Jersey City Community Violence Needs Assessment

Center for Court Innovation

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I. Executive Summary

In November 2017, the City of Jersey City, with the approval of the City Council, engaged the Center for Court Innovation to complete a needs assessment of community violence in Jersey City. With the support of the Jersey City Department of Health and Human Services, the Office of the Mayor of the City of Jersey City, other agency and institutional stakeholders, and many local residents, the Center assembled a team comprised of experts in community justice, violence prevention, and research. The initial goals of the assessment were to identify community concerns and to assess community perceptions of existing resources geared towards reducing violence. The Center team worked towards these goals through qualitative data collection, in the form of multiple community focus groups and numerous stakeholder interviews between August and October 2018. The findings from this process represent the perspectives of those directly involved in the Jersey City community. This report seeks to consolidate the assessment findings into recommendations for continuing effective violence prevention efforts in Jersey City.

Key Findings

Our findings relate to four major themes: impacted communities, perceived causes of community violence, participant perspectives on existing violence prevention efforts, and additional opportunities for youth. Key findings include:

1. Impacted communities

- Community violence, as perceived by assessment participants, is concentrated in, but not exclusive to, the Greenville and Bergen-Lafayette areas of Jersey City, as well as in other public housing developments.
- The African American community is perceived to be disproportionately impacted by community violence. Teenage boys and young men are seen as disproportionately, but not exclusively, involved in the violence. While violence clearly impacts those involved directly, it also indirectly impacts those individuals' friends, families, and the wider community.

2. Perceived causes of community violence

- Participants expressed concern about perceived root causes of community violence, specifically discussing economic marginalization, lack of quality education, issues surrounding race and racism, and neighborhood physical disorder. Participants emphasized the need to address these root causes as a key part of any violence prevention strategy.
- Drug market activity and gang involvement were generally understood to be major factors in community violence in Jersey City. Participants also noted that specific personal or group conflicts, going back generations, are frequently the catalyst for violent incidents. Participants expressed that these conflicts are often facilitated and/or exacerbated by social media.

3. Participant perspectives on existing violence prevention efforts

- There is a perceived disconnect between the community and government institutions. While participants emphasized the importance of community involvement in violence prevention efforts, they also expressed skepticism and wariness towards the Jersey City government and its involvement in combatting community violence.

- Other major concerns include access to organizational resources, including money and physical space, lack of coordination of efforts among discrete entities engaged in similar violence prevention work, and the need for more community centers and service providers relative to where people live.

4. Opportunities for youth

- Participants perceived a need to engage young people in programming as an alternative to unstructured time which often leads to involvement in high-risk activities. Such programming could include recreational activities, education, and mentorship opportunities.
- Participants expressed concerns that existing programs for Jersey City youth often do not reach those who might benefit most.

Recommendations

Recommendations are presented under four main categories: addressing direct interpersonal violence and the resulting trauma, investing in building community capacity and trust in local government and service providers, addressing environmental conditions that play a role in generating violence, and utilizing data and engaging the community for further research and implementation.

1. Addressing direct interpersonal violence and the resulting trauma

- Develop intervention efforts that focus on targeted outreach, in the community and at hospital trauma centers, to those at the highest risk of being involved in conflict. Efforts should make use of 'credible messengers' to mediate disputes and help facilitate connections to resources that help address underlying needs and steer at-risk individuals away from violence.
- Develop restorative justice options for interpersonal conflicts that focus on community healing and mediation. Such programs can act as alternatives to the traditional court system and school suspensions.
- Invest in culturally-appropriate trauma services for community members most directly impacted by violence.

2. Investing in community capacity-building and developing community trust in local government and service providers

- Invest in programs within Jersey City Housing Authority developments that convene neighborhood stakeholder teams and establish direct communication with government agencies.
- Develop platforms for youth to offer valuable input on policymaking decisions that affect them.
- Develop opportunities to incubate and grow grassroots service providers, for example, with direct financial and administrative support.

3. Addressing environmental conditions that play a role in generating or enabling community violence

- Invest in safe accessible spaces for youth to spend time and participate in programming.
- Invest in youth-led placemaking and neighborhood planning.

4. Utilizing data and engaging the community in further research and implementation groundwork

- Engage community-based organizations to build upon local resource mapping efforts.
- Further engage local universities and researchers to enrich data collection and analysis, and continue to develop data sharing efforts.
- Engage community members in further research endeavors including design and dissemination.

II. Introduction

During the first 11 months of 2018, 15 people, including three high school students, were murdered in Jersey City.[1] These deaths represent a continuing tragedy in New Jersey's second largest city. The reverberation of community violence was captured by Pamela Johnson, MPA, BPS, the director of the Jersey City Anti-Violence Coalition Movement; "It's upsetting that so many children in Jersey City believe they don't have options. I see their hopelessness and despair firsthand...Folks need to understand that these are children being gunned down and, in some cases, children being arrested for committing the act."[2]

In recent years, Jersey City has become a sought-after commercial and residential destination. Yet during this period, public safety concerns have loomed large in certain areas of the city and in local politics. In 2016, Jersey City Medical Center's Community Health Needs Assessment, identified community violence and unsafe neighborhoods as a key community concern.[3] In his 2018 state of the city address, Mayor Steven Fulop stated, "A city can only move forward when it has a strong foundation to build upon. In Jersey City, we know that public safety is that first fundamental building block."[4] Public safety has been a central piece of the Fulop Administration's agenda and has been reflected in a number of policy initiatives including the Jersey City Police Department's (JCPD) recent implementation of community policing. Beyond new policing strategies, the city has implemented menu of programs as part of a larger public health approach to violence reduction. Many of these, such as the City Youth Jobs summer employment program, the Jersey City Youth Counsel, and Jersey City Summer Internship program offer young people paid, civically engaged opportunities. Other initiatives include programs for youth run by the Department of Recreation, and the Jersey City Youth Planning Taskforce, which brings together agency members, and community stakeholders to develop policy recommendations on a number of youth focused issues including violence reduction.

In November 2017, the City of Jersey City, with the approval of the City Council, engaged the Center for Court Innovation to complete a needs assessment of community violence in Jersey City. With the support of the Jersey City Department of Health and Human Services, the Office of the Mayor of the City of Jersey City, other institutional stakeholders, and many Jersey City residents, the Center assembled a team of experts in community justice, violence prevention, and research. The initial goals of the assessment were to identify community concerns related to violence and to assess community perceptions of existing resources, geared towards reducing violence. The Center team worked towards

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[1] Patrick Villanova, "Jersey City touts drop in violent crime in 2018," *The Jersey Journal*, December 19, 2018, https://www.nj.com/hudson/2018/12/jersey-city-touts-drop-in-violent-crime-in-2018.html; Michaelangelo Conte. "3 boys, including a 14-year-old, charged in Jersey City teen's 'tragic' murder," *The Jersey Journal*, January 8, 2019, https://www.nj.com/hudson/2019/01/3-boys-including-a-14-year-old-charged-in-murder-of-jersey-city-teen.html

[2] Conte, "3 boys, including a 14-year-old, charged in Jersey City teen's 'tragic' murder."

[3] RWJ Barnabas Health: Jersey City Medical Center. *Community Health Needs Assessment 2016-2018*. Jersey City: RWJ Barnabas Health: Jersey City Medical Center, 2016. Accessed November 2018. https://www.rwjbh.org/documents/jersey%20city%20medical%20center/RWJBarnabas-CHNA-JCMC-12-2016.pdf

[4] "Text of Mayor Steve Fulop's 2018 state of the city speech," nj.com, accessed December 2018, https://www.nj.com/hudson/index.ssf/2018/02/text_of_mayor_steve_fulops_2018_state_of_the_city.html

these goals through qualitative data collection, conducting five community focus groups and thirteen stakeholder interviews between August and October 2018. Our findings represent the perspectives of the participants, all of whom are directly involved in the Jersey City community. This report seeks to consolidate the assessment findings into recommendations for effective violence prevention efforts in Jersey City.

The needs assessment described in this report represents Jersey City's third partnership with the Center for Court Innovation to take on unique community challenges. Previously, the Center provided technical assistance in starting the Jersey City Youth Counsel and Jersey City Community Solutions.

The Center comes to this needs assessment with years of experience combatting violence, through its implementation of a range of community-based violence prevention initiatives operating in New York City. Center programs have been documented to reduce shootings and improve outcomes for participants.[5] The Center works to create communities where violence is neither needed nor wanted, and where the people who want to lead community change have the skills to do so. Neighborhoods once torn apart by violence can become more peaceful, vibrant communities through the collaborative efforts of local residents, nonprofit organizations, businesses, elected officials, and faith-based leaders.

The World Health Organization defines community violence as "Violence between individuals who are unrelated, and who may or may not know each other, generally taking place outside the home."[6] Consistent with this definition, throughout this report "community violence" refers to direct physical violence that is not domestic or intimate partner violence or related to police encounters.[7]

City Profile

Jersey City is a growing, diverse metropolis of roughly 270,000 people.[8] What was once a dock and manufacturing town has been transformed into one of the region's primary commercial hubs. Most of the development projects have been concentrated near the Hudson River and Upper New York Bay on the eastern side of the city. In the last decade, as new buildings in downtown Jersey City have reshaped the Hudson River skyline, the growth of Jersey City's population has outpaced that of neighboring municipalities like Newark and New York City.[9] Jersey City has been cited as the most diverse city in the United States and the city website notes that 75 languages are spoken in city schools.[10] As of 2016, the ethnic/racial breakdown of the population was as follows: 28% Hispanic, 25% Asian, 22% Black, 21%

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[5] Pricard-Fritsche, Sarah and Cerniglia, Lenore. *Testing a Public Health Approach to Gun Violence: An Evaluation of Crown Heights Save Our Streets, a Replication of the Cure Violence Model*. New York: Center for Court Innovation, 2013. Accessed December, 2018. https://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/documents/SOS_Evaluation.pdf; Delgado, Sheyla, Alsabahi, Laila, Wolff, Kevin, Alexander, Nicole, Cobar, Patricia, and Butts, Jeffrey. *The Effects of Cure Violence in the South Bronx and East New York, Brooklyn.* New York: John Jay Research and Evaluation Center, 2017. Accessed December 2018. https://johnjayrec.nyc/2017/10/02/cvinsobronxeastny/.

[6] Etienne G. Krug, Linda L. Dahlberg, James A. Mercy, Anthony Zwi, & Rafael Lozano (Eds.) *World report on violence and health.* Geneva: World Health Organization, 2002. Accessed November 2018. https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/42495/9241545615_eng.pdf;jsessionid=EE6651A6F8046E51C3192DB1272CF574?sequence=1.

