



Gun Violence and Nightlife June 14 and 21, 2022

ATTENDANCE SUMMARY

Due to a high-level of interest, RHI hosted two forums on the topic of gun violence and nightlife.

The forum was attended by 74 representatives from the cities listed below. They came from police departments, business district management, hospitality venues, community representatives and “night managers.” The group was divided into eight breakouts, with average of 5 people per room. They met for 30 minutes discussing trends and strategies implemented in their city. Each group provided a summary of their session and there was general discussion with the larger group.

Annapolis	Columbia	Milwaukee	Raleigh
Arlington	Dallas	Minneapolis	Rochester
Bloomington	Des Moines	New Brunswick	Sacramento
Bogota	Edmonton	Norfolk	Savannah
Burlington	Fort Myers	Philadelphia	Seattle
Cape Town	FT Washington	Pittsburgh	Tampa
Chicago	Garland	Pomona	Washing
College Station	Lexington	Portland	

TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

WHAT’S THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN GUN VIOLENCE AND THE SOCIAL ECONOMY?

Gun violence is a systemic challenge across society, which is playing out in a number of settings, including social districts. These are not isolated incidents, however. Homicide rates across the nation have increased.

- **Nightlife districts have been historically blamed for gun violence**, but now that mass shootings have become a regular occurrence in a variety of locations—schools, churches, supermarkets—the “location as cause” argument is a moot point. The problem is not the location; it’s the guns.

- **When gun violence happens in social districts**, there is an immediate heavy hammered approach to force social venues to have an earlier closing time, but this is not good for the community or businesses.
- **Gun violence taking place in social districts are more likely to occur in public space at closing time.** It's rare for gun violence to occur inside a social venue. **The street itself has become the venue.**
- **Parking lots in social districts have become “glorified gun safes.”** They need to be managed beyond just filling them up with cars and having attendants leave. People are returning to nearby parking lots to retrieve guns.
- **Gangs were involved in the mass shooting in Sacramento.** Really, the shooting could have happened anywhere, but unfortunately, happened in a social district
- **For some cities, the issue of gun violence** has gone past the “tipping point”; it's now at the “breaking point.”
- **Events** (public and private; ticketed and non-ticketed) are becoming new sites for gun violence. Small incidents escalate.

ACCESS TO WEAPONS

- **Guns are in the hands of the wrong people:** young adults who should not legally have access to guns; irresponsible gun owners, etc.
- **Weapons are being stolen from cars** parked in social districts or outside houses, then are used for crimes.

DYNAMICS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE CHALLENGE

- **Conflict resolution skills lacking in young adults:** Minor interactions that used to be resolved with a fist fight are now escalating to the point of using a gun to resolve challenges.
- **“Contagious fire”:** During the mass shooting on South Street in Philadelphia, bystanders with guns decided to get involved and start randomly shooting, leading to two additional victims.
- **Disrespect for law enforcement** creates hesitancy to engage with nightlife patrons. They have to conduct a situational analysis – pick their battles of what to enforce and whether it will escalate tensions. “Nuisance fills the void.” Police are striving to achieve a balance between enforcement and engagement.
- **Negative media exacerbate negative perceptions about social districts.** Violence at night is scaring away daytime economy patrons and workers; even people who would normally go out in the early evening. This is affecting tourism as well.
- **Press tends to focus on stories about gun violence in social districts, even if similar incidents may have occurred throughout the city.**
- **Open carry or “constitutional carry” states (24 out of 50)** are particularly challenged by disparate perspectives on the value and rights associated with gun ownership.

DEMOGRAPHICS AND YOUTH

- **Many of the nightlife patrons who are going out now** had never been in a social venue prior to COVID. Some are outraged by the idea of going through metal detectors or being patted down. There is a need to teach young people how to have fun safely.
- **Youth in the Streets:**
 - Youth gather in downtowns and social districts in some cases because their own neighborhoods are not safe.
 - **In New Orleans**, the city has an 8:00pm curfew, but there are too few police officers to enforce it. Even if police bring youth to the nighttime youth center to notify parents, children cannot be detained there. Further complicating the situation is that youth are being used in an abusive manner by their parents or guardians to be lookouts for drug dealers, play bucket drums or tap dance on the streets for money. So, there is no safe place for them to go.

