



2026 INVESTING IN CHANGE

**Peacemaker Fellowship LifeMAP Milestone Allowances:
Purpose and Practice
A Behavioral Science Framework for Community Safety**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Peacemaker Fellowship® follows a simple premise---if violence is influenced by identifiable behavioral, social, and environmental determinants, then reducing violence requires intentionally creating the conditions that support positive human development and lasting behavior change.

For more than fifteen years, critics of the Peacemaker Fellowship® have asked a familiar question:

“Why would a community violence intervention strategy provide financial incentives to individuals thought to be involved in retaliatory firearm violence?”

The question reflects a misunderstanding of the structure and purpose of the Peacemaker Fellowship®. The Peacemaker Fellowship® is more than a community violence intervention strategy, it is part of a holistic, human development strategy focused on individuals at the highest risk of perpetuating or experiencing gun violence.

The LifeMAP Milestone Allowance—a modest financial incentive tied to personal growth, self-defined goal attainment, and acknowledgement—is one component of that strategy. The allowance is not a payment for good behavior or compensation for avoiding violence. It is not a reward for staying out of trouble. Rather, it is one of several evidence-informed supports intentionally designed to help individuals make and sustain positive change.

The Peacemaker Fellowship® is grounded in established principles of behavior change. Consistent with Social Cognitive Theory¹ and Self-Determination Theory², the Fellowship recognizes that individuals are more likely to sustain positive change when they experience meaningful relationships, develop a sense of agency and competence, envision a viable future, and receive structured opportunities that reinforce growth and accountability.

These theories were studied and validated across disciplines long before they were incorporated in Community Violence Intervention (CVI). *Advance Peace* furthered the application to one of the most difficult public safety challenges in America--helping those at the center of retaliatory gun violence choose a different path despite the absence of systems designed to support them doing so.

¹ Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

² Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78.

ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION OF THE PEACEMAKER FELLOWSHIP®

Early Efforts

In 2008, we assembled and meticulously trained a small but highly capable team of residents with the lived experience, relational credibility, and community trust necessary to operate effectively in Richmond's most volatile neighborhoods. We called them Neighborhood Change Agents (or NCAs).

At the time, conventional wisdom suggested that if we concentrated these assets in the city's most violent hot spots, then we could reduce shootings and homicides. Initially, that strategy appeared to work. Richmond's homicide count fell from 47 murders citywide in 2007 to 28 in 2008. Within the primary neighborhoods where we concentrated our efforts (Central/North Richmond), gun-related homicides fell by nearly 90 percent (from 28 in 2007 to 3 in 2008).

By the end of 2009, retaliatory gun violence had surged again. The city experienced 45 homicides and nearly 200 non-fatal shootings involving injury. The violence had not disappeared. It had simply moved to different neighborhoods and that realization crystalized an important lesson-- our mission should remain the same, but our strategy would need to change.

A Critical Realization

Around that same time, local, regional, state, and federal law enforcement officials shared an assessment that would fundamentally shape the future of our work. Collectively, they believed that fewer than thirty individuals were responsible for roughly 70 percent of Richmond's firearm violence in 2009. Most had avoided arrest and prosecution because witnesses were unwilling to cooperate, and evidence was often insufficient. This information, combined with what our team learned through street outreach and conversations with active firearm offenders themselves, led to a critical realization---our efforts were focused on places when they should be focused on people. More specifically, we needed to focus on the small number of individuals at the center of Richmond's retaliatory firearm conflicts.