[7] This definition is not meant to imply that these other forms of violence are unimportant or not present in Jersey City; they are just not the focus of this assessment.

[8] US Census Bureau, "American Community Survey," accessed November 2018, https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/?intcmp=serp.

[9] US Census Bureau, "American Community Survey."

[10] Adam McCann, "2018's Most Diverse Cities in the U.S" *Wallethub.com,* May 3, 2018 https://wallethub.com/edu/most-diverse-cities/12690/; "Diversity," City of Jersey City. Accessed December 2018, https://www.jerseycitynj.gov/community/diversity

White, 3% multiracial, less than .5% Native American, and 1% other.[11] By many indicators, Jersey City is prospering; the past decades have seen median household incomes rise while violent crime and unemployment rates fell significantly.[12]

Recent years have seen huge demand for residential units in Jersey City. Though the majority of new real-estate development has concentrated in downtown and along the Hudson River, or 'Gold Coast,' much of the rest of the city has seen increased interest in residential units. Roughly 70% of Jersey City residents are renters, which places it near the top of national averages.[13] Cost burdening, defined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development as paying over 30% of annual income on housing, occurs across the city at a rate of 48%; the highest rates of cost burdening occur in Bergen-Lafayette and Greenville.[14] Jersey City is home to over 10,000 federal and state subsidized units; however, only the 2,500 Public Housing units have permanent affordability controls.[15]

Jersey City Public Schools serve over 30,000 students.[16] In 2017, after nearly 30 years of state control, Jersey City regained full local control over public schools.[17] Today, Jersey City is home to multiple nationally recognized public schools, including Dr. Ronald E. McNair High School, ranked as one of the nation's top 100 public high schools by *U.S. News*. Unfortunately, McNair High School is the only one of Jersey City's five largest public high schools to rank above state averages in reading and math proficiency.[18]

As of 2016, median household income in Jersey City was $63,227, above that of neighboring cities Newark and New York City.[19] As of 2018, the unemployment rate in Jersey City was 4.4%, which falls below the statewide rate and is just slightly above that of New York City.[20] Despite the positive economic indicators on the city-wide level, many neighborhoods still experience high levels of poverty and unemployment. Many of the areas with the highest rates of unemployment in the city are clustered in the south parts of the city.

Over the last decade, Jersey City has seen a significant drop in reported crime. The year 2017 saw roughly 34% less total reported index crime (i.e., serious crime) than the year 2007. Reported violent crimes

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[11] "Data USA; Jersey City, NJ" Datausa.io, Accessed November 2018, https://datausa.io/profile/geo/jersey-city-nj/#demographics.
[12] "Median Household Income for Jersey City, NJ," CivicDashboards by OpenGov. Accessed November 2018, https://www.civicdashboards.com/city/jersey-city-nj-16000US3436000/median_household_income; "Uniform Crime Reports," New Jersey State Police, Accessed November 2018, https://www.njsp.org/ucr/uniform-crime-reports.shtml; "Unemployment Rate for Jersey City, NJ," CivicDashboards by OpenGov, Accessed November 2018, https://www.civicdashboards.com/city/jersey-city-nj-16000US3436000/unemployment_rate
[13] Michael Kolomatsky, "Which Cities have More Renters," *New York Times*, February 15, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/15/realestate/rent-increases-2017.html.
[14] City of Jersey City, "Jersey City Housing Plan," Accessed November 2018, https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2332985-jersey-city-housing-plan.html
[15] City of Jersey City, "Jersey City Housing Plan"
[16] "District Directory Information," National Center for Education Statistics, Accessed November 2018, https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/district_detail.asp?Search=2&details=1&ID2=3407830&DistrictID=3407830.
[17] Adam Clark. "N.J. ends state takeover of Jersey City's public schools," *nj.com*, July 5, 2017, https://www.nj.com/education/2017/07/nj_ends_state_takeover_of_jersey_citys_public_scho.html.
[18] "Dr. Ronald E. McNair High School" U.S. News and World Report, Accessed December 2018, https://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/new-jersey/districts/jersey-city-public-schools/dr-ronald-e-mcnair-high-school-12599
[19] Datausa.io, "Data USA; Jersey City, NJ."
[20] "Unemployment Rate for Jersey City, NJ." CivicDashboards by OpenGov, Accessed November 2018, https://www.civicdashboards.com/city/jersey-city-nj-16000US3436000/unemployment_rate.

dropped at an even sharper rate: 2017 saw roughly 44% less violent crime than 2007.[21] However, certain major crimes still plague Jersey City. Unlike the relatively consistent drop in overall violent crime, the number of homicides has not experienced a consistent decline. In 2017, there were 21 homicides in Jersey City, one more than the 20 in 2007.[22] Recently, as visualized on Map 1 in Appendix A, many shootings, both fatal and non-fatal, have concentrated in the south and east sections of Jersey City, roughly corresponding with the Bergen-Lafayette and Greenville neighborhoods.

III. Needs Assessment Methodology

The community violence needs assessment had three key goals: (1) identifying community concerns and priorities related to community violence; (2) collecting and analyzing data to help define the scope of community violence in Jersey City; and (3) identifying the priorities of city agencies and community organizations.

1. Focus Groups

Focus groups were held between August 8, 2018, and October 16, 2018. With the consent of the group participants, the assessment team made audio recordings of all focus groups and transcribed their contents. For analysis, the team coded transcripts and identified recurring themes; the emergent coding was an iterative process. These analyses were facilitated with the qualitative data analysis software package, Dedoose.

To collect a range of responses and perspectives, the assessment team conducted three focus groups with adults and two with high school-aged youth. Adult focus group participants included employees of large city and non-profit institutions doing direct service work (5 participants), members of local community organizations (8 participants), and members of the public (1 participant). Group participants were recruited through direct phone and email contact, as well as flyers and posts on the Department of Health and Human Services social media pages. Participants for the two high school-aged youth groups came from a range of city schools, and were recruited through a local adolescent respite center and using contacts from Department of Health and Human Services staff (8 and 10 participants, respectively). The groups lasted 60-90 minutes.

Key questions asked in focus groups included:

- What are the public safety concerns in Jersey City?
- What are some of the more pressing concerns about the way the city at large currently responds to community violence?
- What strategies do you think will be helpful in addressing community violence?

The full list of focus group questions can be found in Appendix B.

2. Stakeholder Interviews

To identify the strengths, challenges, and priorities of city agencies and community organizations, the assessment team conducted 13 individual and small group interviews with 26 stakeholders between August 27, 2018, and December 5, 2018. Like the focus groups, each interview followed a semi-structured format and was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using qualitative coding.

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[21] New Jersey State Police, "Uniform Crime Reports."
[22] New Jersey State Police, "Uniform Crime Reports."

The assessment team assembled a list of individuals representing a variety of government agencies and community-serving organizations. The assessment team reached out directly by phone and email to these stakeholders to set up interviews, all of which took place in person. The eventual list of 26 stakeholders included the directors of multiple city government agencies, leadership of local social service organizations, law enforcement officials, health care professionals, educators, religious leaders, community organizers, and activists. The interviews lasted 60-90 minutes.
Key questions asked in focus groups included:

- What do you view as the main strengths of Jersey City?
- What would you say are some strengths in the way your agency and the city at large currently respond to public safety issues
- What do you think your agency could do differently to respond to the public safety problems you've mentioned?

The full list of interview questions can be found in Appendix C.

3. Administrative Data Mapping

To provide context for the qualitative findings, the assessment team created a series of maps to visualize the shooting violence in Jersey City. Data on shooting incidents in 2016-2017 come from the JCPD and were provided by the Department of Health and Human Services. Demographic information is from the American Community Survey 2012-2016 five-year estimates, and includes family poverty rate, civilian unemployment rate, and percentages of residents without high school diplomas or college degrees, respectively.

4. Limitations

While the assessment team spoke with individuals representing a wide swath of Jersey City, including residents, professionals, and leaders, it was not a representative sample. As such, the findings are best understood as representing the perceptions of the specific people with whom the team spoke. Designing future needs assessments to elicit responses from a representative sample of residents will help insure that the findings accurately reflect residents' understandings of community violence. Additionally, only one resident attended the general community residents' focus group. While this individual offered valuable insights for the needs assessment, future efforts should try to improve recruitment from this population in order to gather the perspectives of more community residents. Future research design might involve community members in an effort to address some of the hesitancy some participants expressed about the needs assessment project (as elaborated below, in Findings).

IV. Findings

Research participants spoke about a number of aspects of community violence. They discussed the populations and locations they understand to be most impacted, causes of community violence, and their perspectives on combatting violence.

According to participants, the impacts of community violence in Jersey City are felt most acutely in certain communities. Participants spoke about violence mostly impacting the African American community in the Greenville and Bergen-Lafayette areas of the city. While only a subset of people in these communities are involved in community violence as direct victims and perpetrators—perceived as disproportionately male teenagers and young adults—participants noted that the effects are felt indirectly by a much wider circle, including mothers, elderly residents, and children.

Participants discussed both root causes and proximate causes for this violence. While proximate causes such as the drug trade, gangs, and neighborhood-based conflicts lead directly to violence, participants also emphasized the importance of root causes like economic marginalization, lack of quality education, issues surrounding race and racism, and neighborhood physical disorder.

Participant perspectives on combatting violence tended to emphasize the importance of involving the community at the grassroots level in violence prevention efforts. For many, this emphasis was coupled with a skepticism towards larger institutions in Jersey City, including the city government. At the same time, participants spoke about these institutions as having an important role to play in combatting community violence. There was also some focus on the need to engage youth in various programs to keep them off the streets.

1. Impacted Communities

Where community violence occurs

Overall, there was consensus among participants that community violence is concentrated in parts of the Greenville and Bergen-Lafayette areas of the city. This perceived concentration is supported by the location of shooting incidents in Jersey City from the summer of 2016 to the summer of 2017, as reported by the JCPD. Participants also discussed concentrations of violence in some housing developments, primarily Jersey City Housing Authority (JCHA) public housing complexes.

There was general consensus that community violence is predominant in Wards A, F, and, to a lesser extent B, also known as Greenville, Bergen-Lafayette, and West Side, respectively. Public housing complexes in general were also cited as sources of community violence, especially Booker T. Washington, Curries Woods, and Marion Gardens. Salem-Lafayette Court, not a JCHA development, was also frequently mentioned. While difficult to verify with administrative data, participants believe that violence often spills out of housing complexes into the surrounding neighborhood, and that this happens more in Greenville and Bergen-Lafayette than in other areas of the city.

