "retail deterrence" message to a relatively small target audience regarding what behavior would provoke a special response, and what that response would be.

Evaluation research has revealed the pulling-levers deterrence strategy to be effective in reducing gun violence among serious young offenders. The well-known Boston Gun Project/Operation Ceasefire intervention has been credited with a two-thirds reduction in youth homicides, and significant reductions in nonfatal gun violence.[29] Subsequent replications of the Boston strategy have shown very promising results in reducing gun violence. An evaluation of the Indianapolis Violence Reduction Partnership revealed that homicides dropped by 42 percent, and that they were less likely to involve a firearm.[30] Less scientifically rigorous assessments in Baltimore, Los Angeles, High Point (North Carolina), Winston-Salem (North Carolina), and Stockton reveal similar reductions in homicide and firearms violence.[31]

Some key elements of the "pulling levers" approach to prevent gun violence are also part of Richmond, Virginia's well-known Project Exile to deter convicted felons from illegally carrying guns. This program is essentially a firearms sentence-enhancement initiative, as offenders are diverted from state to federal courts. At the heart of the project, all Richmond felon-in-possession cases are prosecuted in federal courts, with the defendants' facing an average five-year prison sentence if convicted. The project also includes training for local police on federal statutes and search-and-seizure procedures, a public relations campaign to increase community involvement in fighting gun crime, and a massive publicity campaign to warn potential offenders about zero tolerance for gun crime and about the swift and certain federal sentence. Project advocates claim success based on a 40 percent decrease in Richmond gun homicides between 1997 and 1998. This claim has been disputed, however, as a recent evaluation found that the decrease would have likely occurred regardless of the project;[32] the study suggests that nearly all of the decrease was probably attributable to an unusually high increase in and level of gun homicide before the project began. Nevertheless, it is important to note here that, as demonstrated in Boston, federal prosecution of gang-involved chronic offenders central to gun violence problems is an important component of an integrated violence reduction strategy.

1 Although they were not involved in Boston's Operation Ceasefire until after the strategy had been designed and implemented, the 10-Point Coalition of activist black clergy made it much easier for police to speak directly about the nature of youth violence in the city. Police could talk with relative safety about the painful realities of minority male offending and victimization, gangs, and chronic offenders. The clergy supported Operation Ceasefire's tight focus on violent youth, but condemned any indiscriminate, highly aggressive sweeps. Before the development of this partnership, Boston's black community viewed police activities to monitor violent youth with knee-jerk suspicion. With the coalition's approval of and involvement in Operation Ceasefire, the community supported it as a legitimate youth violence prevention campaign (Winship and Berrien 1999).

General Requirements for a "Pulling Levers" Focused Deterrence Strategy

1. **Enlisting community support.** It is important for community members to think that police efforts to address youth gun violence are legitimate. Communities will not support any indiscriminate, highly aggressive crackdowns that put nonviolent youth at risk of being swept into the criminal justice system.† Before implementing a pulling-levers strategy, police need to engage community members in an ongoing conversation about legitimate and illegitimate means to control crime. The community needs to be aware that most of the gun violence problem is concentrated among groups of serious young offenders, and that police will be tightly focusing their activities on those youth (see Box 1).

2. **Convening an interagency working group.** Criminal justice agencies often work largely independent of each other, at cross-purposes, without coordination, and in an atmosphere of distrust and dislike.[33] This is often also true of different units *within* agencies. To effectively address youth gun violence, an interagency working group of line-level personnel with decision-making power must be convened. The group should include members from all relevant local, state, and federal criminal justice agencies. Serious young gun offenders are often involved in a wide range of crime, and often vulnerable to some form of criminal justice intervention. For example, by enforcing and manipulating the conditions of community release, probation and parole officers can be powerful partners in influencing the behavior of serious young gun offenders under their supervision (see Box 2 on page 20).

† See the POP Response Guide on *The Benefits and Consequences of Police Crackdowns* for further information.

