



HEAL-PA – Racial & Communal Trauma Action Team

Preventing Radicalization Committee

Strengthening Civic Infrastructure and Social Trust in The Keystone State

Background & Project Summary: The United States continues to face unprecedented levels of democratic backsliding, deepening toxic polarization, and weakening social cohesion.¹ Research shows Americans lack confidence in government and fear each other. Toxic polarization has infused government, media, and social life, increasing political violence, intimidation of marginalized groups, anti-voting rights legislation, and widespread rejection of election results.² This particularly affects people who live in communities vulnerable to escalating violence and anti-democratic initiatives.

Introduction: Why PA? Why now?

Over 20 years into the War on Terror, the intelligence community assesses that domestic violent extremists (DVEs) motivated by a range of ideologies pose an elevated threat to the Homeland. They further conclude that racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists (RMVEs) and militia violent extremists (MVEs) present the most lethal threats, with RMVEs being most likely to conduct mass-casualty attacks against civilians and MVEs typically targeting law enforcement and government personnel and facilities. Additionally, a primary motivation for these domestic extremists pertains to biases against minority populations and perceived government overreach, something that has continued to drive radicalization and mobilization to violence. Experts predict that divisions and incitement to violence will continue. Contentious protests and rallies, and possible dangers around them, are expected well into the future. Clearly, the problem of radicalization to violence is not going to go away on its own.

To establish an effective preventative response to these concerning developments, it is important to initiate programming in the physical and online arenas that are most susceptible to radicalization.

¹ [Americans' Views of Government: Low Trust but Some Positive Ratings](#), Pew Research Center, September 2020 and [America is Exceptional in its Political Divide](#), Pew Research Center, November 13, 2020.

² [Building Sustainable Peace and Preventing Violence in the United States: Recommendations for the Biden-Harris Administration](#), Alliance for Peacebuilding, January 2021



- (1) *Pennsylvania, generally, and Pittsburgh, in particular, represent one such arena:* In Pennsylvania, there are “organized structures, charismatic personalities and, in some cases, tight-knit groups of friends” who create networks and craft a context conducive to disproportionate rates of radicalization at a local level with outsized, second-order influence on radicalization at a national scale. Given this reality, it may not be surprising that Pennsylvania ranks third among the 50 states in terms of the number of people charged criminally for the events on January 6th.
- (2) *The existence of "voting islands:* These are communities and counties, where residents are surrounded by neighborhoods with higher numbers of voters who are aligned by a strong political symmetry
- (3) *High Prevalence of Extremist Groups/Activities:* The state of hate in Pennsylvania exploded onto the world stage three years ago with the October 2018 shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh that left eleven community members dead. The shooting is believed to be the single-worst anti-Semitic attack in U.S. history. Additionally, Pennsylvania is home to 36 hate groups, the eighth highest in the country. Recent data from the FBI shows that 81 hate crimes were reported in Pennsylvania in 2020, up from 45 in 2019, the highest figure since 2006.
- (4) *The TRUST Network's:* The Trust Network’s Early Warning Early Response [reports](#) in the statistical analysis of hot spots, lists Pennsylvania as one of the states at risk, with Pittsburgh and Philadelphia on the list of cities at risk.

The Team:

Recognizing the growing negative impact of violent extremist groups and ideologies on community cohesion in Pennsylvania, the Governor’s Office of Advocacy and Reform Preventing Radicalization Committee (PRC) reached out to the [Trust Network](#) (TN) to identify and share resources and best practices around the U.S. for programming to prevent radicalization to the Commonwealth. The TN serves as an organizer and connector and will support a needs assessment to include the mapping and analysis of key risk and protective factors related to radicalization processes, as well as to identify partners with the capacity to exert influence on these processes at a local level. TN will simultaneously collaborate with multi-sectoral stakeholders in each pilot area to share relevant resources and material, and to raise localized knowledge and awareness.

[Parallel Networks \(PN\)](#), led by Dr. Juncal Fernandez-Garayzabal, is one such program partner. PN’s TCVE-informed approach offers a tested model for implementing whole-of-society approaches to prevention and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). This is in line with the Department of Homeland Security’s 2019 *Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence*, which takes a whole-of-society approach to prevention, empowering our citizens and our state, local, tribal, and territorial authorities, as well as our private sector, non-governmental, and community leaders, to develop localized frameworks to protect their communities.