Who is impacted by community violence

Participants also spoke about who is impacted by community violence, and how they are impacted. In this research, participants identified African American teenage boys and young men as the Jersey City community members disproportionately involved in community violence. Many of these individuals suffer from community violence as much as perpetuate it, and, as is discussed further in section, "Root Causes," a number of social environmental factors contribute to the high-risk of involvement faced by this group.

It is widely recognized that people who engage in community violence tend also to be victims of it.[23] Consistent with this observation, one youth focus group member observed that many victims of violence are themselves perpetrators of violence. Other participants shared examples illustrating the volatility of high-conflict scenarios, where a fine line separates the roles of perpetrator and victim.

Not all direct victims are involved in community violence themselves, however. Youth focus group participants noted that people may be targeted just by living on a certain block, or because a close

[23] Wesley Jennings, Alex Piquero, Jennider Reingle, "On the overlap between victimization and offending," *Aggression and Violent Behavior 17*, no.1 (Jan-Feb 2012): 16-26, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2011.09.003; Laurence Ralph. *Renegade dreams: Living through injury in gangland Chicago* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014); Eric Stewart, Cristofer Schreck, and & Ronald Simons. "'I ain't gonna let no one disrespect me': Does the code of the street reduce or increase violent victimization among African American adolescents?" *Journal of Research in Crime & Delinquency* 43 (November 2006): 427-458, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427806292338.

relative is gang-involved. The impacts of violence extend beyond the direct victims to those they leave behind; youth focus group participants observed that mothers, siblings, and they themselves are all among those hurt most by violence. Other young people spoke about feeling numb to community violence. Similarly, some stakeholders spoke about trauma as a result of growing up and living among widespread violence. For example:

> « *It's just mind-boggling man, the way we're so conditioned. In fact, about two or three weeks ago I heard gun shots and I'm so immune to hearing a gun shots. Like it's normal to me that I didn't even get scared, I just looked in the direction in which the gun shots came from just to see if I seen anyone laying down or running away from the scene.* — stakeholder interviewee

One focus group participant was particularly concerned for his elderly neighbors: "Then the elders, elders are locked in. I can tell you, the elders will not leave their house after like five o'clock. Once it gets dark, they will not leave the house."

2. Perceived Causes of Community Violence

Root causes

The root causes participants spoke about include economic marginalization, poor education, issues surrounding race and racism, and neighborhood physical disorder, with a strong emphasis on economics. Economic marginalization in the communities most impacted by violence takes multiple forms. Participants spoke about a lack of employment opportunities, a high cost of living, shortages of affordable housing, widespread poverty, and a lack of economic investment in the impacted communities.

The need for jobs and job preparation for both youth and adults was raised by many participants. Youth participants observed that for many, a steady paycheck is far more desirable than engaging in the drug trade. At the same time, jobs are hard to come by, especially for young people, and some perceive that selling drugs is more lucrative than a legal job.

Some participants emphasized the imperative of addressing economic factors as part of combatting community violence:

> « *[E]veryone can say violence is a problem, drugs is a problem, and that's true. There's no doubt about that, but you know violence, drugs are branches on a tree. They're not the root causes. You can't address violence and not address poverty. You can't address drugs and not address economics.* — stakeholder interviewee

Others spoke in a similar vein, while giving insight into some of the ways that economic marginality leads to violence.

> « *It's important, especially in a community plagued with poverty and violence, to really focus on economic development. Economic development, you want to make sure people are included and things are for the most part inclusive. If not, you stand to have people feel disenfranchised and they start falling more and more into these cultures which is the gangs and the drug dealing and all that stuff. Economic development, it's real key.* — stakeholder interviewee

> « *I think it has to do with income and housing and stress levels in the household. I'm sure there's some correlation behind that, where you have communities that people are being displaced for whatever realities, causing stress in the household, and that leads to a whole lot of factors.* — stakeholder interviewee

Maps 2 and 3 show locations of shootings in Jersey City from summer 2016 to summer 2017 in relation to family poverty and civilian unemployment.[24] (See Appendix A for all maps.) While patterns on a map cannot indicate causality, shootings do tend to cluster in areas with higher poverty and unemployment rates.

Poor education in the affected communities was noted as a contributor to violence in its own right, and indirectly, because education helps prepare people for jobs. In this needs assessment, school dropout did not emerge as a theme, while the need to improve the quality of education and climate in schools did. Problems cited about the local schools were numerous, including insufficient funding, low expectations from teachers, and undiagnosed learning disabilities. Map 4 shows locations of shootings in relation to the percentage of the population, age 25 and older, without a high school diploma or GED. Regarding higher education attainment, Map 5 shows locations of shootings in relation to the percentage of the population, age 25 and older, without a college degree. This map suggests a prevalence of shootings in areas with fewer college degree-holders.

Another root cause brought up by participants was physical disorder and neglected infrastructure. Participants noted that factors such as poor street lighting, abandoned houses, and vacant lots diminish public safety in their communities. One stakeholder interviewee summarized issues raised by several participants in saying,

> « *Again, going back to economic development, when you have all of these abandoned and run-down homes it creates this perception. When the streets are dark it creates this perception that attracts a certain element. Abandoned properties and dilapidated properties I definitely consider a public safety issue. Broken streetlights, definitely a public safety issue. Just the lapse in the quality of life in our community has transformed into a public safety issue. Now what happens is you have these abandoned homes, they're used for drug dens, they're used to store guns, the outside of them, if they have a lawn with the grass is five, six feet high, they have hiding places for their drugs, for their guns. One of the big public safety issues is the lack of quality of life.*

Another example comes from a focus group: “It's crazy, the roads are crazy, the lack of lighting, the conditions of our sidewalks. There are studies that speak to how people behave in the environment they're in physically, and no one is really giving a complete damn about this area.”

Noting that the African American community is most impacted by community violence, participants discussed racism, including structural and institutional racism. Specifically, participants placed the current situation of the Jersey City African American community within the context of 400 years of racial oppression in the United States, including slavery, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration. Some expressed a perception that the situation is perpetuated by government at all levels, whether maliciously or by benign neglect. As one stakeholder interviewee said, “If you don't get intentional on just meeting the needs of people of color, then I just think you're doing a lot of stuff on purpose. You really don't care.” These unmet needs, in turn, contribute to the other root causes discussed, thus contributing to community violence. Other participants noted that how adults of all races—including police officers, teachers, and others—interact with youth of color often conveys suspicion or a lack of respect, which in turn may lead to gang involvement.

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[24] All demographic data utilized in maps are from the American Community Survey 2012-2016 5-year estimates, accessed through Social Explorer (www.socialexplorer.com). Shootings data come from Jersey City Police Department.

Proximate causes

Participants in the needs assessment also discussed a number of proximate causes for community violence. Two common themes were drugs and gangs: participants observed that drug market activity and gang involvement are major drivers of community violence.

Participants discussed the economic role that the drug market has in their communities, absent legal work opportunities:

> « *You know, a lot of these guys who get themselves involved in violence, maybe have children and they're not being the best dads to their children because they can't be, because of financially, emotionally, whatever. And so, they turn to other methods for finances [such as selling drugs], whatever, and they end up in violent situations. But deep down, they just want to be a good dad, and they want to be good to their family.* — stakeholder interviewee

Participants spoke about how conflict easily spirals into violence. For example, one youth focus group member observed that a seemingly insignificant comment can be taken by someone in such a way that it leads to an act of violence. This first act of violence may in turn lead to a cycle of retaliation. Frequently, the violence is related to gang or territorial conflicts.

One focus group participant commented:

> « *A lot of this is territorial. If you live, what they say is on the Hill, you live towards Jersey City at the beginning, I'm a start from Bayonne, you can't come stay up in this area here, okay, you have to remain in that area. A lot of this is territorial.... And you get a lot of that within public housing. It's territorial. Right now we have a issue going on between public housing Booker T. Washington, Curries Woods, ... as well as the ones on Lexington Ave., okay.*

There is often history in these conflicts. Two participants pointed to the policy of demolishing public housing in Jersey City as actually exacerbating community violence:

> « *What I've seen over the last three to four years with the increase of violence is that there was some city demolition done where a lot of territory places were tore down. Like projects, more to speak. They tore down Lafayette, they tore down Duncan, and these people assimilated into our community, where it would- stuff that would go on, you would have to go in that area. One of the young men who's being shot, if they came in that area, they may have been targeted but now because these people have moved into the community, more [people] can see where you stand and who you hang around with, and that's where I see the spurt came up with so much gun violence here in Jersey City, as a resident.* — stakeholder interviewee

> « *For example, a decade ago, there was a phasing out of different housing projects whether they'd be Montgomery- families are starting to move out of Booker T., Marion doesn't have the same amount of residents that lived there previously. Duncan, which is now the Gloria Robinson Housing. So those folks have either been placed upon the Greenville sections of Jersey City or they've just been moving out to places like Willingboro in South Jersey and stuff. But for those people who lived in those areas, they are now living amongst each other. So say like if, there was violence in- say if people down at Montgomery didn't like a certain group of people up there in the Greenville, the Hill, or whatever we want to call it. Now you see, just that friction.... When you place all the people in there, that's going to be the result.* — stakeholder interviewee

Finally, participants spoke about social media as a magnifier for conflicts, often exacerbating community violence. As one focus group participant put it, “And it's unreal how bad gun violence is right now. And people think it's drug wars, it's gang wars. It goes as petty as Facebook comments.” Other participants elaborated on a process where conflicts originate in gang or turf rivalries, are perpetuated on social media, and result in serial violent incidents.

3. Participant Perspectives on Existing Violence Prevention Efforts

Participants spoke at length about the importance of looking to the community for grassroots leadership and engaging with the community in any violence prevention efforts. Participants expressed significant wariness about top-down efforts from the city, and concern that grassroots efforts would be co-opted.

Participants spoke about the importance of community involvement, both in terms of making direct connections with the people most involved in violence and in terms of the solutions coming from the community, rather than being imposed in a top-down manner. For the former, a need for credible messengers and communication with gang leaders was raised. For the latter, representative quotes include, “I think the city needs to work closely with the grassroots level organizations” (stakeholder interviewee), and, “It’s important to acknowledge that even when the services don't particularly look like what we think are traditional best practices, we must recognize that they are important and valued by the community. Also, we have to recognize the challenge organizations face to secure funds, a lot of funders will only will support established non-profit organizations” (stakeholder interviewee).