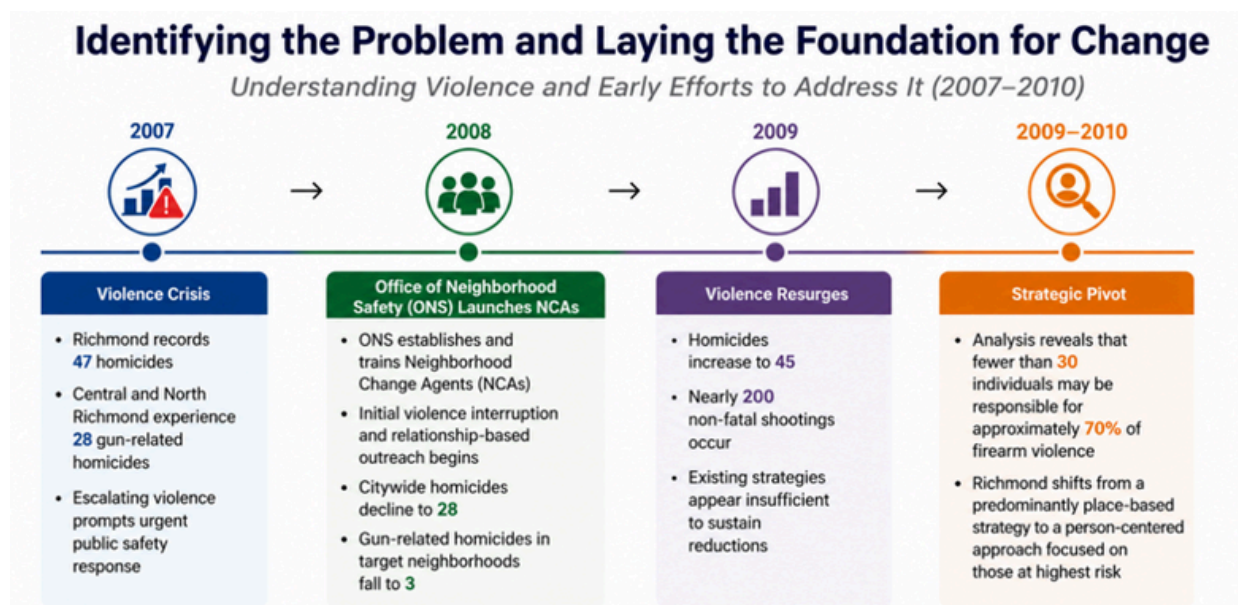
The Systemic Problem

While spending time with these young men, we discovered something that challenged common assumptions---most did not want their current life circumstances, nor did they want to spend every day looking over their shoulders. A life of carrying firearms was not their aspiration.

Most want what we all desire---safety, stability, meaningful experiences, healthy relationships, and the opportunity to imagine a future. Yet many have concluded that such a future is impossible. Many are living with profound unaddressed trauma, food and housing insecurity, and an experience of repeated exposure to violence, incarceration, loss, and systemic failure.

Most of our fellows are not connected to any public or community-based system of care. The systems available to them lack credibility, legitimacy, and relevance in their eyes. Essentially, they are largely disconnected from the institutions designed to help.

We recognized that if we wanted different outcomes, we first had to create an effort these young men would willingly join. Hence, the Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) needed to become an agency for people who did not trust agencies. At the time, I defined our organizational success simplistically. We needed to create an organization that attracted people who traditionally avoided organizations. When those who were thought to be at the center of retaliatory gun violence were running towards us instead of away from us, we would know we were on the right track.



