



Congressional Testimony

Reviewing DHS's Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention Grant Program

Humera Khan
President and Co-founder
Muflehun

The House Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Oversight, Management, and Accountability

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Good afternoon, Chairman Correa, Ranking Member Meijer, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify about the DHS Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention Grant Program.

My name is Humera Khan and I am the President and co-founder of Muflehun. Muflehun is an independent non-profit founded in 2010. We are at the nexus of society, security and technology, and serve as a resource center for preventing and countering hate, extremism, and violence, and for building resilience. Our mission is to facilitate a world with justice for all by cultivating prosperity.

Organization Overview

Muflehun works with stakeholders to design contextualized solutions to complex social challenges aimed at increasing social resilience. We conduct research and analysis of current violent extremism challenges, identifying root causes and developing relevant solutions; applying the learnings from research to pilot programs to counter the threats faced by society; sharing lessons with partner organizations and providing support in their capacity building for adapting and delivering localized versions of the programs; and regularly providing analyses and learning to policy makers for improved macro level decisions.

Our research and pilot programs feed into capacity building of individuals, communities, federal and local government agencies, multi-lateral agencies and independent organizations, as well as institutions involved in the efforts of preventing and countering violent extremism or those influenced by any act of incurred or potential violent extremism. Muflehun has designed and implemented multiple projects providing capacity building to adapt and deliver localized solutions and regularly provides analyses and learning to policy makers for improved decisions domestically and internationally in more than ten countries.

Muflehun has a special focus towards the increasing threats within USA, drawing upon its rich subject matter expertise and vast network of resources, applying technology tools and methods to design relevant solutions for the local challenges faced in society. We provide support to federal, state and local governments in developing community resilience frameworks, increasing the safety of the local populations.

Background

Every few weeks, the news headlines announce another attack, another shooting, another round of thoughts and prayers for the victims and their families, another post-attack post-mortem revealing that there were warning signs and red flags for years and yet help could not be coordinated in a way to prevent the tragedy from occurring. This oft-repeated cycle needs to stop.

To prevent domestic terrorism and targeted violence in our nation it is essential to focus on two main areas: (1) raising awareness of the threat and utilizing a public health approach as a solution for violence prevention, and (2) the allocation of resources by federal, state and local governance for primary prevention to mitigate risk factors and enhance protective factors.

Muflehun was the recipient of two FY2020 Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (TVTP) grants from DHS that focused on these two areas. One is for an upstander training titled Tackle! designed to raise awareness, and the second is an innovation grant titled the Community Resilience Early Warning System (CREWS) to recommend resource allocations for primary prevention of domestic terrorism and targeted violence. Following are brief overviews of the projects funded by the DHS TVTP grants.

CREWS



In 2020, Muflehun received DHS TVTP grant # EMW-2020-GR-00087 for the Community Resilience Early Warning System (CREWS) to recommend resource allocations for primary prevention of domestic terrorism and targeted violence, namely hate crimes, mass casualty shootings and school shootings.

The challenge Muflehun took on in designing and implementing CREWS was to apply a public health approach for primary prevention of these threats of domestic terrorism and targeted violence without repeating the failures of previous CVE efforts. The CREWS project is grounded in decades of academic research, and uses data to inform our understanding of mitigation of risk factors and enhancement of protective factors at local governance levels. It was developed with the objective of facilitating systemic change, and encouraging multi-stakeholder partnerships and prevention frameworks.

CREWS is a data-informed platform to help mayors, county executives, city managers and locally elected leaders prioritize risk and protective factors, specific to their jurisdictions, that need to be addressed to prevent domestic terrorism and targeted violence, and to allocate budgets aligned with the needs of their local prevention frameworks.

