



FAQ: Work to change CVE policies and Safe Spaces Initiative implementation

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)

1. What is our position on government CVE policies?

[We firmly oppose government intrusion in a community's religious spaces](#), including government CVE policies and programs. It is unconstitutional for law enforcement to encroach on theological issues within Muslim communities, and we do not want the government to dictate who is a "good Muslim" and who is a "bad Muslim."

Additionally, we oppose any measure that singles out Muslim communities, or any other policy that promotes radicalization theory. Many parts of the federal government's CVE policy is vague and could erode critical constitutional liberties and values. [MPAC frequently calls upon the federal government](#) to clarify and explain its CVE policies and programs so that they can be thoroughly examined and critiqued.

2. Why and how do we engage the government on CVE policies?

We, like our fellow Americans, want a safe and secure homeland. [Data shows](#) that violent extremism is a small problem in number, but incalculable in impact on national security policy, foreign policy, backlash against the American Muslim community, and the [public's perception of Islam](#) and Muslims. We believe we must be a part of the solution to address this disparity between policy priorities and reality and perception.

Decisions around national security are made at all levels of government that directly and indirectly affect -- [often adversely](#) -- American Muslim communities. More times than not, there are no Muslims included in those decision-making processes. We believe that American Muslims should be included in any policy conversations that directly affect us. We engage government to ensure that our communities are receiving essential benefits from federal programs and to prevent the implementation of policies (including CVE policies) that harm our communities. Principled engagement -- when conducted transparently, purposefully, and strategically -- does



not represent an endorsement of government actions, but a direct effort to change the conversation where possible, and resist destructive policies when necessary.

3. What have we done to change government CVE policies?

We've long advocated for changes and at times the elimination, of the most problematic and potentially harmful government CVE policies. Rather than accepting the notion that the only way to deal with violent extremism is through tactics like widespread surveillance and the use of informants, we believe in community-led and community-driven programs with frameworks beyond the national security context. Our nation can never truly be secure when the civil liberties of any community are curtailed, and without taking a holistic approach to addressing all forms of violent extremism. Our approach to changing problematic government CVE policies center around the following principles. Within each principle are examples of our successes in changing government CVE policies.

1. All forms of domestic violent extremism must be equally confronted, including those of anti-government, right-wing, and white supremacy extremists.

- Success: [In July 2015, we got the Obama administration to recognize](#) that CVE policies disproportionately targeted American Muslim communities and that moving forward the federal government needed to address all forms of violent extremism in its formulation of CVE policies.
- Success: We got federal and local government CVE grants to provide funds to community organizations, e.g., [Life After Hate](#) and [Not in Our Town](#), which counter white supremacy extremists,

2. Interventions must be community-led without law enforcement involvement.

- Success: At the local and state level, we created a model with the *Los Angeles Mayor's Office of Public Safety* that [removed law enforcement](#) from local government CVE policies and programs. Similarly, our advocacy convinced the *California Governor's Office of Emergency Services* to [exclude law enforcement](#) from its violent extremism programs.
- Success: At the Islamic Center of Southern California, [we prototyped and successfully piloted](#) a community-led program, The Safe Spaces Initiative is based on the framework of Building Healthy Communities and approaches the



issues of extremism, violence, and other social ills from a holistic public health framework without any law enforcement involvement.

3. Civil liberties are sacrosanct because national security must never be used as a pretext for discrimination on the basis of race, religion, or country of origin.

- Success: We got the LAPD to [stop its "Muslim Mapping"](#) program.
- Success: We got the International Association of Police to [remove bias](#) from training programs.
- Success: We got the U.S. Department of Justice to [suspend its government-led CVE intervention program](#).

4. Do we receive government funding for CVE?

MPAC has never received funding from the federal government. In 2016, we joined [other organizations](#) from the Muslim community in applying for a new grant program through the Obama administration's Office of Community Partnerships under the Department of Homeland Security.

Like the majority of our fellow applicants, our proposed project had no provision whatsoever for working with law enforcement or any government entity at the federal or state level. Months later, the Obama administration announced that it would award MPAC \$400,000 to pilot our Safe Spaces Initiative in six cities.

After President Trump was inaugurated, and before any funds had been disbursed, his administration [cut MPAC from the list of awardees](#) announced on June 23, 2017 because MPAC did not and would not include a component to support law enforcement in our community-led programs. MPAC never received any funding from this grant.

MPAC filed a [FOIA request](#) for records on the Trump administration's decision to shift the DHS CVE program away from one that addresses all forms of violent extremism to one that is ideologically driven to target Muslims. MPAC sought legal counsel against the administration after it changed the grant requirements, and when we learned that they were considering [renaming the program "Countering Islamic Extremism."](#)



5. How have other Muslim organizations engaged in CVE policies?

American Muslim organizations have taken a variety of positions on CVE policies and CVE funded programs. [Some organizations](#) oppose any Muslim engagement on CVE policies. Some, like MPAC, engage the government to mitigate the most harmful aspects and offer alternative policy solutions as described in this FAQ. [And others](#), participate in federal and local CVE programs.

For example, while [some chapters](#) of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) oppose any and all CVE programs and policies, others, like CAIR-Florida, [have applied for federal CVE grants](#). Moreover, CAIR National [has participated in international CVE conferences](#) and [calls for community-led CVE initiatives](#) here in the United States.