BIRTH OF THE PEACEMAKER FELLOWSHIP®

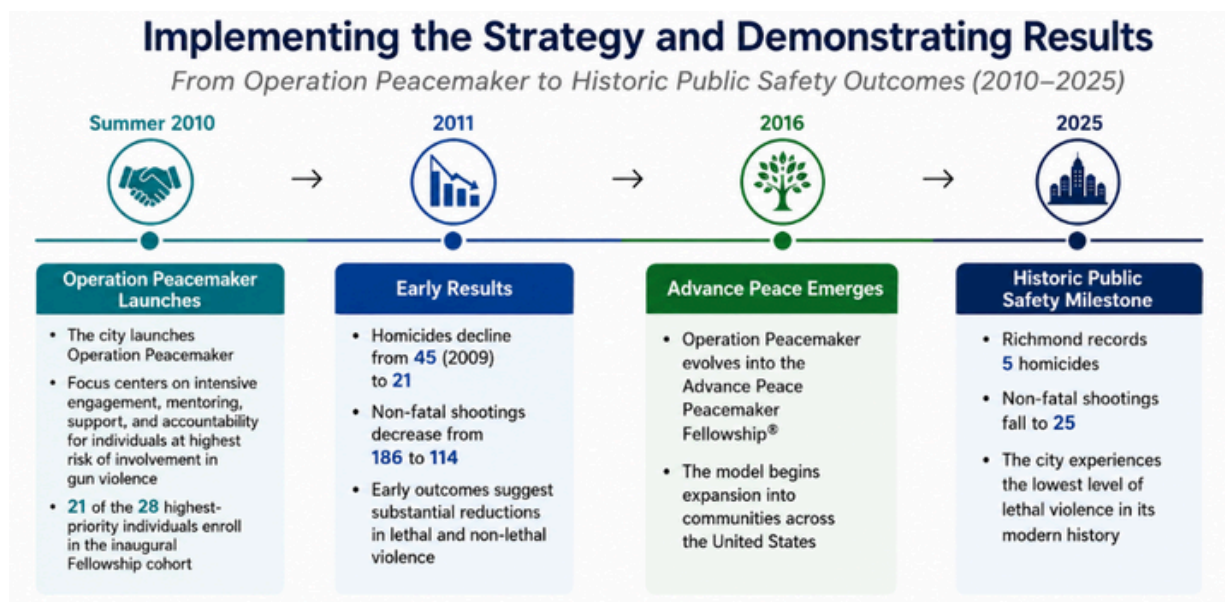
By January 2010, I was entering my twenty-seventh month as Director of the City of Richmond's Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS)—the first government-established Office of Neighborhood Safety in the nation. An ultimatum from the City Manager and City Council was clear: **Reduce retaliatory gun violence or get out of the way.**

With lessons learned from our early efforts, in the summer of 2010, we launched Operation Peacemaker. Operation Peacemaker was designed as a fellowship experience specifically for individuals driving Richmond's retaliatory firearm violence. It was built around a simple question:

What would happen if we exposed the people at the center of gun violence to a variety of conditions suggested by behavioral science that support positive human change?

Of the twenty-eight highest-priority individuals identified for engagement, twenty-one enrolled in the first Fellowship cohort and by the conclusion of that inaugural cohort in 2011, retaliatory firearm homicides had fallen from 45 in 2009 to 21, while non-fatal shootings declined from 186 to 114.

Richmond California has never looked back. In 2016, Operation Peacemaker evolved into the Advance Peace Peacemaker Fellowship®, becoming the signature strategy of Advance Peace and expanding to cities across the country. This work has helped multiple cities reduce retaliatory gun violence by 20 percent or more within 24-months of launch. Also, by 2025, Richmond recorded the lowest level of lethal violence in its modern history—five homicides and twenty-five non-fatal shootings citywide (source: City of Richmond CA.).



LESSONS LEARNED

Over the years, I have wrestled with how best to describe the Fellowship. On one hand, I have always believed it was important to communicate clearly—both internally and externally—that the Fellowship exists for a specific purpose: reducing retaliatory gun violence. That clarity is important. It helps staff remain focused on our service population and our purpose. It also helps policymakers, funders, and partners understand that Advance Peace was created to address a very specific public safety challenge: the small number of individuals living at the center of firearm violence.

Simultaneously, I have increasingly come to recognize that once the right individuals are identified and enrolled, much of our work no longer resembles what people traditionally think of as violence intervention. The daily work becomes far more humane. It becomes about helping people heal, grow, develop, lead, imagine a future, and build the capacity to make different decisions under difficult circumstances. It becomes human development, personal evolution, and leadership development directed toward a population at the center of gun violence.

This tension has remained with me throughout the life of the Fellowship. Acknowledging that we must remain disciplined about our public safety mission because that mission determines who we engage. Yet the closer one gets to this work itself, the more apparent it becomes that lasting reductions in violence are not produced by focusing on violence alone. They are achieved by helping human beings develop the skills, relationships, confidence, hope, and sense of possibility necessary to forge a more positive and healthier path forward.

In that sense, the Fellowship is both a retaliatory gun violence reduction strategy and a human development strategy. The first explains our purpose. The second explains our method. We target retaliatory gun violence because that is where the need is most urgent. We invest in human development because that is where lasting change occurs.