CREWS uses publicly available open-source data of societal and community-level risk and protective factors at the national, state and local levels. It does NOT use any individual level information, nor is there any Personal Identifiable Information (PII) in the platform. The factors are identified from academic research conducted over the past twenty years, and are grouped into several categories: economic, education, health, public safety, community cohesion, social participation, and influence of ideology. The machine-learning models are trained on twenty years of data including the years 2000 – 2019. Muflehun is working with four pilot locations to apply the results of the data findings and support the local government leaders in understanding how their financial resources can be better utilized in developing local prevention frameworks.

We are grateful to the DHS for investing in this innovative approach in FY2020, and to our pilot locations for their commitment to protecting their communities, and their willingness to use data to understand how best to build resilience. Many thanks to the Mayor of Scranton, Pennsylvania and her office, the leadership of the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations, Pennsylvania, the County Executive of New Castle County, Delaware and his office, and the state senator of the 3rd District of Connecticut for their bold leadership.

Our preliminary analysis has focused on hate crimes and on domestic terrorism, and over the next few weeks we will be completing initial analysis for mass casualty shootings and school shootings.

Our findings show that (1) Each location has a unique combination of risk factors and protective factors; what is a risk factor for one location might not be contributing to increasing vulnerability at another location. Examples of this are school spending and income inequality which vary considerably across locations. The prioritized resource allocation portfolio for each location will therefore necessarily look very different (2) The combination of risk and protective factors for each location change over time and analysis must take recent trends into account (3) Some factors, such as drug overdose deaths, mental illness rates and access to health resources, are consistently amongst the top ten risk factors for domestic terrorism and hate crimes across all the pilot locations,

over the past ten years (4) Whereas there is considerable overlap in the risk and protective factors for domestic terrorism and hate crime, they are not identical. Local governments would be well served to prioritize resource allocation for factors that impact both domestic terrorism and hate crimes for greater impact. Examples of this are cyberbully and school-based bullying (5) Enhancing protective factors, rather than only mitigating risk factors, should be part of the design of local prevention frameworks.

These examples of early findings are only the first step in the wealth of information that will be available from CREWS to share with our pilot location partners.

After our analysis is finalized and in partnership with our stakeholders, we will recommend priorities for steering limited resources to facilitate comprehensive local prevention frameworks. Before our project ends at the end of the year, we will be conducting briefings and capacity building workshops at each pilot location and facilitating multi-stakeholder partnerships based on their specific needs. Increasing the efficient utilization of limited resources to build resilience against targeted violence and domestic terrorism is essential for the safety of our nation.

Tackle



In 2020, Muflehun received DHS TVTP grant #EMW-2020-GR-00093 to implement an upstander training designed to raise awareness of the threat of domestic terrorism and targeted violence, and to enhance the ability of community leaders to identify and respond to individuals at risk of mobilizing to violence.

The Tackle! Upstander Training was implemented in partnership with American Jewish Committee (AJC) and its network of 24 regional offices and 11 Muslim-Jewish Advisory Councils (MJACs) that build ties between Jewish and Muslim leaders to work against hate, antisemitism and anti-Muslim bigotry.

The eight-hour training curriculum includes:

- Awareness of the threat of targeted violence, domestic violent extremism, and recruitment tactics
- Understanding of how hate and bigotry can incite violence, including narratives that ignite antisemitism, anti-Muslim bigotry, anti-black racism, and anti-Asian hate

- Local prevention frameworks and the role of communities in violence prevention
- Understanding the role of engaged Upstanders to recognize when individuals are experiencing distress and broadcasting their intent to move towards violence, and knowing what to do in such situations

The participants included elected officials, district attorneys, human rights commissioners, school safety officers, principals, and superintendents, town and county emergency management directors, sheriffs, and law enforcement officers. We were also tremendously fortunate that DHS Regional Prevention Coordinators (RPCs) joined each of our cohorts for discussions and engagement with the participants about existing local resources.

