

Summer Youth Employment Programs for Violence Prevention: A Guide to Implementation and Costing

“As a kid, I always wanted to work in city government, so seeing its inner workings really stuck with me, even now. In the Los Angeles Mayor’s Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development, I helped families impacted by gun violence, worked with community organizers, participated in neighborhood events, and networked with city officials. I learned that it takes a village. As a rising college freshman, it made me even more excited for a political science major.”



Emmanuel Macedo, Students Demand Action Summer Leadership Academy Alum

Executive Summary

Investing in an SYEP is a cost-effective way to help prevent violence in cities.

Homicide rates across the United States have increased 35 percent since before the Covid-19 pandemic. Violence also follows seasonal patterns, routinely peaking in the summer months, meaning that cities feel these effects most strongly then.¹ A growing body of evidence shows that summer youth employment programs (SYEPs) aimed at the young people most at risk for or with histories of violence are a promising intervention to reduce violent crime in cities. With this guide, Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund’s Research team (Everytown) aims to help cities and funders understand the key components and costs of implementing SYEPs. To make the process simpler, Everytown also developed a costing tool that can be tailored to specific needs and budgets. As an example, Everytown estimates that a three-year program that serves 3,000 youth, works with six program providers, and pays youth a stipend of \$12.50 per hour for 24 hours per week and six weeks per summer will cost \$10 million each year—a total of \$3,338 per youth participant. Compared to the social and economic price of gun homicides,² investing in an SYEP is a cost-effective way to help prevent violence in cities.

Relative costs of SYEP enrollment

\$15,600,000

Average Cost per Gun Homicide

\$3,338

Average Cost per Youth in SYEP

The Role of Summer Youth Employment in Reducing Violence

Governments and community members pay a steep price for persistent gun violence, including the costs of lives lost, police response, incarceration, medical care, and loss of income. Homicide rates across the United States have increased 35 percent since before the Covid-19 pandemic, posing an elevated and persistent public health crisis, and four out of every five homicides involve guns.³ This problem does not affect all Americans equally. Young men living in the country's poorest urban communities suffer from the highest rates of gun homicides and nonfatal injuries, and interpersonal gun violence is often concentrated geographically and demographically among male adolescents, often in communities of color.⁴

What steps can cities take to prevent violence in their communities? A growing body of evidence highlights one promising intervention: summer youth employment programs (SYEPs) aimed at young people at risk for or with histories of violence. These programs match participating youth with jobs during the summer months, when violence is at its highest and many young people lack the structure and support that school ordinarily provides. SYEPs offer meaningful employment, safe spaces, and mentoring to young people, serving as a cost-effective intervention to prevent violence.

What Are the Benefits?

There are many potential advantages to establishing SYEPs: these programs can help prepare young people for college and careers, teach financial literacy, offer income support through paid work, improve school attendance and educational outcomes, and provide participants with a sense of agency, identity, and competency.⁵ In addition to these broader benefits, studies of SYEPs in cities across the country show that these programs can help reduce violence, crime, and justice system involvement among participating young people.⁶ As just one example, a randomized control trial of Chicago's SYEP found a 43 percent decrease in violent crime arrests among participants in the 16 months after they completed the program.⁷ SYEPs also offer safe spaces where youth are less likely to be victimized and counteract the structural racism that often denies young people of color pathways to meaningful employment. Programs can be effective at various levels of intervention—for example, both pre- and post-violence or justice system involvement—and research shows that benefits are felt particularly strongly by youth who have already been involved with the justice system.⁸

↓43%
Chicago's SYEP
reduced violent
arrests by 43%
among participants
16 months post-
program completion.

While evaluations in the few years following these programs often show promising results, summer youth employment is not a magic wand that can wave away the multiple, often compounding, challenges youth at-risk of being involved with violence may face. Those problems—such as homelessness or housing instability, trouble with reading or simple math resulting from under-resourced schools, lack of access to culturally competent mental health care, and various forms of childhood trauma—are years in the making. Likewise, the solution will also require multiple forms of support over multiple years. A high-quality SYEP can make important contributions to overcoming these challenges. But it cannot be the only solution.

With this guide, Everytown aims to help cities and funders understand the key components and costs of implementing SYEPs. To make the process simpler, Everytown also developed and provides a costing tool that can be tailored to specific needs and budgets by adjusting for factors like cost of living, program size, inflation, specific outreach and support strategies, and more. This tool was developed using a rigorous methodology known as an ingredients approach from the bottom up, itemizing the key resources needed to implement an SYEP aimed at violence prevention.⁹

Implementing an SYEP: Roles and Responsibilities

Who Do They Serve?

SYEPs are diverse and can target different populations based on program goals. Generally, programs whose goal is violence prevention prioritize recruiting participants from neighborhoods where youth are most impacted by violence, due to issues such as high crime, failing schools, and limited job opportunities. SYEPs are typically aimed at young people ages 14 to 24, at least some of whom face barriers to upward mobility, like living in low-income households, experiencing homelessness or housing instability, being involved in foster care or the justice system, or being pregnant or a parent.

Target neighborhoods might have:

- High crime
- Failing schools
- Limited jobs
- Housing instability

Who's Involved?