Boston's Operation Night Light was an innovative police–probation partnership that involved intensive home and street contact with high-risk offenders during the evening. It was a key component of the Operation Ceasefire intervention. As Corbett (2002) describes, probation officers are matched with officers from the Boston Police Department's Youth Violence Strike Force. The probation officers identify some 10 to 15 probationers they want to see each evening, concentrating on those thought to be "active" on the street. The teams use unmarked cars and wear plain clothes, visit probationers at home, and drive through crime-ridden areas to determine whether probationers are there who should not be. Probation officers gain a new credibility that did not exist when they conducted probation activities in the office. Police have a new tool that significantly increases their power. Many officers speak of their frustration at knowing that certain offenders are active, but being unable to control them because of the difficulties involved in detecting crime and apprehending criminals. While most probationers will not be detected committing crime, their failure to obey court orders can put them at risk of being jailed as certainly as being arrested for a new offense. Unlike people not on probation, they can be removed from the street for a variety of noncriminal behaviors. Feedback from offenders, police, parents, and community members indicates that the youth have become more cautious and more compliant in their behavior.

Prosecutors can give priority to crimes committed by particularly dangerous offenders and work with police to develop solid cases. Federal law enforcement agencies can contribute the extra resources of the federal government and apply a wider range of stiff penalties for certain gun offenses. Social service providers should also have a role in the group, as the best way to change some offenders' behavior may be to offer them substance abuse counseling, job skills training, recreational opportunities, and the like (see Box 3 on page 21).

3. **Placing responsibility on the working group.** In most cities, no one agency is responsible for developing and implementing an overall strategy for reducing youth gun violence. Most police agencies have units or groups responsible for responding to incidents, but not for preventing incidents. The working group needs to be charged with preventing incidents to keep its focus on the bottom line of reducing youth gun violence.

4. **Involving researchers.** Researchers can be important assets to the working group by providing thorough and reliable data to refine the group's understanding of the problem, testing prospective intervention ideas, and maintaining a focus on clear outcomes and performance evaluation. Researchers can also be helpful in producing basic accounts of the implementation processes and problem analysis findings that will be helpful to other jurisdictions.

Boston Community Centers' street workers were key members of the Operation Ceasefire working group and, along with juvenile corrections caseworkers, probation officers, and parole officers, added a much needed social-intervention and opportunity-provision dimension to the Ceasefire strategy (Kennedy, Braga, and Piehl 2001). The city-employed street workers were charged with seeking out at-risk youth in Boston's neighborhoods and providing them with services such as job skills training, substance abuse counseling, and special education. When the risk to drug-dealing gang members increases, legitimate work becomes more attractive, and when legitimate work is more available, raising risks will be more effective in reducing violence.

5. **Developing an effective communication strategy.** While enforcement actions are being conducted, it is important for working-group members to communicate directly with serious young gun offenders. It is crucial to demonstrate cause and effect to those subjected to a pulling-levers intervention. In essence, group members need to deliver a direct and explicit message to violent gangs and groups that violent behavior will no longer be tolerated, and that the group will use any legal means possible to stop the violence.[34] The group also needs to convey this message to other gangs and groups not engaged in violence so they can understand what is happening to the violent gangs and groups, and why. The group can deliver the message in a variety of ways: by talking to gang members on the street, handing out fliers explaining the enforcement actions (see Figures 1 and 2 on pages 22 and 23), and conducting forums with gang members in a public building such as a courthouse or community recreation center. Probation and parole officers can require gang members under their supervision to attend such forums. Social service providers and community members should also be involved, as they may be able to convince gang members that it is in their best interest to attend the forums.

Key Elements of a "Pulling Levers" Focused Deterrence Strategy

6. **Targeting intervention.** Gangs and groups of serious young offenders select themselves for intervention by engaging in gun violence. The working group should focus on gangs and groups of chronic offenders currently engaged in gun violence rather than indiscriminately selecting or developing a "hit list" of gangs, groups, or particular individuals.

Figure 1. Anti-gang violence flier.