[Susquehanna Valley Mediation \(SVM\)](#), led by [Susan Jordan](#), is a 501(c) (3) non-profit community mediation center in the Susquehanna Valley, serving residents across the three rural counties of Union, Snyder, and

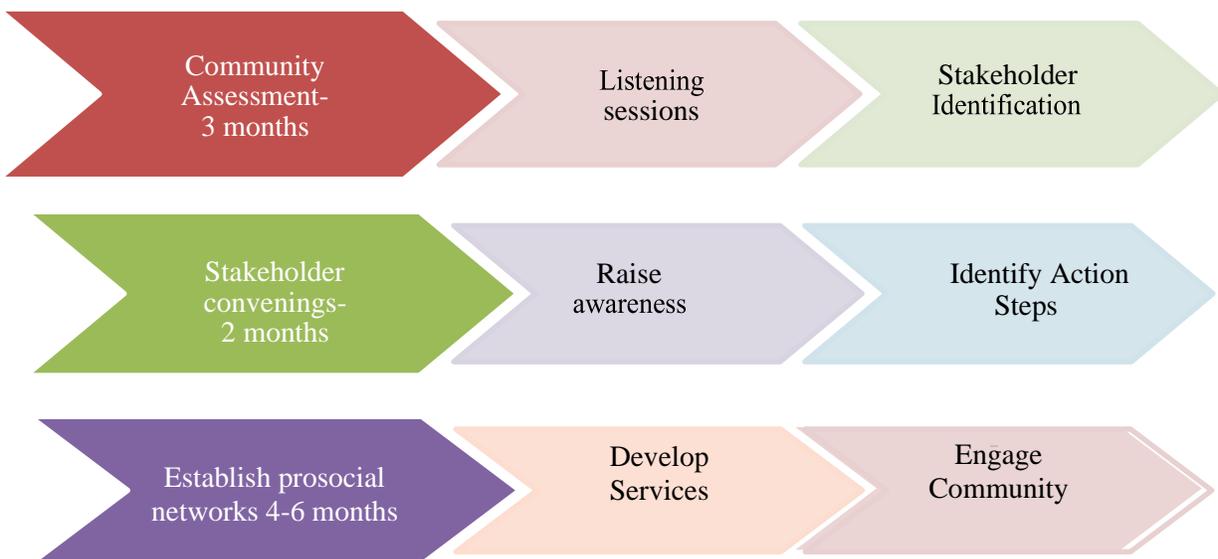


Northumberland. Founded in 2010, SVM’s mission is to support constructive responses to conflict in the Susquehanna Valley through mediation, facilitation, and education. SVM serves and connects many different sectors, including area schools, non-profits, grassroots efforts, human service agencies, hospitals, the courts, and probation. SVM staff and volunteers are rooted in a shared belief that people and communities are capable of transforming conflict when they voluntarily come together to address issues that trouble and divide them, and that people are capable of living together humanely, even when there are profound differences.

Project Strategy – The Pilots:

The Preventing Radicalization Committee will advance a whole-of-society method and trauma-informed approach to prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE) at individual and collective levels in two Pennsylvania locations: (1) Pittsburgh, an urban community, and (2) the Susquehanna Valley, a rural community. A major focus will be to identify key prevention partnership opportunities (which may be unique to both settings), where TN will work with credible convenors. While TN has not yet identified a convener in Pittsburgh, efforts in the Susquehanna Valley will be convened by Susan Jordan, Executive Director of Susquehanna Valley Mediation, based in Selinsgrove.

