



DEVELOPING CANADA'S NATIONAL STRATEGY COUNTERING RADICALIZATION TO VIOLENCE

Stakeholder Perspectives

The Canada Centre for Community Engagement and Prevention of Violence (“the Canada Centre”) is developing a national strategy to outline the Government of Canada’s approach to countering radicalization to violence (CRV) in Canada. The strategy is being developed based on engagement with communities, experts and other stakeholders through face to face meetings and online consultations.

In 2017, Canada Centre officials held over 100 meetings with approximately 275 different organizations and stakeholders in 14 cities across ten provinces in Canada, which included other levels of government, community organizations, academia and law enforcement. Officials also organized or participated in engagement meetings with international counterparts and subject-matter experts to learn more about promising practices and lessons learned about national policy, support for local programs, private sector engagement, and research, measurement and evaluation.

Five major themes were identified throughout the Canada Centre's meetings:

1. More Information

Participants expressed an interest in receiving more information about the issue of radicalization to violence and how it may affect their own communities.

There was significant difference in the level of understanding about what radicalization to violence is and how individuals may radicalize to violence. Many thought it would be helpful if more information was shared about what factors can contribute to becoming radicalized to violence. For example, participants asked about linkages of radicalization to violence to a number of factors such as: social isolation and a lack of community bonds; mental health; lack of employment and economic circumstances; dissemination of fake news and propaganda; and online recruitment efforts by terrorist groups, among many other possible factors.

Participants often believed that more resources should be available to support prevention efforts. For example, family members, educators, peers, services providers, and other community members may not be aware of how to recognize meaningful indicators that individuals or groups are radicalizing towards violence, and where to go for help and support.

Participants also expressed an interest in more information on what types of forms of radicalization to violence may be issues in Canada. Some service providers also noted that tailored resources and tools would be helpful for them in dealing with individuals who may be at risk of radicalizing to violence.

2. Better Understanding Threats to Canadians

Throughout the country, participants frequently communicated concern over terrorist threats and hate-related violence. There were regional differences in what was perceived as safety issues within communities; a variety of threats were mentioned, such as right-wing extremist, Islamic extremism, environmental activists, and anti-government activists.

In general, people cited Canadian or international examples of terrorism-related violence and what they perceived as an increase in the number of occurrences as a main driver for their concerns about terrorism in their own community. In addition, some participants expressed concerns over perceived growing tensions in Canada and abroad based on political, religious, and ethno-cultural differences. They also noted that hateful beliefs may be linked to a number of interrelated factors such as immigration patterns, the state of economy and job opportunities, shifting geo-political dynamics, the dissemination of fake news, and gender and racial inequality.

Noting concerns around hate crimes and hate incidents, some participants wanted the federal government and law enforcement organizations to increase prevention efforts. Some people thought that these efforts should move to respond to hate-motivated violence as terrorist acts when prosecuting perpetrators.

3. Accessing Assistance for Community Initiatives

Social service providers and community organizations often noted that they have programs or potential projects that already are, or that could be, effective prevention initiatives, but that they lacked sustainable resources to implement such programs effectively. Smaller organizations often noted that it is difficult to apply and receive funding. Unlike large organizations, they often do not have the capacity to complete extensive applications.

Views on how best to fund community initiatives were apparent. Some participants thought the federal government is not always the best source of funding for an initiative, and furthermore, within the Government of Canada, Public Safety Canada is not always the best organization. However, in these cases, there was still a demand among these participants for help in finding other sources of funding (e.g. other levels of government, funding programs, foundations, private sector, etc.).

In recognition that the Canada Centre has a funding program for CRV prevention and intervention initiatives, experts and service providers expressed the importance of having evaluation built into initiatives and expressed a desire for support from the Canada Centre in sharing best practices in evaluation of CRV initiatives.

A frequent comment received was that community organizations sometimes struggle to sort out similarities and differences between other forms of crime prevention and intervention and how they are distinguished from CRV. Furthermore, a number of organizations believe they need more information about similar or relevant work that others have undertaken, sometimes within their own community, in order to share lessons, collaborate and not duplicate efforts.

Participants mentioned the value of community engagement work undertaken by law enforcement. Some of the positive benefits were an increase in trust, better information-sharing about the law, and greater reporting of incidents. There was a desire to see more resources for this type of community engagement work as a part of prevention efforts.

4. Enhancing Cooperation with Government

Across most engagement meetings, it was noted that the Canada Centre should continue to engage frequently and deliberately with communities to establish trust in order to effectively advance collaborative

work in the prevention space. Further, participants noted engagement efforts should reach a diverse range of groups, such as youth, women, new immigrants, private sector organizations, and religious leaders, among others, to ensure that all voices are heard.

Many organizations stated that they not only want the Canada Centre to engage more broadly, but also to find meaningful ways to involve them in various aspects of CRV efforts such as providing feedback, setting goals, or identifying opportunities to collaborate with the Canada Centre.

A number of organizations also thought that strong relationships between law enforcement and communities have a positive effective on social cohesion, reduction of hate crimes, and community safety as a whole. Developing positive relationships between law enforcement and community members involves regular outreach, and training for law enforcement on how to engage with communities.

Many provincial and municipal government officials, as well as law enforcement representatives throughout Canada expressed interest in deepening government-to-government relations with the Canada Centre and the federal government on this issue. Many of these participants asked about ways in which to formalize the relationship between the Canada Centre and their respective governments in order to better share information, tools, and resources.

A number of participants also thought that greater collaboration between governments, communities, and the media could help build resilience to hate and intolerance. Some participants thought that media reporting could contribute to the formation of hateful beliefs through negative or unfair portrayals of populations or through the dissemination of fake news. Further, media coverage events can create fear and stigmatize individuals, families and whole communities, and can contribute to a breakdown of trust between community members, community organizations, and governments.

5. Prevention through Education

Education, as a broad concept, was seen by most participants as a necessary element to any CRV strategy in Canada. A common sentiment was that education needs to encourage critical thinking. For example, participants were supportive of expanding education in formal settings that focus on teaching diversity, empathy, and inclusiveness. Critical thinking also should extend to use of the internet. Encouraging digital literacy was seen as a way of safeguarding youth against extremist and terrorist use of the internet.

On the issue of radicalization to violence specifically, opinions differed on what the role of educators should be. Some participants thought that educators are uniquely positioned to reach youth and to help build resilience against hateful ideologies. However, other participants were not comfortable with educators discussing safety-related or sensitive political issues.

Many participants noted that education must also extend to the entire family. For example, in addition to children learning skills about how to be safe online, parents also need awareness about what happens online, including ways to help educate and protect their children from harmful online content and discuss challenging issues such as radicalization to violence.

Education further extends to service providers. For example, participants saw the availability of general training on diversity, gender, ethno-cultural sensitivity, as well as specific training on radicalization to violence for service providers and law enforcement as important components of successful delivery of services. Going further, some participants thought sensitivity training was not enough, and that services should be representative of the ethno-cultural communities they serve.

Education and information sessions, such as inter-faith dialogues, were seen as a way to prevent the spread of hateful views based on intolerance, racism and ignorance.

The role of the Canada Centre on the broad theme of education was discussed among some participants. Some were concerned that, given the location of the Canada Center in the Department of Public Safety Canada, which has linkages to law enforcement and counterterrorism efforts, that it may not be best placed to lead broad education efforts (e.g., inter-faith dialogues). However, it was still believed that the Canada Centre could play an important role as a center of excellence and in advocating for efforts to counter radicalization to violence through education.

Next Steps

In the coming months the Canada Centre will release the results of a recent national consultation on the development of a national strategy on CRV.