Problem:

Violent Gang Member

Solution:

Armed Career-Criminal Conviction

If you have a criminal record and are arrested with a gun or even a single bullet, you could face a mandatory-minimum sentence of 15 years to life, with no parole.

Future Address:

Federal Correctional Institute,

Maximum Security Facility

7. **Sending the initial message.** Working-group members must send a message to violent gang or group members that they are "under the microscope" because of their violent gun behavior. Police, probation, and parole officers should immediately increase their presence and activities in areas frequented by the targeted gang or group, and explain that their increased presence and activities are a response to gun violence. Social service agencies and community-based groups should also increase their presence and activities in the area, and explain to the target group or gang that they support police efforts to quell violence and will provide help to those who want it.

8. **Pulling all available enforcement levers.** The working group should identify a variety of possible enforcement actions. The group should tailor its approach to the targeted gang or group and assess different options, including conducting probation and parole checks, changing the community-release conditions for supervised offenders, serving warrants, giving special prosecutorial attention to any past or present crimes committed by gang or group members, enforcing disorder laws, and shutting down drug markets run by the gang or group. The key is to use the gang's or group's chronic offending against them, as it provides many opportunities for police to intervene. The goal is to save violent offenders from themselves rather than remove them from their environments. Police intervention should be harsh only to the extent necessary to stop gun offending. For some groups or particular individuals, changing probation conditions or shutting down a profitable drug market may be enough. For certain hardened offenders, heavy federal penalties may be necessary.

Figure 2. Anti-gun violence flier.

Goal: Stop the Violence Intervale Posse

- They Were Warned; They Didn't Listen.
- Interagency Drug Operation:
  - Boston Police Department
  - Drug Enforcement Administration
  - Bureau Of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives
  - Massachusetts State Police
  - U.S. Attorney's Office
  - Suffolk County District Attorney's Office
  - Massachusetts Department Of Probation
  - Massachusetts Department Of Parole
  - Safe Neighborhood Initiative
- Aug. 29, 1996:
  - 15 Federal Arrests: Drugs And Conspiracy
  - Eight State Arrests
- Each Federal Charge Carries At Least A 10-Year Mandatory Minimum Sentence. Several Posse Members May Face Life In Federal Prison:
  - Confined Until Trial
  - No Possibility Of Parole
- The Investigation Proceeds: These Charges May Be Just The Beginning.

9. **Continuing communication.** It is critically important to demonstrate cause and effect to the targeted gang or group by directly and explicitly conveying the message. It should be very clear to the gang or group that the police are focusing on them because of their involvement in gun violence.†

† Police agencies should be creative in communicating with offenders. In Boston, face-to-face forums with violent gang members and working-group members were key in delivering the antiviolence message (Kennedy, Piehl, and Braga 1996a). In Minneapolis, working-group members visited gang-involved victims of gun violence—who were often in the company of their friends, in the hospital—and warned them against retaliation (Kennedy and Braga 1998). In Winston-Salem, North Carolina, older offenders were involving juvenile gun offenders in their criminal activities. In response, the Winston-Salem working group, while maintaining their focus on juvenile offenders, met with older offenders and explicitly warned them that involving juveniles in their illegal activity would result in focused police attention (Coleman et al. 1999).

10. **Providing social services and opportunities.** While law enforcement members of the working group are focusing on pulling the appropriate enforcement levers, social service providers and community-based groups should focus on diverting young offenders from their violent lifestyle. In the face of an impressive array of law enforcement actions, some gang or group members may want to take advantage of social services and other opportunities. This element of the approach allows the working group to provide some benefit to those who put down their guns.