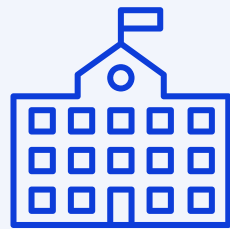
A typical SYEP brings together a lead city agency to plan and oversee the program, SYEP provider organizations to train and work directly with young people, and employers to hire participants for the summer. Often, the employers are the cities or SYEP providers themselves—for example, a city might hire young people as lifeguards at a city pool or city park cleanup crews, while an SYEP provider might employ youth as summer camp counselors for younger children—but other organizations or businesses like private-sector retail or tech companies can also serve this role.

The **lead city agency**, usually a youth development or workforce development agency, is in charge of the program's creation and execution. The city agency determines which populations and neighborhoods the program should prioritize. It also selects and contracts with the SYEP providers, working with them to recruit participants, advertise the program, and establish connections with other providers offering supplemental support and wraparound services as needed. The city agency is responsible for tasks such as producing the pre-employment training curriculum, providing the necessary data infrastructure to monitor the program, establishing and enforcing standard agreements for employers to have youth participate, and processing youth stipend payments.

The **SYEP providers**—which may be community-based organizations, nonprofit or for-profit organizations, universities, foundations, or other organizations—are in charge of the program’s on-the-ground implementation. The SYEP providers work directly with young people involved in the program, providing training, supervision, and mentoring for participants and connecting youth to wraparound support services as needed. SYEP providers also develop relationships with employers and coordinate with them to address any concerns or compliance issues.

The central role of **employers** is to introduce program participants to the working world and provide a safe and supportive work environment in accordance with program standards. To help with the recruitment and selection process, employers are responsible for documenting and describing available positions and tasks. Once the program is underway, employers supervise participants’ day-to-day activities, sign off on timesheets and communicate work absences to SYEP providers, allow SYEP provider staff visits, and notify SYEP providers when young people need additional support.

SYEP Organizational Structure



Lead City Agency

Example: Office of Youth Services, Office of Workforce Development

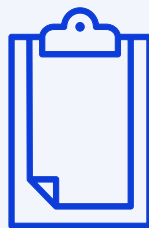
Role: Advertise and oversee program, contract providers, run participant lottery, process payroll



SYEP Providers

Example: Community foundation or youth services non profit

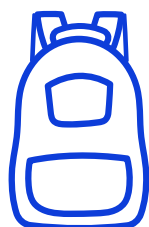
Role: Implement program; recruit, refer, train, and support youth; conduct site visits; process timesheets and reports



Employers/Worksites

Example: Park services, summer camp, retail storefront, technology sector

Role: Provide safe, age-appropriate, and supervised employment; submit job descriptions; sign off on timesheets



Youth Participants

Age range: 14-24 years old

Target population: All youth in served communities, especially those at-risk of or with prior justice system contact

Training: The SYEP provider offers workforce training to participants at the beginning of the summer, before employment begins, using curricula and materials produced by the city agency. This training usually takes place at the SYEP providers offices or a community space. Costs include materials for youth employment specialists and program participants such as pens, notepads, and flipcharts, and a lunch budget.

Equipment: Similar to the lead city agency’s requirements, the equipment needed by SYEP providers includes laptops or tablets and workspaces for staff. This equipment should last for multiple years; however, the equipment budget should include the costs of replacement for loss and wear and tear, especially as staff are expected to frequently be out of the office supporting the youth. Other possible examples of equipment include a vehicle to transport team leads or youth to worksites or laptops that youth can use to submit applications, create résumés, or enter timesheets.



54¢ of every \$1 invested in SYEPs is paid directly to youth.

Youth stipends

Stipends paid directly to participating young people make up the largest share of the budget—54 cents for every dollar spent on the SYEP. While many summer programs and student internships may promote opportunities that rely on volunteer labor by the youth and, in doing so, avoid the cost of minimum-wage stipends, these programs create a major barrier for the young people most in need.¹² In addition to an hourly wage, SYEPs may also want to invest in stipends for public transit to help youth travel to and from worksites.

A Focus on Violence Prevention

An SYEP aimed at reducing violence should explicitly prioritize neighborhoods where crime is concentrated. The mentoring and intensive support required for programs that serve young people at risk for or with histories of violence contributes to the estimated cost per youth in the example above. These costs can be higher in communities where additional supports are incorporated, based on need and resources. For example, New York City’s Emerging Leaders SYEP—aimed at homeless and runaway youth residing in shelters, justice-system- or court-involved youth, and youth in foster care or receiving support from child services—provides the most intensive support and the highest level of funding per youth. In our example, in order to lower participation barriers and offer the necessary support to young people in the program, the SYEP provider budget includes a team lead to mentor and support every 20 youth, lunch provided during training, and a public transit or transportation stipend on top of youth wages. While tailoring programs for young people with the greatest needs results in higher costs, SYEPs that focus on violence prevention may be most cost effective when considering the potential impact on public safety.

For complete footnotes and access to the customizable costing workbook, please visit everytownresearch.org/summer-youth-employment-programs.

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