The Safe Spaces Initiative

6. What is the Safe Spaces Initiative?

The Safe Spaces Initiative is a public health model for building community resilience developed by the Muslim Public Affairs Council in 2014 and is a first-of-its-kind program aimed to combat public violence by empowering communities with a model that promotes the core values of civic engagement, public safety, and healthy identity formation.

Rather than accepting the notion that the only way to deal with violent extremism is through widespread surveillance, Safe Spaces presents alternatives to address social protective factors that strengthen the social fabric. It relies on community-led and community-driven programs that benefit communities beyond the national security context. As such, Safe Spaces is designed as an alternative to both heavy-handed law enforcement tactics and government-led countering violent extremism (CVE) programs.

A premise of the Safe Spaces model is that healthy individuals are not inclined toward violence. The Safe Spaces' approach to supporting healthy communities focuses on resilience and is rooted in equal parts Promotion, Prevention, and Treatment. This is accomplished by promoting community wellness programs and setting up support and resources for direct client mental health and other social services. The Safe Spaces model implements the behavioral health trajectory as described by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), a branch of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



The model does not focus solely on issues of violent extremism; instead, it is a model that promotes overall community resilience and wellness by focusing on mental health and social services.

7. Has Safe Spaces changed since its initial release?

Yes. We have worked to improve and enhance this model, incorporating the feedback of community leaders, civil rights experts, behavioral health professionals, and academics around the country.

For example, we received feedback from the community and from civil rights leaders that led us to remove “Ejection” from the proposed “Prevention, Intervention, Ejection” (PIE) model. Similarly, the feedback from community leaders and behavioral health professionals led us to change the entire premise of the model from violence prevention to community resilience.

The revamped Safe Spaces: Tools for Building Healthy Communities, released in 2016, focuses on public education and access to counseling and behavioral health services.

8. Does Safe Spaces involve law enforcement?

No. The model explicitly states that community-led resilience programs should not involve law enforcement. In fact, the [Trump administration rescinded public funds](#) that had been previously allocated by the Obama administration for Safe Spaces because the model does not have a law enforcement component.

While earlier versions of Safe Spaces proposed some role for law enforcement under the “Ejection” prong of the PIE model, this proposal was never implemented and ultimately removed from the model.

9. Where and how has the Safe Spaces Initiative been implemented?

While we attempted to pilot Safe Spaces in ten cities around the country in 2017, the Los Angeles program at the Islamic Center of Southern California (ICSC) was the only one to secure funding; and thus, it was the only pilot site. A Muslim mental health professional led the pilot program in conjunction with the ICSC board and staff who were trained in the Safe Spaces model. This led to the creation of a Community Resource Team (CRT) of ICSC staff, constituents, and the mental health professional.



The results from the six-month pilot period garnered over 100 people having interventions/treatments through individual, couples and family therapy either as limited or returning cases, and over 4,000 people receiving promotion and prevention services as defined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's behavioral health model. The mental health professional identified and built relationships (including MOUs) with public health agencies, such as the Department of Mental Health in Los Angeles County.

The CRT agreed to continue to meet beyond the pilot period, indicating both sustainability and community buy-in. The Mayor's Office, the Community Resources Team, and the mental health professional expressly stated their commitment to uphold all Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) guidelines (which provide standards for the electronic exchange, privacy and security of health information), and prioritize the confidentiality and anonymity of its clients.

By the end of the pilot project, community wellness programs became a part of ICSC's regular programs because of the success and positive feedback from our events. ICSC's Sunday Program now focuses regular sessions related to wellness and self-care. The Youth Group now also includes regular Let's Be Honest Forums and activities to support resilience in the face of family, academic, social and other challenges. For an in-depth analysis of the pilot program, please view the [After Action Report](#).

10. How was the Safe Spaces LA pilot implementation funded?

Aligning with the objectives of the City of Los Angeles Mayor's Office *Building Healthy Communities* grant to support prevention and intervention behavioral and mental health services, we accepted \$20,000 in seed funds to pilot the Safe Spaces model at the Islamic Center of Southern California. The grant's overall goal was to increase community resilience and inclusion and to offer culturally appropriate social services to individuals and families through education, outreach, assessment, treatment, and referrals.

We also applied for funds in 2016, from the Obama administration's Department of Homeland Security's Office of Community Partnerships, to pilot Safe Spaces in cities across the country. The Obama administration awarded us \$400,000 to pilot in six cities. During the presidential transition, Trump's DHS team re-evaluated the awardee list and added a new requirement before any funds were disbursed, that grantee organizations include a law enforcement component to their programs. This requirement was based on the administration's view that CVE is not strong enough in its targeting and investigating of Muslims.



MUSLIM PUBLIC AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Because MPAC did not and would not include a component to support law enforcement in our community-led programs, we were [cut from the list of awardees](#) announced on June 23, 2017, and our original award was rescinded. MPAC never received any funding from this grant.

MPAC filed a [FOIA request](#) for records on the Trump administration's decision to shift the DHS CVE program away from one that addresses all forms of violent extremism to one that is ideologically driven to target Muslims. MPAC sought legal counsel against the administration after it changed the grant requirements, and when we learned that they were considering [renaming the program "Countering Islamic Extremism."](#)

11. Are we continuing to pilot the Safe Spaces Initiative?

No. We declined any funding or subgrants from the City of Los Angeles' DHS CVE award, asking that it instead be given to organizations providing social services to underserved communities. While we have formally ended our pilot of the Safe Spaces program and will no longer seek funds to implement the program, we will continue to advocate for public funds to be allocated for mental health and social services to underserved communities.