Disarming Young Gun Offenders

11. **Searching for and seizing juveniles' guns.** The St. Louis Firearm Suppression Program (FSP) sought parental consent to search for and seize juveniles' guns.[35] While this program did not explicitly focus on "dangerous" offenders, it aimed to prevent gun violence by disarming a very risky population of potential offenders–juveniles suspected of gang or gun involvement. The FSP was operated by the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department's Mobile Reserve Unit, a squad dedicated to responding to pockets of crime throughout St. Louis. Officers conducted home searches based on citizen requests for police service, reports from other police units, and information gained from other investigations. An innovative feature of the program was its use of a "Consent to Search and Seize" form to secure legal access to residences. Officers informed adult residents that the purpose of the program was to confiscate illegal firearms, particularly those owned by juveniles, without seeking prosecution. They told residents that they would not charge them with illegally possessing a firearm if they signed the consent form.[36] While it was operating, the FSP generated few complaints from those subjected to searches, but received criticism from local representatives of the American Civil Liberties Union, who questioned whether residents could give real consent to search when standing face to face with police officers.

    A key program component was to respond to problems identified by citizens, and the program's success depended on effective police-community relationships. By requesting community input regarding the gun confiscation process, the police department developed a model for policing gun violence that put a premium on effective communication and community trust not found in most policing projects. The FSP also was designed to send a clear message that the police and the community would not tolerate juvenile firearm possession because it threatened public safety. Unfortunately, while the program gained national attention for

its innovative approach and seemed to be a very promising route to disarming juveniles,† the Mobile Reserve Unit underwent a series of changes that caused the program to be stopped and restarted several times; subsequent variations of the FSP did not use the same approach as the original one. Thus, a rigorous impact evaluation of the original FSP was not completed.

Place-Oriented Responses

In addition to focusing on high-risk individuals, police can prevent gun violence among serious young offenders by focusing on high-risk places at high-risk times. The Kansas City Gun Project,[37] and its subsequent replications in Indianapolis[38] and Pittsburgh,[39] successfully used place-oriented policing responses to prevent gun crime in gun violence hot spots. In general, these studies examined the gun violence prevention effects of proactive patrol and intensive enforcement of firearms laws via safety frisks during traffic stops, plain-view searches and seizures, and searches incident to arrests on other charges. The Kansas City and Indianapolis studies also examined whether focusing police enforcement efforts at problem places simply displaced gun crime to different places or times. Neither study found any evidence of significant displacement.

It is important to note here that the research evidence is currently limited to place-oriented strategies involving mostly traditional police activities, such as increased patrol and street searches of suspicious individuals, at gun crime hot spots. While these interventions have produced crime control gains and have added to law enforcement's array of crime prevention tools, problem-oriented police should focus their efforts on those characteristics that cause a place to be a gun crime hot spot.[40] Officers can reduce gun crime by changing the features, facilities, and management of problem places. For example, if problem analysis reveals that easy access to common areas in front of a high school causes youth gun crimes to be clustered there immediately upon school release, police should experiment with ways to limit access to these areas during problem times. The practice of problem-oriented policing is still developing, and additional research is needed on different approaches to controlling gun violence hot spots.

† Rosenfeld and Decker (1996) reported that, while the program was operating as originally designed, police seized 402 firearms in 1994, and another 104 firearms during the first quarter of 1995.

General Requirements for a Place-Oriented Enforcement Strategy

12. **Enlisting community support.** Some observers question the fairness and intrusiveness of aggressive law enforcement approaches and caution that street searches, especially of young minority males, look like police harassment.[41] However, the results of the Kansas City and Indianapolis projects suggest that residents of communities suffering from high rates of gun violence welcome intensive police efforts against it. They strongly supported the intensive patrols and perceived an improvement in the quality of life in the targeted neighborhoods. Thus, the patrols apparently did not increase community tensions. The studies did not, however, assess the views of people stopped by police patrolling the hot spots. The police managers involved in these projects secured community support before and during the interventions through a series of meetings with community members. Effective police management (leadership, supervision, and maintenance of positive relationships with the community) seems to be the crucial factor in securing community support for aggressive, but respectful, policing.

