



**Fact Sheet:**  
**The Department of Homeland Security's Approach to  
Countering Violent Extremism**

**Overview**

We have become a stronger, more secure nation over the last decade. Our experience also has made us better prepared to mitigate and respond to the kind of threats we face. We have used this knowledge to make our nation and communities more resilient, not only to terrorist and violent extremist attacks, but also to threats and disasters of all kinds, while safeguarding the fundamental rights of all Americans.

There should be no doubt, however, that serious threats remain. The terrorist threats facing the United States have evolved significantly over the last decade, and continue to evolve. In addition to the direct threats from al-Qa'ida, foreign terrorist groups affiliated with al-Qa'ida, as well as individual terrorist thought leaders, are seeking to recruit or inspire Westerners to carry out attacks with little or no warning.

The threat posed by violent extremism, however, is neither constrained by international borders nor limited to any single ideology. Groups and individuals inspired by a range of religious, political, or other ideological beliefs have promoted and used violence against the Homeland. Increasingly sophisticated use of the Internet, mainstream and social media, and information technology by violent extremists adds an additional layer of complexity.

To counter violent extremism (CVE) the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is working with a broad range of partners to gain a better understanding of the behaviors, tactics, and other indicators that could point to potential terrorist activity within the United States, and the best ways to mitigate or prevent that activity.

Our approach to CVE emphasizes the strength of local communities. We begin with the premise that well-informed and -equipped families, communities, and local institutions represent the best defense against terrorist ideologies. And while our primary purpose is to prevent a terrorist and violent extremist attack by an individual or group recruited by a violent extremist organization, or inspired by an extremist ideology, we also support strong and resilient communities as important ends themselves.

### **Our CVE efforts therefore focus on three broad objectives:**

1. Support and coordinate efforts to better understand the phenomenon of violent extremism, including assessing the threat it poses to the Nation as a whole and within specific communities;
2. Bolster efforts to catalyze and support non-governmental, community-based programs, and strengthen relationships with communities that may be targeted for recruitment by violent extremists; and
3. Disrupt and deter recruitment or individual mobilization through support for local law enforcement programs, including information-driven, community-oriented policing efforts that for decades have proven effective in preventing violent crime.

To implement this approach, we are working closely with our federal and international partners, as well as our many partners at the community, state, local, and tribal level across the country. We are an important partner in supporting the National Strategy on Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism, which President Obama released on August 3, 2011.

### **Key Objectives**

1. **Support and coordinate efforts to better understand the phenomenon of violent extremism, including assessing the threat it poses to the Nation as a whole and within specific communities.**

The Department of Homeland Security, along with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), is improving our understanding of the means and mechanisms of violent extremism within the United States and its implications for our country.

This includes examining the dynamics of radicalization to violence, the role of social media, and reasons why some individuals affiliated with violent extremism may commit acts of violence while others may not. We believe a better understanding of violent extremism improves our capacity to disrupt and deter recruitment or individual mobilization to violence. Key initiatives include:

- **Strengthening intelligence analysis** by developing case studies and unclassified publications about violent extremism incidents and indicators of domestic terrorist activities, identifying communities most impacted by violent extremism, and by assessing the capacity of state correctional organizations to detect and share information regarding violent extremism.
- **Sponsoring research through the DHS Science and Technology Directorate (S&T)** to develop a more complete understanding of violent extremism. Since 2009 S&T has produced more than 20 major projects or reports for DHS components and interagency partners, or the public, with additional reports now underway.
- **Developing an enhanced understanding of CVE through discussions and coordination with international partners.** Led by the DHS Office of Policy, we collaborate with international governments, law enforcement, and non-governmental organizations to gain greater insights and to understand violent extremism from a global perspective and techniques used abroad to counter it. This includes lessons learned and best practices regarding CVE programs and policy, and the facilitation of partnerships on CVE.

**2. Bolster efforts to catalyze and support non-governmental, community-based programs, and strengthen relationships with communities that may be targeted for recruitment by violent extremists.**

Our nation's homeland security is based on the premise that we must harness local efforts in support of national threats. DHS is working closely on multiple interagency efforts, and with non-federal and non-governmental partners, to engage local communities in our CVE efforts to make them safe, secure, and resilient. Our understanding of why an individual becomes a violent extremist continues to mature, and we continue to work with communities to better understand the dynamics that may contribute to that outcome.

We are expanding outreach to communities that may be targeted for recruitment by violent extremists; engaging those communities on issues of common interest; promoting greater awareness and understanding of Federal resources, programs, and security measures; and addressing community concerns. Key initiatives include:

- **Expanding DHS outreach efforts with communities** to address grievances, share information, and inform the development of policy. For example, the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) has worked to educate communities and state, local, and tribal law enforcement on cultural awareness, leading or co-leading over 150 community engagement and outreach events across the nation over the past year.
- **Supporting interagency efforts to broaden engagement with** state, local, and tribal law enforcement, philanthropic organizations, religious organizations, community groups, and national advocacy groups, and others to discuss violent extremism, best practices, and approaches.
- **Helping to build strong and resilient communities** by promoting immigration integration and civic participation.

**3. Disrupt and deter recruitment or individual mobilization through support for local law enforcement programs, including information-driven, community-oriented policing efforts that for decades have proven effective in preventing violent crime.**

Homeland security begins with hometown security. DHS continues to work closely with state and local partners, and individual citizens, to raise awareness through initiatives such as the "If You See Something, Say Something™" public awareness campaign and the Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative. As part of its effort to support local networks to counter violent extremism, DHS has launched a number of core initiatives, including:

- **Expanding support for local, information-driven community-oriented efforts** to prevent violent crime and build safe, secure, and resilient communities. The approach has proven successful in preventing crime and improving the quality of life in communities across the Nation. When done effectively, community oriented policing has provided the foundation for dealing with a broad range of violent crime issues including those associated with violent gang activity.
- **Implementing recommendations from the DHS Homeland Security Advisory Council CVE Working Group**, such as developing a CVE curriculum for state, local, and tribal law enforcement focused on a community oriented policing approach to combat violent crime and counter violent extremism.

- **Helping facilitate relationships of trust among local communities, law enforcement, and state and local fusion centers through the Building Communities of Trust (BCOT) initiative.** With our DOJ partners, lessons learned have resulted in guidance for law enforcement highlighting the importance of information sharing, responding to community concerns, and distinguishing between cultural behaviors and conduct that may legitimately reflect terrorism precursor activities.
- **DHS Conferences and Workshops on CVE:** With our federal partners, DHS is hosting conferences and workshops for law enforcement to better educate them about CVE. DHS hosted its first *National Countering Violent Extremism Workshop* on August 2-3, 2011 to provide fusion centers and state and local law enforcement partners with information about the Department's CVE efforts and the role of fusion centers in these efforts.
- **Training Initiatives:** DHS is working with DOJ, and has trained over 46,000 front line officers on Suspicious Activities Reporting and trained over 2,100 law enforcement officials on CVE.
- **Additionally, DHS has prioritized prevention activities through our FY2011 grants** that directly support local law enforcement efforts to understand, recognize, prepare for, prevent, and respond to pre-operational activity, and separately to raise public awareness and vigilance on terrorist and violent extremist activity.