Another concern expressed by some participants is that the city’s involvement in community initiatives, while helpful from a resource perspective, often results in the community losing ownership. This perception resonates with a larger sentiment, shared by many, of wariness towards the city government and other large institutions. For example, when asked how people react to city-led violence prevention efforts, a stakeholder interviewee, replied,

> « *In regards to violence, it's very pessimistic, very disappointed. There is nothing. The expectation is low.... So when it comes to violence specifically, it's unfortunate there is no one, until recent, that they've started talking about it. And to tell you the truth, I think a lot of it might have been sparked by grant opportunities and more national—where the discussion is led nationally, then it's cool that the city started to follow. But if it wasn't for that, I don't see the city officials or those that make up the council aware of all of this.*

Similarly, a youth focus group participant wondered aloud if this report would be read.

Some participants were also skeptical of the assessment process leading to this report. One focus group participant asked, “I just want to know that, what are we gonna leave here with?” Some expressed a concern that community members were not a part of planning or conducting the needs assessment.

Participants expressed that distrust is felt widely, and not only in relation to the city. “Outsiders” in general were cited with skepticism. There were also positive feelings towards Jersey City residents in general: “I think the people are by far [the city’s] greatest asset, because I think, I want to say the resilience of the people.... Jersey City residents will always remind you we have the best city” (stakeholder interviewee); “And it's a sense of community and family, right.... I like to promote that sense of family and community structure where we're looking out for one another and I call it the village because of this” (stakeholder interviewee).

There was also appreciation for current efforts by the city in combatting community violence. For example:

> « *Just the idea that the city now has someone assigned to injury prevention and just the idea that the hospital is gonna have someone as a navigator, that lightens my load. It identifies partners where they could funnel their resources.... This community feels that.* — stakeholder interviewee

Presence in the community
Suggestions for improving responses to violence included greater community engagement and improved, transparent communication. Regarding community engagement, one stakeholder suggested that the city could dispatch mobile outreach vans into under-served communities. Another interview participant spoke about the challenge of scheduling public events at a time that works for the entire community. A focus group participant spoke about his experiences engaging with community youth on the basketball court:

> « *But after you beat the kids, or you play with them and [they see] you're competitive, they're like, 'Ah man, this [person] plays basketball. This [person] knows the NBA. They start to see you as a person, instead of just a figure. We have to incorporate those things to be more relatable, not just a figurehead.*

Distrust of the police department was a recurring theme. According to one focus group participant police are "the most hated people in the world. Like, once you've accepted that, that's it.... [The police] ain't getting no cooperation from nobody." At the same time, many had positive things to say about community policing efforts. One stakeholder interviewee observed, "Now they're looking to be proactive, and they're looking to meet with the community and say, 'How do we stop this? How do we get engaged more? What do we do?'" Similarly, another stakeholder interviewee remarked, "there's great efforts with Jersey City Police Department" regarding community policing, while observing that change is always slow. One youth focus group participant gave an example of policies from the top not always matching behavior on the ground, noting having seen police officers, stationed in the community, sitting in their cars while drug activity occurred around them. Examples such as this led some residents to feel that their public safety concerns are not heeded, while others appreciate the current direction of the police department.

Communication
In addition to engaging more effectively with the community, participants also spoke about the importance of communication regarding violence prevention efforts. Many participants felt they did not know about violence prevention efforts being undertaken by the city, or had other concerns about how that information is communicated when it is. Some specific concerns involved reaching specific populations and accuracy of information.

It became clear through the assessment process that there are many current efforts aimed at reducing community violence. It was also clear that people do not know what opportunities, services, and current efforts are available. Even the most widely recognized efforts face this problem. A large number of participants mentioned the Jersey City Anti-Violence Coalition Movement, and they were near-unanimous in speaking about it and its multiple activities in positive terms. However, one youth participant expressed not knowing what that organization does aside from social media posts, characterizing it as words without action.

Coordination of violence prevention efforts
Related to the desire for improved communication, there was also a widespread desire for better coordination of efforts in Jersey City violence prevention work. For example, in response to a question about what could improve responses to violence in Jersey City, three participants in a group stakeholder interview had this exchange:

- Participant 1: *Coordination of effort.*
- Participant 2: *Join forces.*
- Participant 3: *And to stop duplication of services.*
- Participant 1: *Right.*
- Participant 3: *Again, I think someone said before, a team, a task team of- a task force or a team response, where sort of everyone knows exactly what role it is they're playing, whether it be us, whether it be the city of Jersey City to all the other non-profits that are also very involved. We just- It's all wonderful assistance, we just need everyone to have a role and know what it is so we can respond appropriately.*

In another representative quote, a stakeholder interviewee said:

> « *I think sometimes we are our biggest enemies and we hurt ourselves, we're not properly coordinating. I think there has to be more of that. There has to be more coordination amongst ourselves. What my biggest worry is, is that we're going to be duplicating services and not collaborating to a full extent because we're so worried as to, can we survive another year? Is there a program? Is there name recognition? And things like that.*

Resources
Another widespread concern among assessment participants was an overall shortage of funding and other resources. The lack of funds was a common theme especially among smaller organizations.

There was also some concern about who does and does not have access to financial resources. Participants noted challenges in attracting money comparable to the grants received by entities in neighboring cities, such as Newark and New York, and also a concern that grant money that does come to Jersey City is “not properly allocated.” One interviewee was more specific about what he sees as imbalance in resource access:

> « *The responses haven't been great up until now because everything is reactionary. You have these organizations who want to be proactive but don't have the resources or the money to get out there and run these campaigns.... Everything from office space to money, database systems, running a real operation. Then you have the Jersey City Police Department and Health and Human Services who have the resources and now are just getting on board when some things could have been going on a long time ago.*

This quote also speaks to two themes discussed above: skepticism towards the city government, and a preference for grassroots efforts. While most participants who discussed financial challenges spoke in relation to non-profit organizations, there was also concern that most funders will only fund non-profit organizations, making it challenging for the city government to raise money directly.

Another category of resource challenge addressed by participants related to space and service locations. They noted dearth of space, for both recreation and programming, in the impacted communities. Many needs assessment participants echoed the sentiment, one focus group participant noted, “The one community center we have [in Jersey City] is insufficient for the need.” Also, “We need a community

center in Greenville. We need a community center to provide exactly everything she just said, including job training, workforce development, things to do after school, mental health, et cetera....” (stakeholder interviewee).

A number of participants also noted that though the Boys and Girls Club aspires to provide young people an alternative to violence, it is located downtown, outside of the most impacted communities; this means getting there can be expensive. The associated fees are also perceived as a barrier for some residents. Concerns about turf were also raised; it is often unsafe for young people to go into certain areas because of inter-group rivalries. A focus group participant noted that when planning programs located in public housing complexes, but aimed at the broader population, “you have to worry that they don’t have any type of territorial issues with the people that live there.”

4. Opportunities for Youth

Participants spoke a good deal about the need to engage young people in programming as an alternative to the streets. One interviewee said, “living in an urban city, not only Jersey City, these kids aren't given a fair opportunity.”

Recreation was mentioned frequently. While many of the comments focused on athletics, not all did. One stakeholder interviewee was explicit about the need to look beyond athletics. “People think basketball and football's the answer, and I disagree. Everybody can't dribble a ball, everybody can't throw a ball. You gotta tap in to these kids' talents.”

Participants also discussed the importance of mentorship for youth. Some youth focus group participants expressed a desire for mentors who are unbiased, willing to listen, and understand where young people are coming from.

A key takeaway regarding opportunities for youth is that current programs do not reach many individuals who might benefit most. One stakeholder interviewee, summarized the issue:

> « *We pride ourselves on the resources we have in the community, but I think it's still a disconnect, especially when it comes to our youth having access and utilizing the resources.... You know, we have resources, but have issues connecting people to the resources, and the appropriateness for these people that are victims of this violence.*

Related, one group stakeholder interview included this discussion about engaging more young people in existing programs:

- Participant 1: *That kid that's hard to reach, the kid that's out there, we have to be out there. We have to engage them. We can't just open up a gym and not go out there and get the kid and bring him to the gym, if that's what it takes....*
- Participant 2: *I wouldn't say that they're hard to reach, it's just giving them opportunities because they have [faced severe challenges] at home so that level of wall is there.*

V. Recommendations

These recommendations respond directly to issues identified by the needs assessment participants. The recommendations are broken down into the following overarching categories:

- Interpersonal violence and trauma
- Community capacity, engagement and trust
- Environmental conditions
- Data, resource mapping, and community-engaged research

Given the stress put on the importance of economic access by the needs assessment participants, where possible, recommendations incorporate provisions for increased economic opportunity for community members. This includes ensuring that economic development is distributed evenly and felt equitably across Jersey City communities.

1. Interpersonal Violence and Trauma

The needs assessment identified recurring violent conflicts, perceived to primarily involve African American teenage boys and young men, concentrated in the Greenville and Bergen-Lafayette sections of Jersey City as a core community concern. Participants spoke to widespread psychological trauma felt amongst victims, families of victims, and the community. Though many participants spoke to the need to address long-term root causes of violence, it became clear that there is also a need to invest in direct interventions that will immediately reach those most affected to shift behavior away from violent conflict. This should include culturally-appropriate trauma services to help community members heal and prevent future violence.

Develop targeted street outreach efforts: Cure Violence[25], Caught in the Crossfire[26], and other public health violence prevention models focus on detecting and deescalating conflicts before they turn violent. These programs focus on a specific catchment area and often seek to hire local community members with deep neighborhood knowledge—"credible messengers." The ultimate goal is to shift norms away from violence as means of conflict resolution. High-risk individuals are connected with the services to address underlying needs. These violence prevention models also offer the flexibility to add additional programmatic pieces, such as wraparound therapeutic services, and employment readiness. Jersey City would benefit from the implementation of public health violence prevention programs in the neighborhoods with the highest rates of violence. For more information on Cure Violence see Appendix E.

