

Restorative Change: Tulane Researchers Partner with New Orleans Schools to Reduce Youth Gun Violence

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A new grant will help Tulane's Violence Prevention Institute remain active within the New Orleans community. Pictured here is an Enrichment 2 Empowerment film screening aimed at connecting and elevating youth

voices.

A recently awarded \$650,000 grant from the William T. Grant Foundation is helping Tulane University researchers strengthen a citywide effort to reduce youth firearm violence and racial disparities in school discipline across New Orleans.

[Dr. Julia Fleckman](#) and [Dr. Katherine Theall](#), faculty in the [Department of Social, Behavioral, and Population Sciences](#) at the [Celia Scott Weatherhead School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine](#), are leading the initiative through Tulane's [Violence Prevention Institute](#) (VPI). The project formalizes a three-year research-practice partnership between Tulane, the Center for Restorative Approaches (CRA), and NOLA Public Schools (NOPS), in collaboration with the Orleans Parish School Board.

At the heart of the work is the New Orleans Violence Interruption Program (NOVIP), a school-based intervention that gives students involved in conflict an opportunity to repair harm, rebuild trust, and avoid exclusionary discipline like suspensions or expulsions.

"We know that punitive responses often fail to address the roots of conflict and can even increase the risk of future violence," said Fleckman. "Restorative approaches create space for students to be heard and supported while still being held accountable. It's a shift in how schools think about safety and discipline."

The project endeavors to address youth exposure to violence. In 2022, New Orleans reported its highest homicide rate since 2004. Ninety percent of those homicides involved firearms, and Black youth ages 11 to 24 made up a disproportionate share of victims. The data underscores what community organizations like CRA have long seen on the ground, which is that young people are navigating trauma, conflict, and systemic inequality without the support they need to thrive.

"Restorative work is about healing relationships, not just fixing behavior," said Troi Bechet, CRA's executive director. "We've seen firsthand the difference it makes for students to have access to tools that build understanding, rather than punishment that pushes them out. This partnership allows us to deepen that work in a meaningful and lasting way."

Over the next three years, the research team will work closely with CRA, NOPS leaders, and city partners to refine NOVIP, gather evidence of its effectiveness, and

prepare for broader adoption across the school district. The project also includes quarterly updates to the city's Gun Violence Prevention Coalition, formed in 2021 to coordinate cross-sector efforts to reduce gun violence in New Orleans.

The William T. Grant Foundation's Institutional Challenge Grant supports university-based research centers in building sustained partnerships with public agencies or nonprofits to reduce inequality in youth outcomes. With this support, Tulane is also taking steps to ensure that research-practice partnerships are recognized as core to its academic mission. Fleckman and Theall are working with leadership at the department, school, and university levels to align faculty reward structures with the values of community-engaged scholarship.

"This grant is not just a win for Tulane—it's a win for the city," said Theall. "It demonstrates what's possible when researchers, schools, and communities work together to address the root causes of harm and build a better future for our youth."