



Yakima Valley Gang Violence Prevention

Report pursuant to Section 128(191), [Chapter 297, Laws of 2022](#)

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Report to the Legislature

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Acknowledgments

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Executive summary

Overview

The Washington State Legislature appropriated \$750,000 to the Washington State Department of Commerce (Commerce) for fiscal years 2024 and 2025 to contract with a community-based, nonprofit organization to develop and execute a preventive gang violence campaign in Yakima County. In the city of Yakima, 26% of homicides were related to gang activity. The initiative was designed to address the high gang violence rates in the Yakima Valley.¹

Commerce contracted with the Northwest Communities Education Center (NCEC) to lead the two-year project. NCEC is the non-profit organization that owns and operates Radio KDNA, a Spanish-language public radio station. The organization established a community consortium and was tasked with developing and implementing strategies to address an alarming level of gang violence in the region. The Gang Violence Consortium (Consortium) collaborated with a public radio station to develop a Spanish-language public radio media outreach campaign, focused on connecting gang-involved youth with employment, educational programming, and training opportunities.

Leveraging KDNA, NCEC led the Consortium, focusing on school districts in Grandview, Mabton, Sunnyside, Granger, Toppenish and Wapato. The Consortium called for community institutions to work together to prevent students from engaging in gang-related activities. Partners included law enforcement, schools, social services agencies and grassroots organizations.

Introduction

Background

Section 129 (50) of [Chapter 475, Laws of 2023](#) directs Commerce to:

(a) \$375,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2024 and \$375,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2025 are provided solely for a grant to a nonprofit community-based organization for the coordination of a gang violence prevention consortium with entities including community-based organizations, law enforcement, and members of the faith community, and to continue and expand after-school activities and social services for students and young adults in the Yakima valley. Social services may include, but are not limited to, employment, mental health, counseling, tutoring, and mentoring services. The grant recipient must be a community-based organization located in Granger operating a Spanish language public radio station and with the mission of addressing the social, educational, and health needs of economically disadvantaged Spanish-speaking residents of central and eastern Washington.

(b) By June 30, 2025, the department must provide a report to the appropriate committees of the legislature. The report must include: (i) A description of the gang violence prevention programs conducted by the consortium and how they were implemented; and (ii) The number of individuals who participated in or received services through the programs conducted by the consortium, including any relevant demographic data for those individuals.

Additional funding was appropriated in the 2026-2027 supplemental budget for \$125,000 to continue providing gang violence prevention services in the Yakima area.²

¹ Yakima Police Department Murder Map Dashboard. From 2019-2024, the Yakima Police Department reported 65 murders in the Yakima Valley, with 17 gang-related, 12 domestic violence-related, 2 drug-related, 1 robbery, 21 unknown and 12 classified as other.

² [Washington State Legislature, "Section 197 \(17\)."](#)

Gang violence prevention programs

Yakima Valley Gang Violence Consortium

The Consortium focused on the Grandview, Mabton, Sunnyside, Granger, Toppenish and Wapato school districts. The Consortium called on local groups – including law enforcement, schools, social service agencies, juvenile justice agencies and grassroots organizations – to collaborate in preventing students from engaging in gang-related activities across the five districts. The Consortium produced a comprehensive and collaborative project that focused on:

- Reaching underserved populations with limited literacy and experiencing cultural or information isolation

Providing resources for after-school activities, including mentoring, job training and job placement services

- Producing a radio show and social media campaign to promote educational gang prevention and intervention programs – the radio show aired seven days a week during prime-time hours
- Providing after-school tutoring and remedial classes in English, math and science
- Conducting parent workshops and giving regular presentations to students

Project overview

Programs consisted of five major components:

- 1) **Yakima Valley Gang Violence Prevention Consortium:** Regular meetings to revise a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis, which was created the year prior, and made an action plan for the project.
- 2) **Youth-Focused Activities:** Support for school-based credit retrieval programs and job fairs aimed at youth.
- 3) **Outreach Campaign:** Development of informational materials and radio programs to raise awareness about gang prevention.
- 4) **Workshops/Presentations:** Educational sessions for students and parents on gang awareness and prevention.
- 5) **Data Collection/Reporting:** Evaluation of program effectiveness through surveys and attendance tracking.

Northwest Communities Education Center

Commerce contracted with the Northwest Communities Education Center (NCEC), which operates Radio KDNA, to promote gang prevention awareness in the Yakima Valley. Radio KDNA is a Spanish-language public radio station that launched in 1979. It operates in Eastern Washington's Yakima Valley within a 100-mile radius of the lower Yakima Valley broadcast area. KDNA aims to encourage and motivate its listeners by educating, informing and mobilizing them to become involved in the Valley's culture and on topics that affect their health, education and civic engagement. The station's call letters, KDNA, stand for "Cadena," meaning "chain" in Spanish. This name reflects its mission to link agricultural workers and other Spanish-speaking communities in central and eastern Washington. Through the radio station, the NCEC broadcasts educational programs, public service announcements and health information, often in partnership with other organizations.