13. **Training officers in appropriate search-and-seizure techniques.** In general, the gun hot-spot patrol teams initiated citizen contacts through traffic stops and "stop and talk" with people on foot. They used these contacts as an opportunity to solicit information and investigate suspicious activities associated with illegally carrying and using guns. When warranted for officer safety reasons (usually after people acted suspiciously), police conducted "Terry"† pat-downs for weapons; these searches sometimes escalated to more thorough checks when police had reasonable suspicion of criminal activity, and arrests were made. Officers participating in these programs must be trained in appropriate search-and-seizure techniques so that they conduct only legally warranted searches and seizures.‡ In addition, police supervisors should stress to their officers that they need to treat citizens with respect and explain the reasons for stops.

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† In Terry v. Ohio (1968) 392 US 1, the Supreme Court upheld police officers' right to conduct brief threshold inquiries of suspicious persons when they have reason to believe that such persons may be armed and dangerous to the police and others. In practice, this threshold inquiry typically involves a safety frisk of the suspicious person.

‡ Beyond the landmark Terry decision, there are many court decisions that govern search-and-seizure techniques. For example, in Houghton v. Wyoming (1999) 526 US 295, the Supreme Court upheld police officers' right to search the belongings of the passengers of the car, incident to the arrest of any of the vehicle occupants. You should consult legal counsel regarding the application of search and seizure law in your jurisdiction.

Key Elements of a Place-Oriented Enforcement Strategy

14. **Increasing gun seizures.** The Kansas City Gun Project focused on testing the hypothesis that gun seizures and gun crimes would be inversely related. In other words, an increase in the number of guns seized in a targeted location would be associated with a decrease in gun crimes there. The evaluation revealed that proactive patrols focused on firearm recoveries resulted in a 65 percent increase in gun seizures and a 49 percent decrease in gun crimes in the target beat area.[42] The authors concluded that removing guns from high-risk places at high-risk times caused the crime prevention gains.

15. **Increasing contacts with potential gun offenders.** The Indianapolis program tested the effects of two different types of directed patrol strategies on gun crime. In the north district, police focused on suspicious activities by particular people at high-risk locations. In the east district, police increased vehicle stops in the targeted area. During the intervention period, the number of firearms seized in the east district increased by 50 percent, while the north district experienced a modest 8 percent increase. The evaluation revealed that there were significant decreases in gun homicide, aggravated assault with a gun, armed robbery, and other gun crime in the north district. The east district had no significant changes in gun crime. In this study, the authors suggested that simply increasing gun seizures in a specific area does not seem to be enough to cause crime prevention gains. Rather, in Indianapolis, the effectiveness of this approach seems to depend on the ability of police to increase their visibility and contact with likely gun offenders within very small areas.[43]

Responses with Limited Effectiveness

16. **Suppressing gangs without providing programs and services to address the social conditions that contribute to gang affiliation.** The typical law enforcement suppression approach assumes that most street gangs are criminal associations that must be attacked through an efficient gang identification, tracking, and targeted enforcement strategy. The basic premise of this approach is that improved data collection systems and information coordination across different criminal justice agencies lead to more efficiency and to more gang members' being removed from the streets, quickly prosecuted, and given longer prison sentences.[44] Typical suppression approaches have included street sweeps in which police officers round up hundreds of suspected gang members; special gang probation and parole measures that subject gang members to heightened surveillance levels and more stringent revocation rules; prosecution programs that target gang leaders and serious gang offenders; civil procedures that use gang membership to define arrest for conspiracy or unlawful associations; and school-based law enforcement programs that use surveillance and buy-bust operations.[45] Unfortunately, gangs and gang problems usually remain in the wake of these intensive operations. Police agencies generally cannot "eliminate" all gangs in a gang-troubled jurisdiction, nor can they powerfully respond to all gang offending in such jurisdictions.[46] Pledges to do so, though common, are simply not credible to gang members. Gang suppression programs' emphasis on selective enforcement may increase the cohesiveness of gang members–who often perceive such enforcement as unwarranted harassment–rather than cause them to withdraw from gang activity. Thus, suppression programs may have the perverse effect of strengthening gang solidarity.[47]

    Focused law enforcement is an important part of a comprehensive gang violence prevention strategy. Clearly, violent gang members need to be arrested and prosecuted for their crimes. However, these suppression approaches work best when based on a thorough understanding of the nature of gangs and gang violence problems in local jurisdictions and blended with social intervention, opportunity provision, and community mobilization activities.[48] Boston's Operation Ceasefire and the integrated approaches suggested by the U.S. Department of Justice's Strategic Approaches to Community Safety Initiative[49] provide practical examples of gang suppression programs integrated within this broader framework.

