DHS TVTP FY2024 Grant Proposal

Prevention Academy: Training City Leaders and Officials on Addressing Hate, Extremism, and Polarization

The Challenge

Mayors and other local elected leaders around the country are increasingly concerned about the impact that hate, extremism, and related threats are having on community safety and cohesion in their cities. These leaders recognize that due to their immediate proximity to these incidents and their deeper, more nuanced understanding of affected communities, they have an important role to play alongside federal and state counterparts in both prevention and incident response. However, many feel they lack the tools necessary to assume this role, which may vary depending on the context.

The Proposal

The DHS Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships (CP3) issued a call for proposals for the FY24 Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (TVTP) grants program, with a submission date of May 17.

Strong Cities and the National League of Cities (NLC) – who recently announced a strategic partnership – propose a "Prevention Academy" for mayors and other local elected officials, as well as senior city officials, to help them 1) better understand and identify the threats, needs and vulnerabilities in their cities as they relate to hate, extremism, and related threats; 2) appreciate the benefits of a public health approach to prevention and the essential role they play in operationalizing and sustaining it; and 3) understand how to apply such an approach in their cities, including through the development of whole-of-city approaches to prevent targeted violence and terrorism that are driven by the needs and priorities of local communities. The academy will impart to cities how to best leverage a) tools and approaches developed and/or delivered by other TVTP grantees, b) promising practices from across the Strong Cities' 235+ members, and c) violence prevention and other public safety improvement efforts from across the NLC programming and membership. Attention will also be given to ensuring that hate/extremism prevention approaches are aligned with, and in some cases embedded into, broader existing safety and violence prevention efforts.

The Academy would include both on-line and in-person elements. It would consist of a series of 10 learning modules delivered over the course of 10 months, complete with technical support to advance the city's work in operationalizing a comprehensive approach to addressing hate and extremism. Such technical support can include standing biweekly "office hours" to assist cities with issues related to hate and extremism as they arise and/or assist with longer-term efforts to develop comprehensive approaches.

Over the cycle of the grant, Strong Cities would run two rounds of the Academy (up to 15 per session). Strong Cities and NLC would work to ensure that the process of identifying these cities and the participating officials reflects diversity, equity, and inclusion principles. Each session would include two in-person workshops, at the beginning and end of the cycle, where the participation of mayors (or their deputies) and other local elected leaders would be expected. The workshops would take place in or on the margins of already planned events where mayors and other local elected officials would be attending. For example:

- NLC City Summit in Tampa, FL (November 2024) & Salt Lake City, UT (November 2025)
- Strong Cities North America annual mayoral retreat in Pittsburgh, PA (August 2024 and 2025)

In between the two in-person roundtables, city leaders would complete eight modules, which will be delivered virtually on multiple occasions to accommodate the different schedules of the participating cities. Together with the in-person workshops, the project modules would address the following topics:

1. Local leadership in prevention: the role of mayors and other local elected leaders in prevention
2. Understanding the on- and off-line hate/extremism landscape (data collection, monitoring, etc.)
3. Federal, state, and local government action in prevention and how cities can take the lead in a public health approach to prevention
4. The role of communities, community-based organizations, and law enforcement in prevention
5. How to identify potential stakeholders in city-led prevention and build a multi-disciplinary prevention team
6. Community engagement models, including with faith and historically marginalized communities
7. Referral mechanisms, behavioral threat assessment and management, and ongoing provision of psychosocial and other support
8. Rehabilitating and reintegrating former extremists/offenders
9. Sustaining city-led prevention efforts, with a focus on monitoring, evaluation & learning and building city-level public-private partnerships for prevention
10. Crisis communications and post-incident response and recovery, with a particular focus on the role of mayors and other local elected officials

Throughout the course, participating cities would be able to access the Strong Cities "help desk" and resources, including its members and pool of subject matter experts, for support in the application of the knowledge being shared during the course. Outside of the two in-person convenings, each city can expect a total commitment of about 2 hours per month (by the relevant official of the city's choice) to attend the trainings and attendant exercises, with the option to commit more time to leverage the "help desk" to assist in any ongoing developments or initiatives.

Partner Contributions

In addition to the Strong Cities team, former Pittsburgh mayor Bill Peduto and current mayor of Highland Park, IL Nancy Rotering will serve senior mayoral advisors. Both led their cities through the aftermath of horrific attacks – at the Tree of Life synagogue in October 2018 and an Independence Day Parade in July 2022 – to develop response, recovery, and a long-term prevention infrastructure. Together, they will lead project engagement with mayors and other local elected officials. Strong Cities will also leverage its growing SME pool – including current and former city officials – who serve as external consultants to contribute to the development and delivery modules based on the areas of their expertise. Finally, Strong Cities will leverage the experiences of cities across its 235+ member network and the tools it has developed to support city-led prevention efforts, tools which will be tailored for the US context.

The NLC is serving as a key partner alongside Strong Cities in this effort. Building on key networks like the Mayoral Network on Community Safety and Violence Prevention and other peer learning groups/cohorts of local elected officials, NLC would lead on the formation of the session cohorts, identifying (in partnership with Strong Cities) the cities (and from those the elected and staff leadership) to target for participation. NLC will also support the ongoing management of and communications with each cohort, identifying speakers, especially city representatives, for the in-person and online training, and as the primary host for the cohort at each NLC City Summit.