Summary of Project: The Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) ACE has been funded since 2000. A major strength of the VCU ACE is their community surveillance system, which has closely informed program and policy implementation in the city of Richmond, VA. The primary objective of their surveillance system is to describe and monitor youth violence activities in Richmond youth (under age 25) through continuous gathering, analysis, and interpretation of data. The system also gathers information about indicators of community health and victim/perpetrator biological sex, race, and residence. The surveillance system relies primarily on secondary data gathered by agencies in the City and from the following sources: VCU Health System’s emergency room; Medical Examiner; Vital Registry; Ambulance service; Richmond Public Schools; and the Department of Juvenile Justice in Richmond. Analysis of these data is conducted regularly and used to develop fact sheets and maps to educate policy makers, program planners, researchers, and the public. Maps geographically display youth violence activities in the city and present a visual representation of the spatial relationship between violence, neighborhoods and zip codes.

Major Accomplishments:

- Surveillance data has been used extensively to mobilize the community, educate community leaders and influence local policies.
- The data have been disseminated to partners through quarterly fact sheets reflecting changes in the data over time, maps that illustrate rates and trends in violence, and an annual report detailing all youth violence activities.
- Maps have also been created for individual organizations who wanted specific information about their neighborhood or school.
- These data have also been used to conduct small area analysis to examine the impact of community wide interventions. One example of this is the Alcohol Outlets Study.

Alcohol Outlets Study:

- In 2003, through VCU ACE’s community outreach efforts, residents became aware of the increased prevalence of youth violence (through increased violence-related ambulance pick-ups) surrounding convenience stores selling inexpensive, single-serve alcoholic beverages (also known as “40s” or “22s”).
- Alarmed by the data, residents held several community forums and collaborated with the Alcohol Beverage Control (ABC) unit that controls alcohol licenses to businesses. Eventually, residents were able to convince the ABC to restrict licenses to convenience stores to sell these single-serve alcoholic beverages.
- This new policy remained for six months but was reversed following legal action initiated by the opposition.
- VCU ACE used this situation as a natural experiment to evaluate the effect of the policy on violence in the community

○ Method:
- Geocoded the location of the convenience stores with restricted licenses between January and June 2003.
- Selected control communities with similar demographics but with no restrictions.
- Used several variables from the surveillance system at pre-intervention, intervention, and post-intervention: violence-related ambulance pickups among 15-24 year olds (included rape, fights/assaults, shootings, and stabbings), age, marital status, female-headed households with children, median household income, education, and federal poverty level.

  **Results:**
  - In the intervention community, rates of violence-related ambulance pick-ups were 13.1 per 1,000 at pre-intervention, 0 per 1,000 in intervention, and 5.3 per 1,000 at post-intervention.
  - Within the control community, the average rate of violence-related ambulance pick-ups declined. However, within the intervention community, there was a significant decline in ambulance pickups between pre-intervention and intervention. In addition, when the restriction was lifted the ambulance pickups significantly increased.

**Challenges:**
- While this natural experiment provided some evidence that the restriction of single-serve beverages at convenience stores was associated with a decline in youth violence-related ambulance pickups, rates increased following the successful reversal of the policy by opposition.
- The study was quasi-experimental and thus, cannot truly assess any causal relationships between policy implementation and rates of violence.

**Next Steps:**
- DVP will continue to collaborate with the VCU ACE on implementing and sustaining the community surveillance system.
- In the 2010-2015 round of the ACEs, the community surveillance system will play a major role in helping to determine the impact of the constellation of prevention programs implemented in the intervention communities on violence rates.