Develop restorative justice options for interpersonal conflicts: Traditional responses to interpersonal conflicts, such as school suspensions, arrests, and incarceration, tend to be punitive in nature. These approaches can neglect the healing and mediation often needed to resolve conflicts and avoid future confrontations. Restorative justice options like peacemaking circles[27] allow disputants to settle conflicts in a manner that does not center on punishment but rather focuses on healing and building a mutual path forward. Building on a traditional Native American approach to justice, peacemaking generally brings together disputants along with family members, friends, and other members of the community to communicate about how a disruptive event affected each participant. The purpose is not only to

[25] "The Model," Cure Violence, accessed December, 2018, http://cureviolence.org/the-model/

[26] Becker, Marla, Calhoun, Deane, Feldman, Gale, Karraker, Naneen. *Caught in the Crossfire Program Manual: A Peer-Based Hospital Intervention Program for Violently Injured Youth*. Oakland: Youth Alive, 2009. Accessed December 2018. http://www.youthalive.org/wp content/uploads/2016/03/CinC_Training_Manual-2.pdf

[27] For example, see: https://www.courtinnovation.org/node/20111/more-info for a detailed overview of peacemaking work at the Center.

resolve the immediate dispute, but to heal the relationships among those involved, thus restoring balance to the community. Typical outcomes include apologies for harm done, commitments to resolving future disagreements using peaceful means, and proactive steps to address underlying issues through employment and education. Neighborhood residents, including police officers and other local leaders, are recruited to train and serve as peacemakers. At the discretion of local law enforcement, referrals to the peacemaking program come from a variety of sources including, but not limited to, the local justice system. Such programs also accept referrals from community members who are involved in disputes that have not formally interacted with the justice system. Jersey City should explore the possibility of incorporating restorative justice into its menu of responses to conflict.

Invest in culturally appropriate trauma services: Culturally-appropriate trauma services are designed to serve individuals not traditionally reached by therapeutic services, such as African American teenagers and young adults. These services allow victims of violence who may be at high-risk of involvement in violent behavior to receive proper therapeutic services which can help avert potential future violent engagement. The research process made clear that many community members, including those not directly involved in violence, experience psychological trauma. It is important to serve these groups as well. For more information on a trauma-informed care program for young men of color, see Appendix E.

2. Community Capacity, Engagement and Trust

The needs assessment process made clear that there are lapses in communication about violence prevention efforts in Jersey City. Many participants felt that available funding is not consistently going to organizations with the best ability to use it. Community members do not always know of the services available to them. Deeply intertwined with these problems is a lack of trust in services provided by government agencies. For some, this was a product of feeling chronically underserved and overlooked. Across the board, participants expressed a desire to see greater efforts to include grassroots organizations and community members in violence prevention efforts. The needs assessment highlighted the need to invest in programs that build community problem-solving capacity, that bring community members into the policy-making process, and that build trust with the community.

Invest in programs that build community agency in JCHA developments: The needs assessment process suggests that public housing developments offer a unique opportunity to implement programs that address violence through building community capacity and facilitating communication with local government agencies. In New York City, the Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety (MAP) is an example of community and government joint problem-solving. Launched in 2014, the effort focuses on 15 public housing developments that have historically led the city in indicators of concentrated disadvantage and have accounted of 20% of the violent crime in the City's public housing.[28] Together, representatives from city agencies such as the Police Department, Department of Health and Human Services, and Department of Recreation, as well as local community organizations, join residents to form a MAP Stakeholder Team. This team works together to address local challenges by collecting data, identifying public safety concerns, creating action plans, and implementing collaborative solutions. Crucial to the function of stakeholder teams is the opportunity for residents to provide direct feedback to staff members of government agencies. Creating a feedback loop between residents and agency members not only aids in addressing relevant issues but also provides opportunities for transparency and trust-building. While assessment is ongoing, early indicators on crime reduction have been promising in MAP developments. Since the inception of MAP in 2014, shootings at MAP developments

[28] "The Mayors Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety," New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. Accessed March 2019. https://criminaljustice.cityofnewyork.us/programs/map/

are down 36%, compared to 31% for all NYCHA developments. Though figures have fluctuated, violent crime fell 6% in MAP developments since 2014, compared with a 5% decrease for all NYCHA developments.[29] For more information on MAP, see Appendix E.

Develop platforms for youth input in policymaking decisions: Giving youth a voice in the policy-making process serves the dual purpose of getting valuable feedback on how best to coordinate services for young people and opens lines of communication to build trust in the local government. Jersey City should explore the creation of a youth policy group that would offer stipends, train, and empower young community members to propose and advocate for solutions to policy challenges that impact them and their peers. Youth-led policy development programs encourage civic engagement and leadership, much like the Jersey City Youth Counsel. For more information on a youth policy board, see Appendix E.

Develop opportunities to incubate and grow grassroots organizations: Many community members voiced the desire to see increased support for grassroots service organizations. Community-based organizations are often well-situated to provide meaningful services and build trusting relationships with the communities of which they are a part. However, as made clear in the research process, many groups in Jersey City have limited administrative and fiscal capacity which can impede them from reaching their full potential. Incubating grassroots organizations by providing direct fiscal and administrative support, allows frontline staff to focus on direct service work. Incubation can take many forms, including physical space, fiscal management, and talent development. One example of this work in another jurisdiction, is the Fund for The City of New York which provides fiscal and administrative support to New York City start-up organizations. The Fund for the City of New York provides financial management services, insurance coverage, a comprehensive array of employee benefits as well as access to an accounts payable department, human resources experts, a legal team, and nonprofit coaches.

3. Environmental Conditions

The research process identified various environmental factors that play a role in community violence. Research participants pointed to blighted houses and dark streets as detrimental to neighborhood wellbeing. Many community members also spoke to the lack of safe, accessible spaces to run pro-social programming for youth after school and during the summer months. Clearly noted was the importance of having spaces near to where people live as many may not be able to travel across the city. Crucial to improving environmental conditions is engaging community members to help in the process. Not only are community members often able to provide important feedback on where to invest, but also the engagement process creates buy-in and builds trust.

Invest in safe and accessible places for youth: Research participants identified a clear need for more safe community spaces for young people. Existing public spaces like parks and recreation centers are not always perceived as accessible spaces by the young people themselves. Crucial to creating such spaces, are considerations about location and programming. Research participants expressed that some youth have difficulty reaching programs that are outside of their immediate neighborhoods. In other cases, certain neighborhoods are unsafe due to geographic-based alliances and conflicts. Investing in safe spaces can take the form of improving safety and accessibility of existing community spaces and creating new ones. Leveraging the city's existing relationships with downtown's large corporations could open sources of funding for new safe spaces for young people.

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[29] Fuleihan, Dean, Thamkittikasem, Jeff. *Mayor's Management Report*. New York, NY: The City of New York, February 2019. Accessed March 2019. https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/pmmr2019/2019_pmmr.pdf

Invest in youth-led placemaking and neighborhood planning: Place-based initiatives focus on identifying local hot spots for violence and crime and empowering youth in planning changes that could improve the area. Youth-led placemaking initiatives serve multiple goals; they repair conditions of disorder, bring people out of their homes and into the public, deter crime, and engage young people in positive activities. In New York City, there are numerous examples where young people have installed public art and plantings, improved lighting, created pedestrian plazas, and attracted new, resident-owned businesses. One such example is the Marcus Garvey Youth Clubhouse in Brownsville, Brooklyn, a youth led, multi-organization initiative that, in 2017, redesigned and activated a vacant lot in an area where crime had reportedly flourished. Beyond creating a space by and for youth to socialize and engage in programming, the process intentionally sought to empower young people lead the planning process to build collective efficacy and ensure that the project responded directly to their needs. Identifying the best forms of evaluation for placemaking initiatives like the Marcus Garvey Youth Clubhouse is an ongoing process. Though not an encompassing measure of safety, the year the clubhouse opened, incident reports on the block of the clubhouse were lower than previous years. Perhaps more importantly, qualitative assessment identified unified positive reactions to youth leadership in the planning process, and that youth felt relaxed and safe in the space.[30]

4. Data, Resource Mapping, and Community-Engaged Research

To aid in the implementation process of violence prevention efforts, Jersey City should continue research efforts focusing on local resource mapping, data access and sharing, and partnering with local universities for support. All such efforts should engage community members directly.

Engage community-based organizations to build upon local resource mapping efforts: There is a passionate and informed cohort of community-based organizations throughout the city, and particularly in Bergen-Lafayette and Greenville. These organizations can and should serve as key contributors to future violence reduction initiatives, starting with a collaborative effort to further identify all existing community resources. This comprehensive resource mapping should take place before implementing new programs, as it will allow for optimal investments that directly fit the needs of Jersey City. The city should look to CBO leaders and community members to identify the types of services offered, the geographic locations of said services, and the demographic groups to be targeted. This will also help to identify gaps in service and promote communication between existing programs. These efforts should build on work already being done by the city, such as The Jersey City Department of Health and Human Services' *Healthier JC Community Resource Guide*,[31] a searchable online database of social service providers. The process of engaging community members will help the city maximize the accessibility of tools like the *Healthier JC Community Resource Guide* and potentially identify other effective means of communication specific to the communities served.

Further engage local universities and researchers to enrich data collection and analysis and continue to develop data sharing efforts: In keeping with its commitment to data-driven solutions, Jersey City should further invest in partnerships with local universities to collect and analyze data on community violence. This research should be used to inform decision-making and to identify clear metrics to measure progress as part of a measured, step-by-step process of violence reduction. Where appropriate,

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[30] Trekson, Mark, Esthappan, Sino. *Empowering Young People to Make Their Place A Case Study of the Marcus Garvey Youth Clubhouse in Brownsville, Brooklyn*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 2018 Accessed March, 2019. https://www.urban.org/research/publication/empowering-young-people-make-their-place-case-study-marcus-garvey-clubhouse-brownsville-brooklyn

[31] "The Jersey City Community Resource Guide," Jersey City Department of Health and Human Services, accessed March, 2019, https://healthierjcgetstarted.com/

the city should look to further streamline the process of data-sharing from city agencies and large local institutions. Other efforts might build on the existing Jersey City Open Data online portal[32] and its accessibility to the community.

Engage community members in further research endeavors
Where possible, further research efforts, whether by the city or by local universities, should use community-engaged research, which is a powerful tool for developing and enhancing relationships with grassroots individuals and organizations, building trust with the community, and promoting alignment with community priorities. While community-engaged research can take many forms, it ideally involves intensive consultation and collaboration with community partners throughout the research process. Research question identification, research design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination are all key parts of this process.