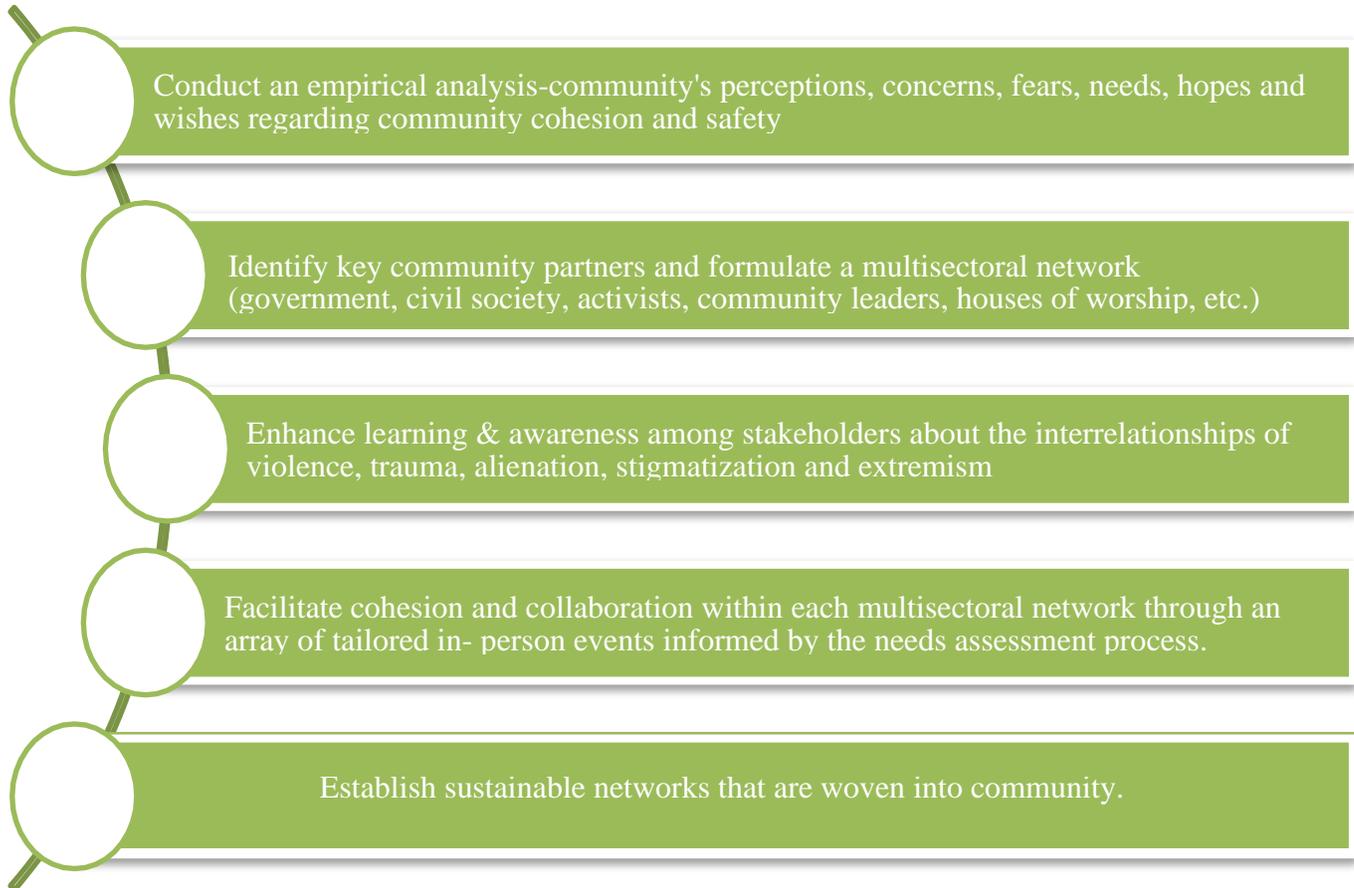
The program is designed to be delivered in three phases and will include activities, as set out in the chart below:



The process is as follows: First, an open community presentation at a university or community center that utilizes the lived experience of PN’s influencers to motivate communities and impart awareness. These influencers include: (1) [Bryant Neal Viñas](#), America’s first foreign fighter after 911; (2) Daryl Davis, a world-renowned African-American musician and race-relations expert, who has pulled together of hundreds of people from far-right wing movements; (3) Ryan Lo’Reed, a former right-wing extremist leader, now an activist and community organizer in Michigan and Program Director at PN; and (4) [Hope Hyder](#), a survivor of a white supremacist murder that targeted her father.



Project Objectives:



Proposed Activities:

The following proposed activities for the first two phases of the project will take place over a period of 4-6 months.

- (1) Train each local convenor and conduct semi-structured interviews with 35-50 local stakeholders using a knowledge, attitudes, belief and behavior (KABB) protocol developed by PN. These efforts will identify needs and existing assets, inform project activities, and begin a mapping and stakeholder identification process of organizations, sectors, and



individuals to impact at-risk populations in each locality.

- (2) Unite members from each area's network and present the project and findings from the needs assessment. In an open, online half-day webinar, to include all elements of a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats analysis (SWOT) that compares the urban and rural settings and outlines the trauma-informed and CVE-informed approach to combating hate and radicalization that gets to root causes.
- (3) After the online webinar, the HEAL-PA website will include a portal that will outline the project, share findings from the needs assessment and online webinar, and map the two networks. Additionally, the website will provide access to "PN's SHIFT-Hate Helpline" (Support and Help for Individuals and Families Touched by Hate) and "Ctrl+Alt+Del- Hate" counter-narrative material. This will provide network participants and the general public access with access to de-radicalization- oriented intervention services.
- (4) PN/TN staff, in collaboration with local conveners, will coordinate, organize and gather in each area (a week in Pittsburgh and a week in Susquehanna Valley) to hold meetings and deliver at least five events:
- (5) Following these events in Pittsburgh and the Susquehanna Valley, PN/TN will elicit reactions from each stakeholder-network participant to assess their knowledge and learning to identify next steps and opportunities to further the capacity to treat individual and collective cases of radicalization locally, and to establish preventive and intervention initiatives in Phase II of the project. The intent is to make this self-sustaining as TN/PN, the funder and local partners pursue federal governmental, philanthropic, and private funding sources to maintain and expand the HEAL-PA initiative.