

**Blue Ridge Partnership for Workplace Violence Prevention (BRPWVP)
Mission Statement and Guiding Principles**

MISSION STATEMENT

The Blue Ridge Partnership for Workplace Violence Prevention is committed to improving community safety through a proactive, collaborative, coordinated, objective, and thoughtful approach to the prevention, identification, assessment, intervention, and management of situations that pose, or may reasonably pose, a danger to the safety and well-being of the community.”

The partnership will exist to consult, review and assess the safety, health and welfare of individuals and businesses caused by the actions and/or behaviors of persons who may become a threat to a specific business or its employees.

The civilian and law enforcement professionals in the partnership will be available for consultation regarding their specific areas of expertise to assist businesses in setting up programs, files and internal workplace violence prevention teams. Law Enforcement members will take specific legal actions in a timely manner based upon potential or real workplace threats to the business community.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Principle 1: Targeted Violence Can Often Be Prevented

This principle is based upon data from school and workplace shootings that show that such targeted violence is rarely spontaneous. Rather, the perpetrator usually engages in a frequently observable pattern of thought and behavior prior to becoming violent.

The BRPWVP looks for information that may indicate that a person is on such a trajectory or pathway toward violence, and if such information is found, the BRPWVP then determines where it might be able to intervene to prevent harm. By proactively identifying the behaviors that precede the escalation of targeted violence, the BRPWVP can attempt to stop the forward progression down that pathway.

Principle 2: Violence is a Dynamic Process

The process of workplace violence assessment and management is based on the understanding that violence is a dynamic process, rather than a static event or a state of being. The BRPWVP does not try to determine whether someone is a “violent person” or not; rather the BRPWVP tries to determine the circumstances or situation in which the person in question might pose threat to themselves or others. A key aspect of the workplace violence assessment and management process is to look ahead over the coming days, weeks, and months and see what factors in a person’s life might change – an if such changes might increase or decrease the likelihood of violence. The particular workplace violence posed by an individual of concern varies with the ebb and flow of his/her situation and the interventions that may be applied. The BRPWVP must continually monitor and re-evaluate the situation to maintain a clear awareness of the workplace violence posed and the actual impact of the interventions used.

Principle 3: Targeted Violence is a Function of Several Factors

Incidents of targeted violence arise from an intersection of several factors, including the individual of concern, his/her situation, the setting, and the target of the individual’s animosity or grievances. Workplace violence assessment should not focus solely on the individual, but should also take into consideration all of these factors. The BRPWVP must examine the context and the environment in which the individual lives, the individual’s current situation, the factors that may precipitate violence or other negative behavior, and ways to make a target less accessible or vulnerable. It is possible that an individual’s behavior is merely a symptom of some broader, systemic problem that needs to be addressed. Indeed, in many cases, the individual in question may have legitimate concerns, yet has behaved inappropriately in response to a particular stressor.

Principle 4: Corroboration is Critical

Being skeptical about information received and corroborating information through multiple sources are critical to successful workplace violence assessment and management. This means that it is important to check facts where possible. It is imperative the business community and BRPWVP work closely together to ensure information is appropriately shared to not only protect the individual who may be in crisis but the business, employees and the general public. The workplace violence assessment and management process is based upon facts and behaviors, not assumptions. The BRPWVP must be diligent in identifying and verifying original source information in order to maintain an objective view of the totality of the situation. The BRPWVP will ensure the rights of all parties involved are protected.

Principle 5: Workplace violence Assessment is about Behavior, not Profiles

A major guiding principle of workplace violence assessment is the notion that there is no single “type” of person who perpetrates targeted violence. Instead, workplace violence assessment is evidence-based, focusing on the specific behaviors a person has exhibited and determining whether the person poses a workplace violence (or is a risk) based upon those behaviors. Only by carefully assessing each individual (and situation) and the available evidence in each specific case does the BRPWVP determine the appropriate response. It is this focus on behavior and the facts of a particular case that separates workplace violence assessment from profiling. The focus in workplace violence assessment is on what *this* individual in *this* particular context has done (or is doing) that causes concern.

A Word about Workplace violence Assessment and Profiling

When talking about predicting whether someone might become a “school shooter” or “workplace shooter”, the term “profiling” refers to comparing the person who has raised some concern with other perpetrators who have carried out the same types of attacks in the past – in terms of demographic characteristics, background histories, what they look like (e.g. a “Goth” student), etc. Based on the individual’s traits in comparison to those characteristics that have been associated with violent individuals in the past, profiling attempts to determine the likelihood that a person will become violent in the future. While workplace violence assessment is focused on preventing violence, profiling is focused on predicting violence. In this way, profiling is theoretical in nature.