[32] "Open Data," City of Jersey City, accessed December 2018, https://data.jerseycitynj.gov/pages/home/

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VII. Appendices

Appendix A: Maps

- Map 1: Distribution of Shootings in Jersey City
- Map 2: Shootings and Poverty in Jersey City
- Map 3: Shootings and Unemployment in Jersey City
- Map 4: Shootings and High School Incompletion in Jersey City
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Appendix B: Community Focus Group Instrument

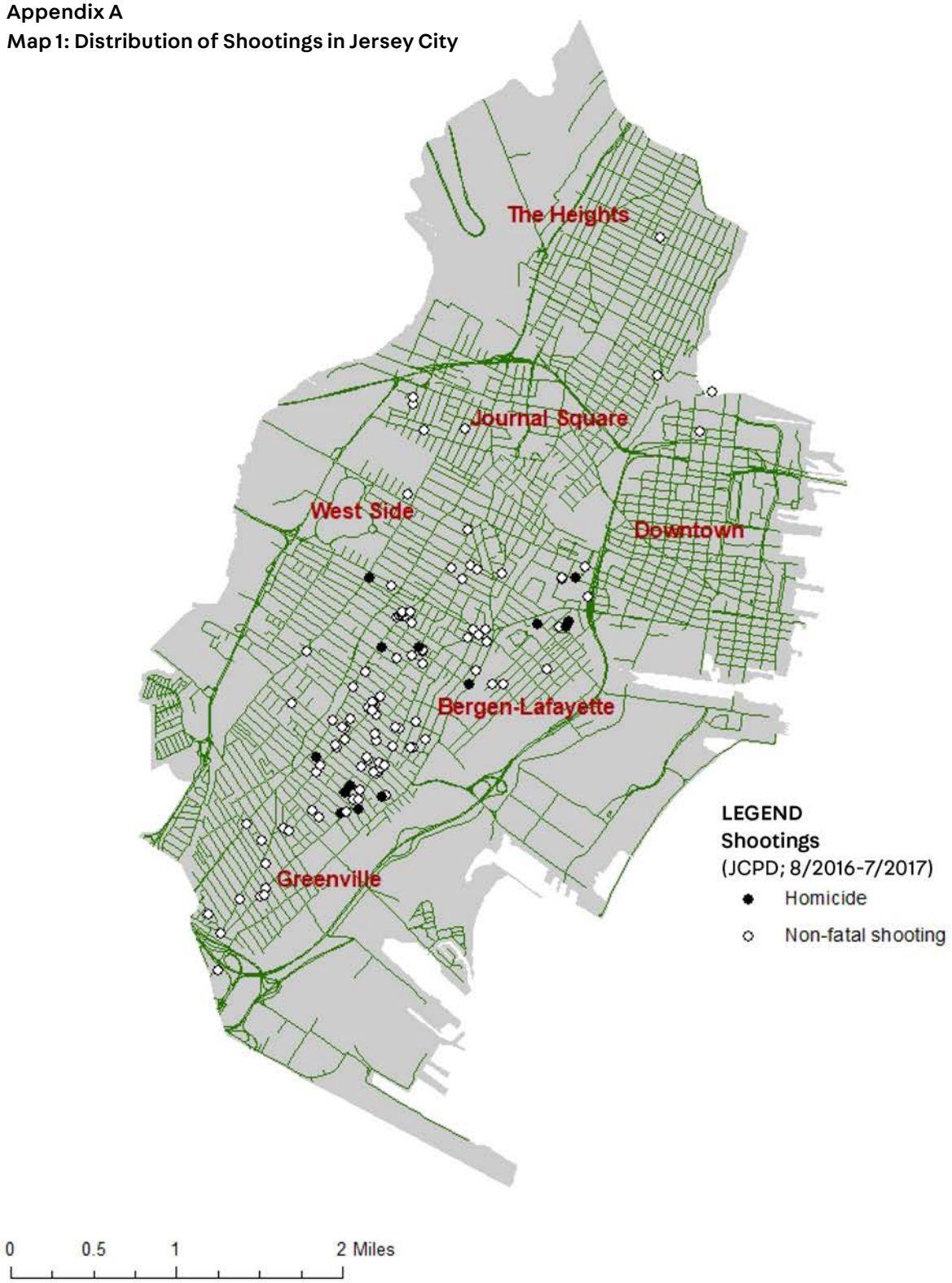
Appendix C: Stakeholder Interview Instrument

Appendix D: Summary of Further Community Engagement During Needs Assessment

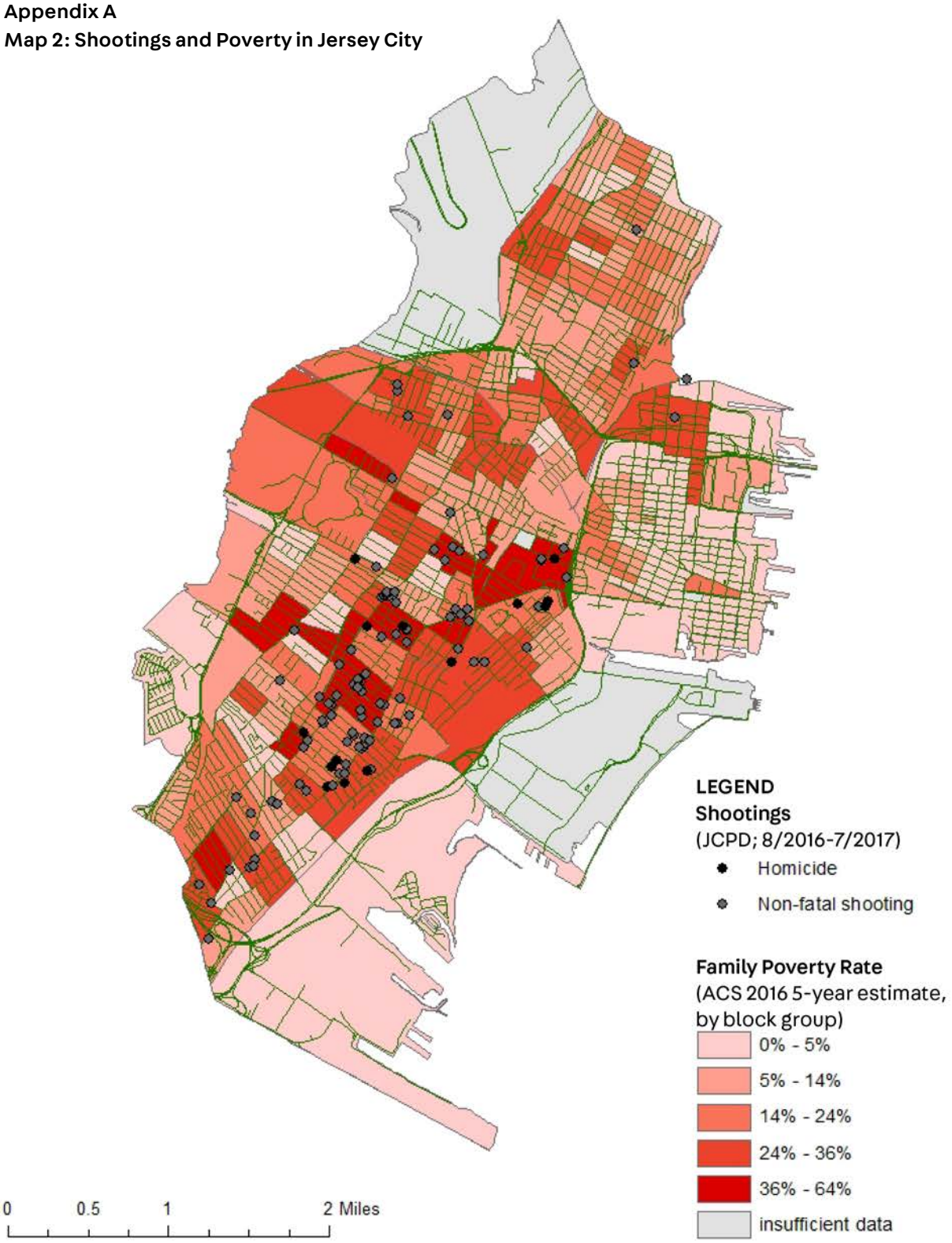
Appendix E: Violence Prevention Program Model Summaries

Appendix A

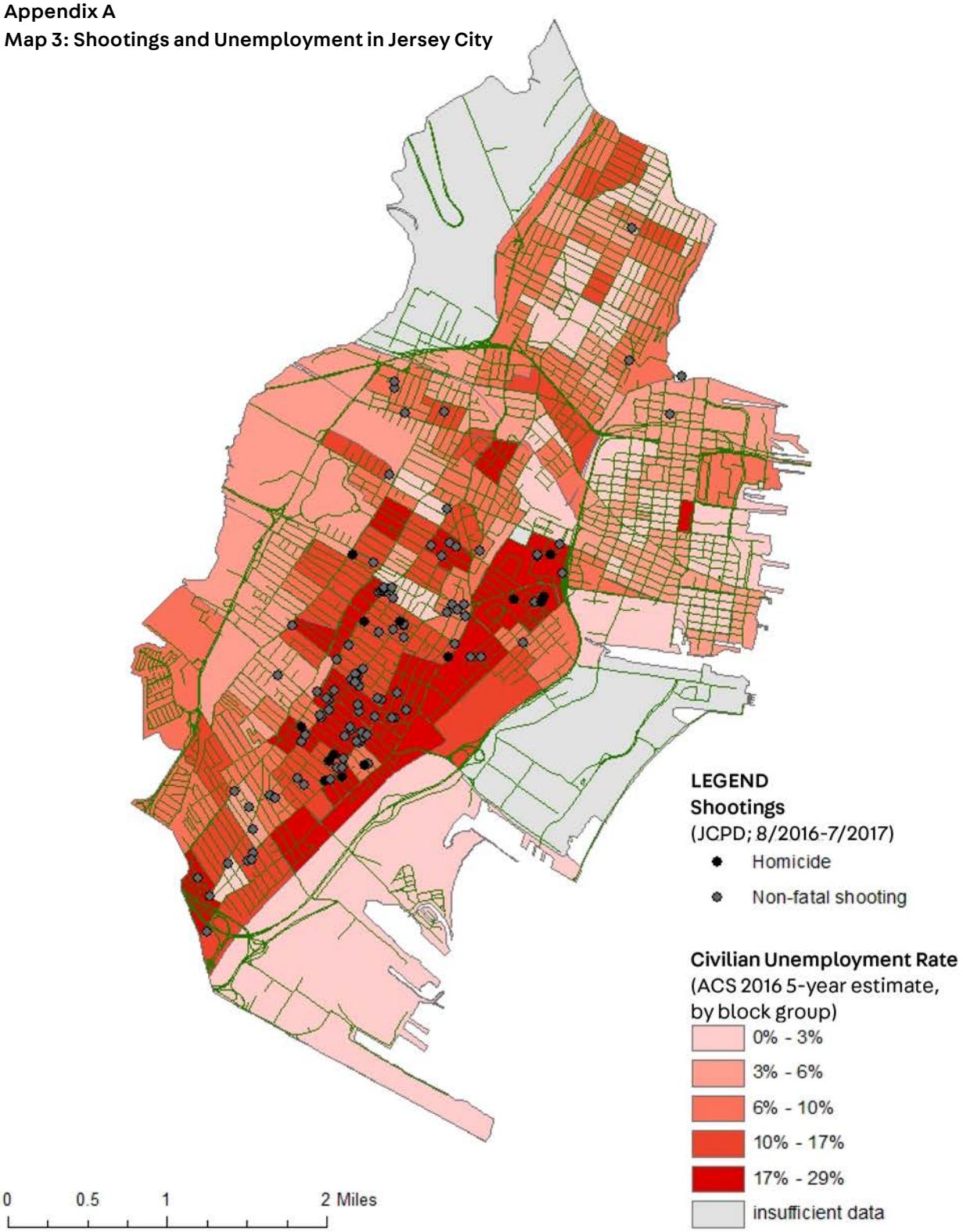
Map 1: Distribution of Shootings in Jersey City