The station reaches about 130,000 members of the Hispanic community who live and work in the area. The Yakima Valley also boasts a large agricultural workforce and a thriving community. Agricultural activity is not inherently linked to increased crime or gang activity. However, the social conditions surrounding migrant labor – such as poverty, racism and lack of opportunity – can create environments where gangs thrive.

Credit retrieval program

The credit retrieval program provided academic support to youth who withdrew from school or were at risk of not completing high school due to involvement or association with gangs. The project focused on secondary schools located in the Mabton, Granger, Wapato, Toppenish, Grandview and Sunnyside school districts. Students were referred through a referral system and received mental health and social support services.

Total student participants:

- 88 students participated in the program
 - 40 identified as male, 48 identified as female
- 84 students completed the required coursework to graduate

Social media campaign

Local radio stations are widely accessible to agricultural workers and their families in Central Washington. These groups use social media platforms to share information. NCEC/Radio KDNA built a social media campaign to promote gang awareness and prevention in English and Spanish. Social media topics using hashtags, #kdna, #radiokna, #cdc, #prevencion, #COVID19 and #prevenciono covered:

- 88 social media posts were posted on Facebook, Instagram and X (formerly Twitter), focusing on gang awareness and prevention, opioid misuse and alcoholism
- On average, there were 113 views per post
- Posts provided links to resources in Spanish, such as the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism and infographics about drug use

Radio segments and programs

Small five-minute radio broadcast segments were placed in between longer radio shows that quickly provided the listener with quick information about gangs and substance abuse, the effects of gangs on mental health, gang identification and symbols, leaving a gang and how to communicate with children and youth about gangs. Agricultural workers in Central Washington rely on Radio KDNA for local information and would not receive this information from other sources.

In addition to the radio segments, there were longer, one-hour extended radio programs featuring guest speakers from the Yakima Valley Communities Gang Violence Prevention Consortium, including representatives from local schools, WA Labor and Industries and local medical clinics. Programs aired at different times and dates to reach a broader audience of 8,000 to 10,000 listeners per year.

Workshops and presentations

Educational sessions were conducted for both students and parents, focusing on gang awareness, prevention and education presentations for middle and high school students. These workshops were held at Mabton High School, as well as at Los Niños Bien Educados Training and Granger Wellness Coalition meetings – the presentations aimed to provide crucial information on identifying and mitigating gang involvement.

There were two student workshops per school district, with pre- and post-surveys assessing awareness of gang violence. The workshops taught students how to share information about the danger of gangs with others.

The Awareness of Gang Violence workshop discussed how to be aware of gang violence. Students' awareness of gang violence in Yakima County was measured pre- and post-workshop via survey:

- Pre-survey: 90% of students understood how to be aware of gang violence
- Post-survey: 100% of students understood how to be aware of gang violence

The second workshop was titled, "Sharing Information About the Danger of Gangs to Others."

- Pre-survey: 53% of students knew how to share information about the danger of gangs with others.
- Post survey: 73% of students would share information with friends, and 66% would tell their parents.

Student participation demographics consisted of 93% Hispanic, 3% Native American, 2% white and 2% were unreported.

Three parent workshops were provided. Parents were made aware of gang violence in Yakima County and how to share information about gangs with other family members, neighbors, extended family and others – 98% of parents participating in the workshops identified as Hispanic.

Community outreach programs

The outreach campaign was a significant part of the project, utilizing multiple platforms to raise awareness about gang prevention. Outreach staff attend local events that offer community resources and support. Outreach activities were conducted throughout the year at various events. Northwest Communities Education Center reported the outreach activities, events and individual participation as follows:

- NCEC/Radio KDNA back-to-school events, Second Harvest Festival, Latino Bar Association of Washington (LBAW) Legal Clinic, Health Fairs and National Night Out – 7,320 individuals
- Heritage University, Migrant Resource and Harvest festivals, Cultural Nights at Benton High School and Drug Take Back Day – 150 individuals
- Covid vaccine clinic and resource fair – 334 individuals
- NCEC/KDNA Christmas festivity events – over 2,000 individuals
- Second Harvest Festival – 735 individuals
- Events included a COVID vaccine clinic, agricultural safety day in Wenatchee and the Quincy resource fair – 1,314 individuals
- Resource job fair, health fair, harvest festival and tax preparation services – 1,302 individuals
- Resource fair and Cherry festival – 180 individuals
- Resource fair, harvest festivals, job fair events and agricultural farm visits – 1,270 individuals