17. **Implementing gun buyback programs.** Gun buyback programs seek to reduce gun violence by reducing gun ownership. They typically offer money, goods, or services in exchange for firearms, and they usually offer amnesty and anonymity to those who exchange them. While police may check whether a returned gun was used in a crime, they do not use their findings to pursue the person who returned it. Unfortunately, evaluations have shown that gun buyback programs have no observable effect on either gun crime or gun-related injury rates.[50] They do not directly target guns that are highly likely to be used in violence,[51] and the characteristics of the guns collected reveal little overlap between crime guns and buyback guns.[52] While gun buyback programs are not effective in reducing serious gun crime, police departments should not be discouraged from launching problem-oriented attacks on the illegal sources of guns for criminals.[53] A thorough discussion of the prospects of disrupting illegal gun markets is beyond the scope of this guide. However, police departments interested in addressing the illegal supply of guns to criminals should consult the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives website, at www.atf.gov, and the Justice Department's Project Safe Neighborhoods website, at www.psn.gov.

Appendix: Summary of Responses to Gun Violence Among Serious Young Offenders

The table below summarizes the responses to gun violence among serious young offenders, the mechanism by which they are intended to work, the conditions under which they ought to work best, and some factors you should consider before implementing a particular response. It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances, and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem.

Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If…	Considerations
Offender-Oriented Responses					
General Requirements for a "Pulling Levers" Focused Deterrence Strategy					
1	19	Enlisting community support	Helps community members to view police enforcement actions as legitimate	…police inform the community that gun violence is concentrated among groups of serious offenders, and that they will focus their efforts on them	Indiscriminate, highly aggressive law enforcement can undermine community support
2	19	Convening an interagency working group	Combines the resources of multiple agencies to address the problem	…group members' agencies coordinate their efforts	The group should include members from all relevant local, state, and federal criminal justice agencies; social services personnel should be included to offer offenders positive alternatives to their behavior
3	20	Placing responsibility on the working group	Holds the group accountable for strategy development and implementation	…the group is explicitly charged with preventing incidents	This requires that the group members have a proactive, rather than reactive, mindset

Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If…	Considerations
4	20	Involving researchers	Provides the working group with thorough and reliable data	…researchers provide both background and strategically practical information, and evaluate performance	Researchers' findings may be helpful to other jurisdictions
5	21	Developing an effective communication strategy	Warns potential offenders about the consequences of committing gun crimes	…the message is direct and explicit, conveying clear cause and effect	Nonviolent gangs and groups should be informed of what is happening to violent ones, and why; probation and parole officers can require those under their supervision to attend forums, and social service providers and community members may be able to persuade gang members to do so
Key Elements of a "Pulling Levers" Focused Deterrence Strategy					
6	21	Targeting intervention	Ensures that enforcement is focused on chronic offenders	…police can differentiate between formerly and currently active offenders	Police must avoid indiscriminately selecting gangs, groups, or individuals for intervention
7	22	Sending the initial message	Lets violent gangs and groups know that they are under close scrutiny	…police immediately increase their presence and activities in areas frequented by the gangs and groups	Social service providers and community members should let would-be offenders know they support the police, and offer help to those who want it

Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If…	Considerations
8	22	Pulling all available enforcement levers	Provides a variety of opportunities for criminal justice intervention	…interventions are tailored to the targeted offenders' behaviors	Intervention should be harsh only to the extent necessary to stop gun crime
9	23	Continuing communication	Reinforces the anti-gun violence message	…police make it clear to violent gangs and groups that they are focusing on them because of their involvement in gun crime	Police agencies should be creative in communicating with offenders (e.g., by conducting forums with them)
10	24	Providing social services and opportunities	Diverts offenders from a violent lifestyle	…consequences for continued involvement in gun violence are severe enough to compel offenders to seek positive alternatives	A variety of options should be available, such as substance abuse counseling, job skills training, etc.
Disarming Young Gun Offenders					
11	24	Searching for and seizing juveniles' guns	Reduces the opportunities for gun violence by eliminating the means	…the affected community supports the initiative; parents/guardians trust police and prosecutors to keep their word about criminal prosecution, and give signed consent to searches; and police base targeting on reliable intelligence about juveniles' gun involvement	This is promising, but it has not yet proved effective in reducing gun violence

Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If…	Considerations
Place-Oriented Responses					
General Requirements for a Place-Oriented Enforcement Strategy					
12	26	Enlisting community support	Helps community members to view police enforcement actions as legitimate	…police managers meet with community members both before and during interventions, and demonstrate effective leadership and supervision	Communities with high rates of gun violence tend to support police intervention
13	26	Training officers in appropriate search and-seizure techniques	Ensures that officers conduct only legally warranted searches and seizures	…officers treat those they stop with respect, and explain the reasons for stops	Street searches of young male minorities may be viewed as police harassment
Key Elements of a Place-Oriented Enforcement Strategy					
14	27	Increasing gun seizures	Reduces the opportunities for gun violence by eliminating the means	…police focus on high-risk places at high-risk times	Research has shown that, in some cases, increases in gun seizures in targeted areas have resulted in decreases in gun crime there
15	27	Increasing contacts with potential gun offenders	Subjects would-be offenders to increased police scrutiny	…police increase their visibility and contact with likely offenders within very small areas	Both traffic stops and "stop and talk" contacts may be effective

Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If…	Considerations
Responses with Limited Effectiveness					
16	28	Suppressing gangs without providing programs and services to address the social conditions that contribute to gang affiliation	Reduces gun violence by identifying, tracking, and aggressively enforcing laws against known violent gang members	…when based on a thorough understanding of the nature of gangs and gang violence problems in local jurisdictions and blended with social intervention, opportunity provision, and community mobilization activities	Gangs and gang problems usually remain in the wake of these intensive operations; suppression programs may have the perverse effect of strengthening gang solidarity; gangs do not consider police threats to eliminate them credible; social intervention and prevention efforts are necessary complements to suppression efforts
17	29	Implementing gun buyback programs	Reduces the availability of guns that may be used in violent crimes by reducing the overall number of guns in the community		This has not proved effective in reducing gun violence-it fails to focus on the guns most likely to be used in violent crimes

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Anthony A. Braga is Senior Research Associate in the Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management of the Malcolm Wiener Center for Social Policy at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. His research focuses on working with criminal justice agencies to develop crime prevention strategies to deal with urban problems such as firearms violence, street-level drug markets, and violent crime hot spots. He has served as a consultant on these issues to the Rand Corporation; National Academy of Sciences; U.S. Department of Justice; U.S. Department of the Treasury; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; Boston Police Department; New York Police Department; and other state and local law enforcement agencies. Dr. Braga was a key member of the Boston Gun Project / Operation Ceasefire working group that was responsible for reducing youth homicide in Boston by almost two-thirds during the late 1990s. The Operation Ceasefire program has received numerous prestigious awards including the International Association of Chiefs of Police Webber-Seavey Award for quality in law enforcement, the Police Executive Research Forum Herman Goldstein Award recognizing excellence in problem-oriented policing, and the Ford Foundation Innovations in American Government Award. Dr. Braga has also been involved in a number of other strategic crime prevention programs such as the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives Youth Crime Gun Interdiction Initiative and the U.S. Department of Justice-sponsored Strategic Alternatives to Community Safety Initiative and Project Safe Neighborhoods. He received his M.P.A. from Harvard University and his Ph.D. in Criminal Justice from Rutgers University.

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