Because profiling focuses on characteristics rather than behaviors, there is a tendency to make assumptions that individuals who possess certain traits will become violent. This bias tends to produce a high rate of false positives and unwarranted stigmatization, since many individuals possess these traits but very few of them actually engage in targeted acts of violence. Moreover, by focusing on a profile, it is possible to miss someone whose behavior suggests they are thinking about or planning for harm but who does not match or “fit” the profile. By contrast, workplace violence assessment is fact-based, focusing just on the information in the individual case and whether the facts gathered indicate the person is thinking about or planning harm. In this way, workplace violence assessment is a deductive process – focusing on what conclusions the facts allow the BRPWVP to draw. A BRPWVP uses the information gathered both to assess whether the person in question poses a workplace violence, and more importantly, to determine how best to intervene to prevent violence. Focused solely on prediction, profiling offers no guidance with respect to intervention or workplace violence reduction.

Principle 6: Cooperating Systems are Critical Resources

Communication, collaboration, and coordination among various departments and agencies are critical throughout the process of workplace violence assessment and management. Having the participation of people from various parts of the community can enhance the major components of the workplace violence assessment process: identifying persons of concern, gathering and sharing information, determining whether the person poses a workplace violence (or is at risk), and, if necessary, developing and implementing an individualized case management plan to reduce the workplace violence posed. Using different systems as well as outside resources provides more eyes and ears on the process of both assessing and managing a potentially violent situation. Effective communication is necessary for the receipt, assessment, and response to critical information. Collaboration involves establishing effective relationships and a shared mission to achieve desired safety goals. Coordination involves prioritization and timing of interventions by differing members of the BRPWVP in order to implement and maximize the effectiveness of the management plan.

Principle 7: Does the Person Pose a Workplace violence threat?

The central question of a workplace violence assessment is whether the person in question *poses* a threat of workplace violence, NOT solely whether he/she *made* a workplace violence threat. A person makes a threat when he/she expresses intent to harm another person or business, whereas a person poses a threat when he/she “engages in behavior that indicates furthering a plan or building capacity for a violent act.” This guiding principle of workplace violence assessment means that the BRPWVP should take *all* potential workplace violence behavior seriously, not just those that have been verbalized or expressed in some other way. The potential for workplace violence is usually detected because someone notices something unusual or troubling about the person’s behavior, such as carrying weapons, stalking a target or decreased abilities to regulate and control their behavior. Just because a person has expressed intent to do harm does not necessarily that he/she poses a serious threat of workplace violence. It is the job of the BRPWVP to gather relevant information and determine whether the person does, in fact, poses a threat of workplace violence – and, if so, how best to intervene and reduce or eliminate that threat.

Principle 8: Early Identification and Intervention Helps Everyone

The emphasis of workplace violence assessment and management is on the early recognition, reporting, and intervention with persons who have raised some concern. This guiding principle is directly related to the idea that targeted violence is frequently the end result of an identifiable pattern of thought and behavior. The main task of the BRPWVP is to recognize signs of these thoughts and behaviors that tend to precede violence, and to intervene as early as possible in order to prevent further escalation. In order to do that effectively, the BRPWVP needs to learn about persons who have raised concern as early as possible. Volatile situations are like poured concrete – the longer they set, the harder they are to work with. The earlier a concern is recognized, the easier it is to address and resolve. Early identification also allows for a broader range of intervention options, especially those interventions that are less punitive or control oriented.

Principle 9: Multiple Reporting Mechanisms Enhance Early Identification

In order to be effective, workplace violence assessment and management require simple and easy access to reporting, consultation and intervention resources. The BRPWVP should make it as easy as possible for the community to report concerns and for the BRPWVP to quickly access the resources it needs in order to intervene appropriately. Having multiple means of reporting concerns – including websites, and email addresses – as well as guidance on what to report, can all encourage community members to report concerns as early as possible. A multidisciplinary BRPWVP better facilitates a multi-source, multi-method approach to early notification of problem situations.

Principle 10: Safety Is a Primary Focus

The last guiding principle is that safety is the primary goal of all workplace violence assessment and management efforts. The BRPWVPs’ ultimate purpose is to ensure the safety of the business community by identifying and managing situations which increase the potential for workplace violence. The BRPWVP must remain cognizant of the possibility that such measures, however well intended or appropriate, may be perceived as a trigger for a volatile individual. The BRPWVP will do its due diligence to insure all information and recommendations given and all legal actions taken are for the ultimate protection of the person in crisis, the business and the community. Members of BRPWVP strive to provide the best service and most up to date information to assist businesses in making informed and proper decisions.

NOTE: Mission Statement and “Guiding Principles” are drawn from The Handbook for Campus Workplace violence Assessment & Management BRPWVPs, November 2008, authored by Gene Deisinger, Marisa Randazzo, Daniel O’Neill and Jenna Savage.