VIOLENCE IS A BEHAVIORAL OUTCOME

Violence is a behavior that leads to a perpetual criminal justice problem.³ Violence, like all human behaviors, is shaped by the complex interplay of social determinants. These influences may include environment, relationships, trauma, stress, incentives, opportunity, social norms, identity, and expectations about the future.

³ American Psychological Association. (1993). *Violence and youth: Psychology's response*. American Psychological Association.

If violence is influenced by identifiable determinants, then reducing violence requires changing the conditions and beliefs that drive violent behaviors. This realization became foundational to the design of the Peacemaker Fellowship®.

Rather than asking: *“How do we stop shootings?”* We asked: *“What conditions help people make different decisions?”* Decades of behavioral and social science research suggest that lasting behavior change is more likely when people experience trusted and supportive relationships, positive reinforcement, accountability, social belonging, and practical support. Exposure to new experiences, increased self-efficacy, hope and a growing sense of purpose all further impact this change. These principles became embedded throughout the Fellowship’s design and structure.

Today the same behavioral principles are reflected in the Fellowship’s core touchpoints.

Relationships	Growth & Learning	Opportunity	Support & Reinforcement
Daily engagement with NCAs	LifeMAP planning	Interest-based internships	Social service navigation
Intensive mentorship	Life skills & cognitive behavioral supports	Transformative travel	LifeMAP Milestone Allowance
Elders & Eldress Circles	Goal setting	Exposure to new experiences	Accountability & encouragement

The allowance is not the intervention. It is one element of a much broader framework of engagement, support, accountability, and opportunity together intended to mitigate violence and promote positive behavior change.

FINANCIAL INCENTIVES: THE SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Immediate survival is an all-consuming priority for persons living amid conditions of chronic stress, scarcity and adversity.⁴ The persistent burdens of poverty and instability consume cognitive bandwidth and further diminish one’s ability to make sound decisions, plan for the future, and pursue even short-term life goals.⁵ Financial incentives can help in alleviating immediate pressures and creating space for engagement, future planning and goal-setting.

⁴ [Haushofer, J., & Fehr, E. (2014). On the psychology of poverty. *Science*, 344(6186), 862–867.]

⁵ Mani, A., Mullainathan, S., Shafir, E., & Zhao, J. (2013). Poverty impedes cognitive function. *Science*, 341(6149), 976–980.

Financial incentives as an intervention for positive behavioral change is not a novel practice. Research has long demonstrated the value of incentives across public health, addiction recovery, workforce development, education, and economic mobility initiatives. By the start of our early work in 2008, Higgins and colleagues had already documented a substantial body of evidence supporting the use of incentives to influence behavior.⁶ Central to this research has been the well-established principle that behaviors followed by meaningful reinforcement are more likely to be repeated over time.⁷ Incentives serve as one form of reinforcement, helping to encourage and sustain desired behaviors.

Over the years, the evidence base has continued to mount, with studies across multiple disciplines and settings demonstrating the effectiveness of incentives in promoting engagement, reinforcing desired behaviors, and improving outcomes. More recent research has reaffirmed these findings and strengthened confidence in the use of incentives as a legitimate and evidence-based behavior-change strategy. Today, contingency management and related incentive-based approaches are securely grounded in scientific literature.^{8,9,10,11}

Importantly, research also challenges one of the most common criticisms of incentive-based approaches. Financial incentives do not automatically undermine intrinsic motivation.

Psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan found that incentives are most likely to weaken motivation when they are experienced as controlling or coercive.¹² Conversely, incentives can strengthen motivation when they support autonomy, reinforce self-directed goals, and communicate investment in an individual's success. People resist being coerced but typically respond positively when others invest in their future.

⁶ Higgins, S. T., Silverman, K., & Heil, S. H. (Eds.). (2008). *Contingency management in substance abuse treatment*. Guilford Press.

⁷ Volpp, K. G., John, L. K., Troxel, A. B., Norton, L., Fassbender, J., & Loewenstein, G. (2008)].