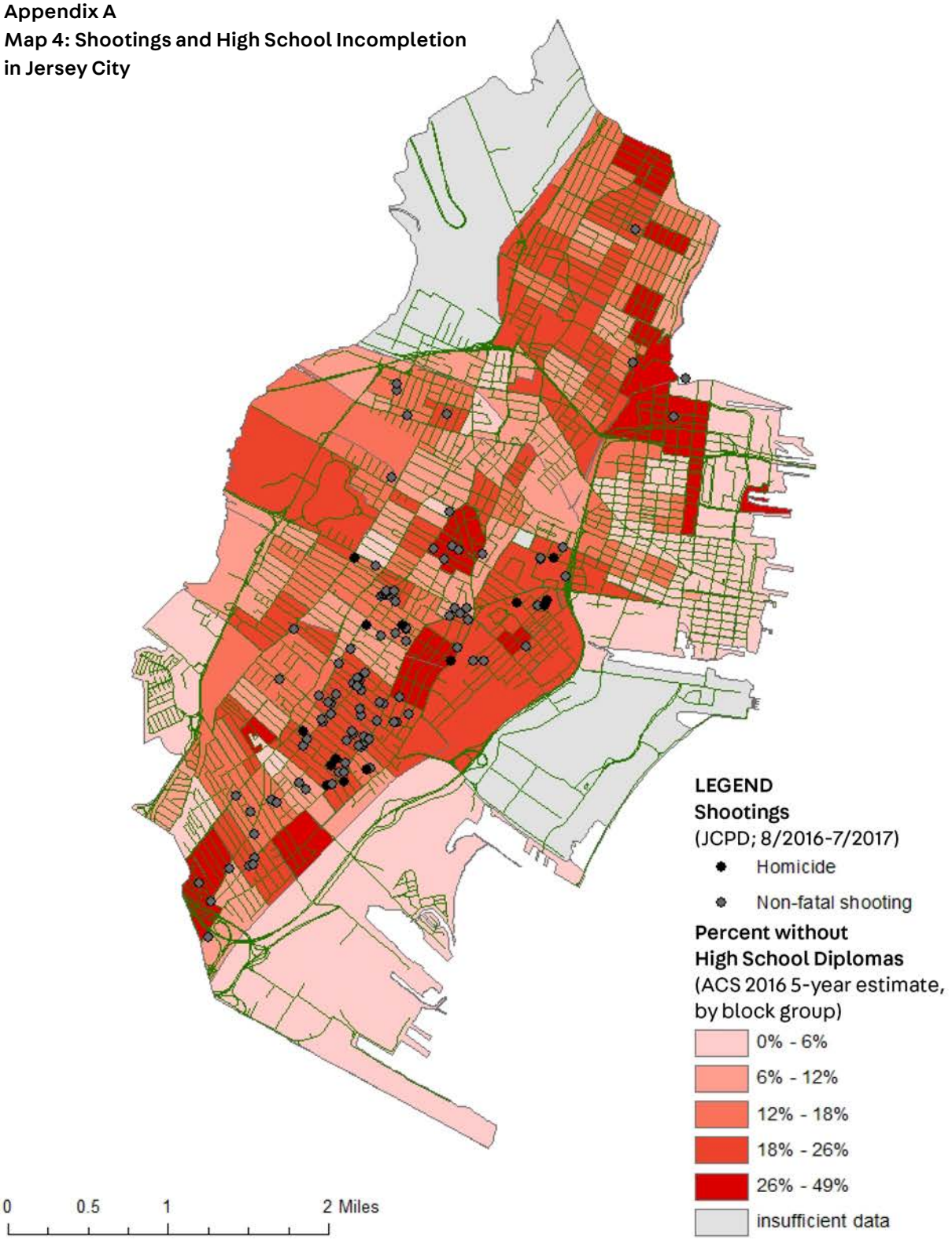
Appendix A
Map 2: Shootings and Poverty in Jersey City



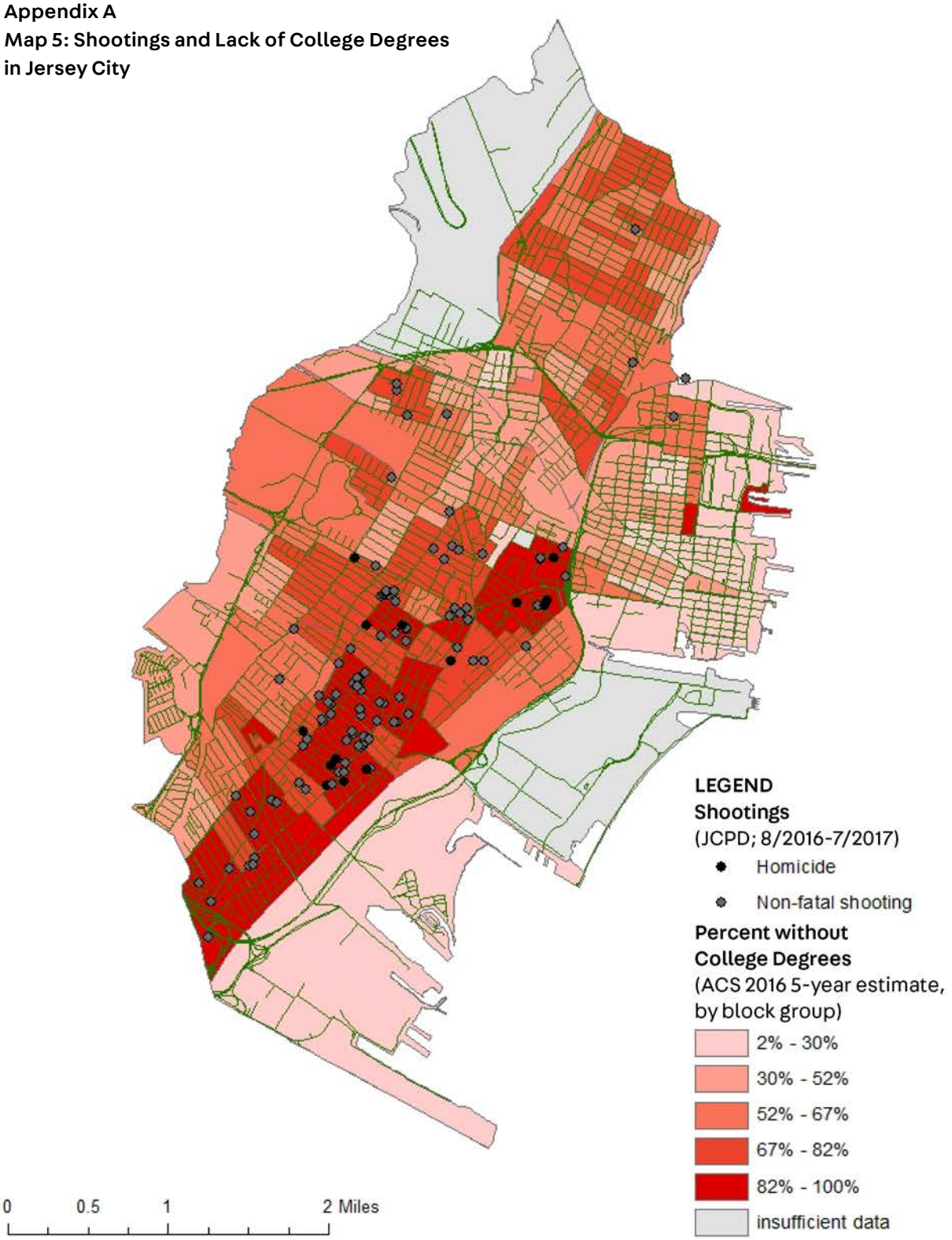
Appendix A
Map 3: Shootings and Unemployment in Jersey City



Appendix A
Map 4: Shootings and High School Incompletion in Jersey City



Appendix A
Map 5: Shootings and Lack of College Degrees in Jersey City



Appendix B: Community Focus Group Instrument

Focus Group Questions:

1. What are the public safety concerns in Jersey City?
2. Where in Jersey City are these public safety concerns highest, in particular "community violence?
3. What factors contribute to the public safety concerns shared in this space?
4. Who is most impacted by the violence?
5. What is currently being done to address the violence?
6. What are some of the more pressing concerns about the way the city at large currently responds to community violence?
7. What strategies do you think will be helpful in addressing community violence?
8. What changes would you like to see in your community?
9. How can youth/the community be better supported to be agents of change in their community?

Appendix C: Stakeholder Interview Instrument

1. Community Strengths

Main Question: As a [INSERT ROLE] what do you view as the main strengths of Jersey City?

Additional Prods:

- What do you think people would say are the best things about living or working in in Jersey City?
- To the extent that you are able, please identify some important community resources in Jersey City (e.g. schools, parks, community-based organizations, political leadership, geographic locations, and other positives).

2. Public Safety Issues

Main Question: What are some of the more pressing public safety concerns in Jersey City that you are aware of?

Additional Prods:

- Is violence impacting the quality of life of residents in Jersey City? What types of violence?
- Who or what would you say is causing the violence you've mentioned?
- What are the visible signs that this problem exists in the community?
- What members of the of Jersey City community would you say are the most adversely affected by this problem?

3. Other Community Concerns and Problems

Main Question: Other than public safety issues regarding violence you have already mentioned, what would you say are the primary concerns or problems currently facing the Jersey City Community?

Additional Prods for each problem mentioned:

- Who or what would you say is causing any public safety issues you've mentioned?
- What are the visible signs that this problem exists in the community?
- What members of the Jersey City community would you say are the most adversely affected by this problem?
- Where in Jersey City are these public safety concerns highest, in particular "community violence?