- **In DC**, there is an issue with youth stealing from retail stores. Law enforcement doesn't feel like they can stop the cycle. Youth are out on the streets late at night without any parental guidance.

AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

A representative of the International Nightlife Association (INA) commented that mass shootings just don't happen outside the U.S to the same degree due to the lack of legal access to weapons. Top issues on the international radar are needle spiking being used against women.

STRATEGIES DISCUSSED

ROLE OF POLICE

It was agreed that while police presence is part of the strategy for public safety in social districts, "more police" is not an end-all solution. In several instances, armed police were present at events and social districts, and did not serve as a deterrent to gun violence.

However, many of the strategies discussed (e.g. deploying mental health workers and tow truck operators to tow illegally parked cars) require some level of police presence. Social workers and parking enforcement alike have expressed discomfort about going into social districts at night and risking retaliatory action from someone with a gun. Many request accompaniment by an officer; thus, the idea that they can alleviate the burden on police is not necessarily true.

NIGHTTIME GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS

Recent incidents of violence have prompted or accelerated the desire for many city leaders to establish a Nighttime Economy Manager position. Forum attendees indicated the presence of a point person to coordinate a response among government and between government and the business community would be an enormous asset, especially after a major incident. Having those relationships in place would expedite the process.

"Nightlife is multi-faceted. It's an orchestra that needs a conductor." Otherwise, everyone is playing their own song without being in sync.

SOCIAL VENUES

- **Bag policies:** combinations of "no bags" vs. "some bags" are being explored for hospitality industry workers, but this is difficult because employees usually carry a change of clothes for going out after their shift.
- **ID Scanners**
- **Metal Detectors**, but they may no longer be as useful now that guns are being made from ceramic and plastic materials
- **Clear signage posted outside social venues** stating no weapons inside, so door security can point to that.
- **90 second rule** where trained security analyzes the situation and mitigates risk.

EVENTS

- Engage event organizers MCs to get on the mic and encourage attendees to calm down if they start witnessing small fights and skirmishes (before they escalate).

TECHNOLOGY IN PUBLIC SPACE

- In Norfolk, VA, mobile video surveillance systems are being used, but they are not welcoming nor sustainable.

ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGIES

- **More lighting**
- **Restricting parking** on the street in front of social venues so people don't have easy access to guns in cars; prevents people from starting street parties out of parked cars.
- **Increasing trash management**
- **Enforcement of open containers** being consumed from cars.

PROGRAMMING

- **Family-friendly programming** sends a message that it's not ok for troublemakers to attend.

ENLISTMENT OF POSITIVE INTERVENERS AND INFLUENCERS AT NIGHT:

- **Pittsburgh, PA has outreached to citizens, teachers and other influential people** in young people's lives to work as interveners to help deescalate situations.
- **MadDads is a program in Minneapolis** that sends out men who have been in jail to help deescalate conflicts.
- **Sacramento** is engaging community groups to intervene with youth.
- **Dallas** is engaging faith leaders to get involved in social districts.
- **DC has a violence interrupter program** where community members help mediate conflict.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COLLABORATION

- **Holistic plan** with door security, police and community service officers to partner on safety.
- **De-escalation training** is needed across the board – police to venue staff.

PROACTIVE MONITORING

- **Raleigh, NC police has a hospitality squad** that surveys downtown before social economy patrons start arriving to try to prevent guns from reaching locations.
- **Patron safety campaigns** to educate patrons about how businesses are working to keep them safe.
- **Getting guns off the street:** Sacramento did a successful gun buy-back program in exchange for gas cards.
- **Gang task force** has been re-engaged in Sacramento.

MESSAGING

- **An idea was discussed about partnering with alcohol brands** to remind consumers to have fun safely with messages like "Fun, not guns" and "chill out."