⁸ Ginley, M. K., Pfund, R. A., Rash, C. J., & Zajac, K. (2021). *Long-term efficacy of contingency management treatment based on objective indicators of abstinence from illicit substance use up to 1 year following treatment: A meta-analysis*. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 89(1), 58–71.

⁹ Ginley, M. K., Pfund, R. A., Rash, C. J., & Zajac, K. (2021). *Long-term efficacy of contingency management treatment based on objective indicators of abstinence from illicit substance use up to 1 year following treatment: A meta-analysis*. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 89(1), 58–71.

¹⁰ Phillips-Chantelois, D., et al. (2025). *Financial incentives for substance abstinence: A systematic review and meta-analysis*. *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*, 27(8), 1319–1332.

¹¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2025). *Using SAMHSA funds to implement evidence-based contingency management services* (PEP24-06-001).

¹² Deci, E. L., Koestner, R., & Ryan, R. M. (1999). A meta-analytic review of experiments examining the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 125(6), 627–668.

THE PURPOSE OF THE LIFEMAP ALLOWANCE

The LifeMAP Milestone Allowance, as previously noted, emerged directly from a grounding in the literature, field observations and lessons learned. It was designed to support the difficult work of behavior modification. The Allowance was never designed to pay people not to shoot.

This allowance serves several important functions within the Fellowship model. It reinforces positive progress and sustained engagement, encourages participants to adopt a more future-oriented perspective, helps reduce barriers associated with economic instability, and acknowledges the effort required to pursue meaningful personal change. The Milestone Allowance, however, is not the intervention, but functions as one part of a broader strategy designed to support engagement, growth, and long-term behavior change.

Perhaps most importantly, the allowance communicates a message many fellows have rarely heard: “You matter, your future matters, your growth matters, and you are worthy of investment.” The allowance does not replace accountability, responsibility, or relationships. Rather, it reinforces all three by supporting sustained engagement, recognizing progress, and creating opportunities for participants to invest in personal growth.

WHAT ADVANCE PEACE PIONEERED WITHIN CVI

The novelty of the Peacemaker Fellowship® with its inclusion of evidenced-supported incentives, was not the incentives themselves but the intentional integration of the established behavioral science principles into CVI. Operation Peacemaker became the first known effort to intentionally apply behavioral science by integrating intensive mentoring, future orientation, positive reinforcement, transformative experiences, and milestone-based financial incentives into a unified public safety strategy directed at those at highest-risk of perpetrating gun violence.

The innovation was the recognition that the individuals at the center of firearm violence are human beings responding to the same forces that influence all human behavior. Relationships matter. Hope matters. Opportunity matters. Recognition and investment matter. And behavior changes when those conditions are consistently present.

THE RESULTS

Between 2010 and 2024, the Peacemaker Fellowship® enrolled 1,086 individuals identified as being at extraordinarily high risk for firearm violence.

Tremendous outcomes were achieved because of the Fellowship's intentional exposure to the conditions behavioral science has consistently associated with positive human change.



CONCLUSION

The LifeMAP Milestone Allowance is not the Fellowship. It is one component within a comprehensive framework of care designed for individuals facing some of the most difficult circumstances imaginable.

At Advance Peace, people do not change because they receive financial support. People change because they experience hope, accountability, opportunity, encouragement, meaningful relationships, and evidence that a different future is possible. The LifeMAP Milestone Allowance is just one tool for creating and reinforcing the conditions that make such change feasible.

The Fellowship's use of LifeMAP Milestone Allowances reflects a simple but powerful principle: *When society invests in positive change, positive change becomes more likely. And when positive change occurs among those at the center of firearm violence, communities become healthier and safer.*

The Peacemaker Fellowship®

An Integrated CVI Strategy

GOAL: REDUCE VIOLENCE & BUILD SAFER COMMUNITIES

By fostering human development and lasting behavior change.

THE CVI STRATEGY



RESULTS



The LifeMAP Milestone Allowance is one essential component of a comprehensive, behavioral science-informed strategy that creates the conditions for change.