4. Systems

Main Questions:

- What would you say are some strengths in the way your agency and the city at large currently respond to public safety issues

- What are some of the more pressing concerns about the way your agency and the city at large currently respond to those public safety issues
- What do you think your agency could do differently to respond to the public safety problems you've mentioned?
- What do you think the justice system – police, prosecutors, courts – could do differently to respond to the public safety problems you've mentioned?

Additional Prods:

- In your opinion, are there any improvements you've noticed in the way that Jersey City responds to public safety concerns?
- What feedback have you heard—for example, from colleagues, members of the public, or the media—about the way the system responds to public safety issues?
- Considering the community strengths and concerns you've discussed, are there any other specific challenges that city agencies should be mindful of?

5. Other Information

Main Questions:

- Are there other persons you recommend we speak with as part of this process?
- Do you have reports, data, or publications that you recommend we review as part of our assessment?

Appendix D: Summary of Further Community Engagement During Needs Assessment

Community Engagement

The assessment team supplemented methods of formal research with attendance at community events and a visit to Center for Court Innovation operating projects in New York City.

Community Events: The assessment team attended various community events put on by both the city and by local organizations including such as the Jersey City Unity Walk and a meeting of the Jersey City Youth Taskforce.

Visit to Neighbors in Action Crown Heights and the Brownsville Community Justice Center: On Friday, October 12th, the Assessment team hosted a group of over 15 city government employees and community stakeholders from Jersey City for visits to Neighbors in Action and the Brownsville Community Justice Center, both in Brooklyn, New York.

Neighbors in Action, located across multiple storefronts in Crown Heights and Bedford-Stuyvesant, houses several neighborhood safety programs including Save Our Streets (S.O.S.), which uses the Cure Violence Model to seeks to address gun violence on a neighborhood level by changing local norms.
The Brownsville Community Justice Center is a multi-faceted project that seeks to improve community safety and prevent crime by investing in local youth and improving the physical landscape of the neighborhood.

Appendix E: Violence Prevention Program Model Summaries

1. Cure Violence Program Description

Cure Violence programs draw from an evidence-based, public health focused model that treats violence like a disease and seeks to stop its transmission with direct conflict mediation, outreach, and building of community networks. Core to the programs are street intervention and client outreach in a targeted catchment area. Under the Cure Violence model, outreach workers deliver the message that gun violence is a high-risk solution to personal conflict and offer alternative dispute resolution strategies and services to people at high-risk of becoming perpetrators or victims of violence. Separately, a staff of "violence interrupters" uses knowledge of the neighborhood and previous gang contacts to identify and attempt to resolve brewing conflicts before they result in gun violence. Anti-violence messages are delivered by outreach workers familiar with the target neighborhood who are often ex-gang members with experience in the criminal justice system. In theory, these "credible messengers" have some legitimacy in the eyes of high-risk youth. Further, outreach workers work to establish relationships with high-risk youth and modify norms regarding violence toward a less tolerant view of guns.

The second core component of the Cure Violence model is a community-wide educational and mobilization campaign which aims to modify norms that are tolerant of violence and to increase the sense of collective efficacy among residents in neighborhoods heavily affected by gun violence. Outreach workers, clergy and Cure Violence program staff typically work together on the community-level components. The public education component involves canvassing and delivering written materials about Cure Violence and the problem of gun violence as widely as possible throughout the intervention community. Other key ingredients in the community mobilization campaign are community events and "shooting responses" (vigils held within 72- hours of a shooting at with the purpose of sending a message that violence will not be tolerated).

Key to the success of cure violence model programs is community engagement in the planning and hiring process. Incorporating planning time into the budget process important to ensuring sustainable, effective programs. Typically, municipalities put out an RFP to local service providers. Once a provider is identified and funded, community members are further engaged in the hiring process. Center for Court Innovation Cure Violence model programs use hiring panels consisting of crucial agency leaders, community leaders, and social service providers, a member of the local faith community, and local law enforcement. These panels allow for a thorough assessment of a candidate's, knowledge of the community, their capacity for eliciting change in individuals and the community, their sense of responsibility, their strengths and weaknesses, their credibility, and their willingness to grow and learn. Furthermore, the process catalyzes some of the community connections necessary for the program to function. Panel members must offer feedback on each candidate and document their recommendation for hiring.

2. Make It Happen Program Description

Trauma informed care programs take many shapes and it is important to structure them to meet the needs of individuals in the communities served. Make It Happen provides trauma-informed support services at Neighbors in Action in Crown Heights, Brooklyn to young men of color between the ages of 16 and 24. The goal is to provide supportive services to young men who have been negatively impacted by community violence yet are not in a position to acknowledge and process the trauma. Make It Happen challenges participants to think about how their definition of manhood is intertwined in trauma and gender roles. Through group workshops and client-driven individual sessions, participants can recognize their own trauma and engage in healing.

Make it Happen offers individual therapy in which participants meet weekly or as needed with a licensed mental health clinician in a one-on-one setting. Individual therapy is grounded in a person-centered approach focused on improving individuals' all-around wellness. Clients also partake in group therapy which addresses topics such as understanding healthy masculinity, post-traumatic stress disorder, and violence in the home and community. In unison with therapeutic services, clients are offered case management designed to identify immediate needs that can pose barriers to healing. In cases where referrals are made to local service providers staff act as fierce advocates for Make It Happen participants and are dedicated to ensuring service provider accountability. To this end, staff assist participants on an ongoing basis in communicating with and navigating systems, such as court, mental health services, and housing. Finally, Make it Happen is also charged with attempting to engage traditional victim service providers on the needs of male crime victims. The purpose of this is to make victim services compensation available to young men of color who have been victims of crime.

The healing work done at make it happen does not end when clients complete the program. Make It Happen is home to Community Healers and Mentors for Personal Success. The C.H.A.M.P.S. are peer mentors who have completed the Make It Happen program. They are trained in group facilitation and work with middle school students to help them engage with the topics of healthy masculinity, healing, and trust-building. Additionally, the mentors are equipped with information about community resources to help them support their social networks.

3. Mayor's Action Plan (MAP) Program Description

Underway since 2014 and led by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, the Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety (MAP) is a comprehensive strategy to enhance public safety and strengthen community well-being in 15 public housing developments across New York City. MAP is a multi-faceted initiative that brings together residents and city government agencies to reduce crime with strategic investment informed by collaboration and data. Rolled out in multiple phases, key MAP initiatives include building access to employment and benefits, improving physical environments, and developing socially cohesive neighborhoods. For example, in 2017 through MAP advocacy, the city guaranteed summer employment to all MAP youth ages 14-24 and coordinated with local partners on a campaign to help increase recruitment and enrollment.

A driving force of the MAP program is Neighborhood Stat (NSTAT) which brings together residents and city agencies to address underlying drivers of crime using shared knowledge and data. Initial centralized NSTAT meetings convened community stakeholders and city agency leaders to identify neighborhood priorities geared towards enhancing quality of life and to spur collaboration and accountability. In a more recent phase of the effort, the Center for Court Innovation has worked with the city government to localize the NSTAT process by assisting each of 15 designated communities to convene local stakeholder groups to discuss, identify, and prioritize community initiatives, access and analyze data, identify and leverage resources, monitor community conditions, and implement projects that address local concerns and enhance public safety and well-being. Key to localizing the NSTAT process is hiring Neighborhood Engagement Coordinators. Amongst other duties, Neighborhood Engagement Coordinators spearhead the development of community stakeholder teams that can identify and speak out on community concerns, and then implement action plans that address these concerns. Coordinators work with team members to develop and participate in projects that aim to improve public safety while emphasizing the benefits of community stewardship and inspiring team members and other residents to build a sense of ownership in their surroundings.

4. Youth Justice Board Program Description

The Youth Justice Board is a youth leadership and civic engagement program operated by the Center for Court Innovation that trains and empowers young residents of New York City to propose and advocate for solutions to policy challenges that impact them and their peers. The Center for Court Innovation launched the Youth Justice Board ("the Board") in 2004 to bridge the gap between adult decision-makers and local young people—addressing the lack of meaningful ways for teens to engage in the policymaking process, even when they are the population most affected by these decisions.

A group of 20 to 25 teenagers is selected each year to join the Youth Justice Board. Youth Justice Board members represent the diversity of the community and include a wide range of skills, perspectives, and personal experiences. During the first year of the program's two-year cycle, Board members conduct extensive research on the chosen policy topic, develop credible policy recommendations, and present them to key stakeholders. A report summarizing findings and recommendations serves as the springboard for the Board's second-year projects, which focus on implementing select recommendations through product development and advocacy.

This effort is no mere exercise: the Board's work product has led directly to changes in policies and practices across New York City, including: *I Got Arrested! Now What?*, a comic book and poster for arrested young people explaining the juvenile justice system, which is now distributed to all juveniles arrested by the Department of Probation; *Next Move NYC*, a mobile-optimized website that supports young people who are not in school and not working connect to jobs and training, education, and other resources; *Homeless Not Hopeless*, a report on youth homelessness and its intersection with the justice system, which informed New York City Council's March 2018 legislation package for runaway and homeless youth; and *Getting to Know YOUth*, a video project that educates police officers about how to safely and effectively interact with teens.

In addition to addressing pressing policy issues and creating meaningful system change, the Youth Justice Board program provides a direct benefit to Board members. They begin the year with intensive training on developing their leadership assets, understanding research methods, learning public policy and methods of advocacy, and immersing themselves into the issue being addressed. This skill and knowledge base is developed over the program year through hands-on work including conducting interviews with policymakers, designing and facilitating focus groups with other young people directly affected by the issue, writing and publishing a research-informed report containing recommendations on this issue, and presenting these recommendations to policymakers and other system stakeholders. Youth Justice Board staff also help Board members prepare for their futures by conducting monthly workshops related to college access and future planning. Staff also meet with members individually three to four times over the course of the program to help them identify and work towards their academic and career goals.

The program's intensive curriculum fosters civic participation and develops leadership and self-efficacy skills in young people. Through participation in this program, Board members are prepared both to create and promote policies that can lead to better outcomes for New York's youth and to take on life-long leadership roles in their neighborhoods and their city. Many Youth Justice Board alumni dedicate their lives and careers to these issues. Their leadership roles have included engaging with local elections in their neighborhoods, serving youth in detention facilities as social workers, and working as attorneys to improve justice system policies with organizations such as the Bronx County District Attorney's office.

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