180 leaders in nine cohorts attended the virtual course with 154 participants completing the full training (85%). Participants were surveyed on their starting knowledge and post-training to assess the change in their willingness and skills to be engaged upstanders. The results inform our understanding of the dire need for more awareness, the effectiveness of our Tackle! curriculum, and suggestions for improvements:

- When asked if participants had heard the terms domestic terrorism and targeted violence, 94% indicated that they knew of the terms however only 25% knew what the terms actually meant.
- When asked about using a public health approach for violence prevention, a mere 22% knew the concept, with over 30% never having heard of it before.
- After the Tackle! Training, 86% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that they had the skills to prevent violence, an increase of 37%.
- Similarly, post-training 73% were very likely to engage with a friend or family member they were concerned about, an increase of 21%.
- Participants consistently stated the most helpful features were “case studies and real-life examples” and requested “more case scenarios with upstander interventions”

Given the low levels of awareness of the threat and how to respond to it even by the very leaders who are entrusted to keep us safe, the need to scale up awareness is imperative for the safety of our country.

To ensure sustainability of the Tackle! training beyond the DHS TVTP grant, Muflehun and its partners have applied for support from private foundations to continue to enhance the curriculum and provide training in new locations.

Learnings from the CREWS and Tackle! Projects

The implementation of our two DHS TVTP grants over the last eighteen months has resulted in several learnings and recommendations which we will briefly share:

1. While the threats of domestic terrorism and targeted violence continue to increase, \$20 million of grant funding each year, stretched thin over our whole nation, is woefully inadequate. It is merely a drop in the bucket and what we need is a firehose. We recommend that the grant funding levels should be increased multiple fold.
2. Our experience in implementing the CREWS and Tackle! projects has highlighted the low awareness levels of the threats of domestic terrorism and targeted violence (and how to respond to them) of our leaders who are entrusted to keep us safe. We would request the House Homeland Security Committee to give greater attention to increasing awareness levels by encouraging the scaling of capacity building programs such as Tackle! and other similar initiatives. Giant strides are required to build the capacity of the local leaders; only baby steps have been taken so far.
3. The DHS Regional Prevention Coordinators are one of the greatest assets of DHS CP3. They are experienced professionals who understand what is happening on the ground and are an invaluable resource for the grantees and the local stakeholders alike. Muflehun has worked closely with the Regional Prevention Coordinators while implementing the CREWS and Tackle! projects and has witnessed their support in developing local prevention frameworks. But there is not enough of them; there need to be at least one per state, and in more populated states, multiple Regional Prevention Coordinators per state are required.
4. DHS CP3 has provided overview documents to encourage the development and implementation of local prevention frameworks. However, much more detailed guidelines are needed that factor in the necessary sophistication and coordination required to effectively design and implement these approaches. DHS should incorporate the learnings

from its various grantees to accelerate the in-depth understanding and process of developing well-informed local prevention frameworks.

5. While DHS CP3 continues to add members to its team, there remains an unfilled gap for more technically qualified staff with subject matter expertise that are aligned with the public health approach that DHS is now taking towards preventing domestic terrorism and targeted violence. Without the required expertise and knowledge, there is a risk that essential technical areas of developing local prevention frameworks will remain unattended or previous mistakes from CVE might be repeated.
6. Data-informed analysis facilitates improved decision making. Our experience in implementing the CREWS project displays the variation in the combination of needs for local prevention frameworks. Muflehun recommends utilization of data by the DHS TVTP Grants program in its selection of future grants by matching the data-informed needs of geographic locations to the proposed solutions at state and local levels.

Conclusion

Let me end by emphasizing that DHS TVTP grant funded projects such as CREWS and Tackle! are only the beginning of the long journey of solutions ahead of us as a nation. To make the required progress, we must accelerate our efforts with increased resource allocation, and not be discouraged by mistakes of the past. We need to learn and continually improve our approaches to make our country safer by tackling the public safety challenges upstream rather than intervening only after they become threats to communities. We must not wait for another Tree of Life Synagogue attack or Charleston AME church attack or Sandy Hook School shooting, or Buffalo supermarket killings or the Uvalde school massacre before we decide to allocate resources towards primary prevention.

Thank you again for your attention and for the opportunity to share Muflehun's experiences and perspectives. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.