



# EXECUTIVE REPORT

**COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM**

SYMPOSIUM

Disrupt. Reimagine. Redefine.





In his keynote address, U.S. Homeland Security Secretary, Jeh Jonson emphasized the importance of building bridges to marginalized communities to counter radicalization.

Expanding on the one-year anniversary of the White House Summit and calls for action at the 2015 UN General Assembly meetings, IPSI, Creative Associates International, and other strategic partners constructed a dynamic platform for world leaders, policy makers, peace-builders, new media and technology experts, and concerned global citizens to grapple with the challenges to countering violent extremism today, define gaps in methodologies, and redefine opportunities for innovative solutions and their implications in practice.

There is an urgency to this work, as recent attacks in the United States and elsewhere in the world almost every day, have shown. This symposium was about identifying the effective strategies

**Figure 1: Diverse Group of Experts** Although diverse, the Symposium audience was primarily from the United States, so much of the data and conversations centered around U.S. foreign and domestic policy. There was a strong call for similar events to take place in Europe and the Muslim World, focusing on their unique problem sets through similar interactive conference structures. The largest single group in attendance was the private sector, focusing primarily on violent extremism's effect on operations and market-based solutions to CVE.

for countering violent extremism and scaling them into global solutions that resonate down to the local level, before communities with a few radicalized individuals reach a tipping point and become entire radicalized communities.

To that end, a diverse group of 379 experts (see Figure 1) gathered April 6-7, 2016, at the CVE Symposium in Washington, DC to discuss the toughest challenges in countering and preventing violent extremism. The trend lines and new ideas mapped through purposefully designed panel discussions, innovative conference structures, and open space technology, further advanced the evolving foundation of this field, establishing a new point of departure.

The following is an executive brief of the conversations and key outcomes compiled from detailed notes and recordings of each session.

## Panels & Keynotes

Several central points echoed throughout the 27 panels, workshops, and keynote sessions of the two-day event. Here is what experts said about efforts to prevent support for groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS):

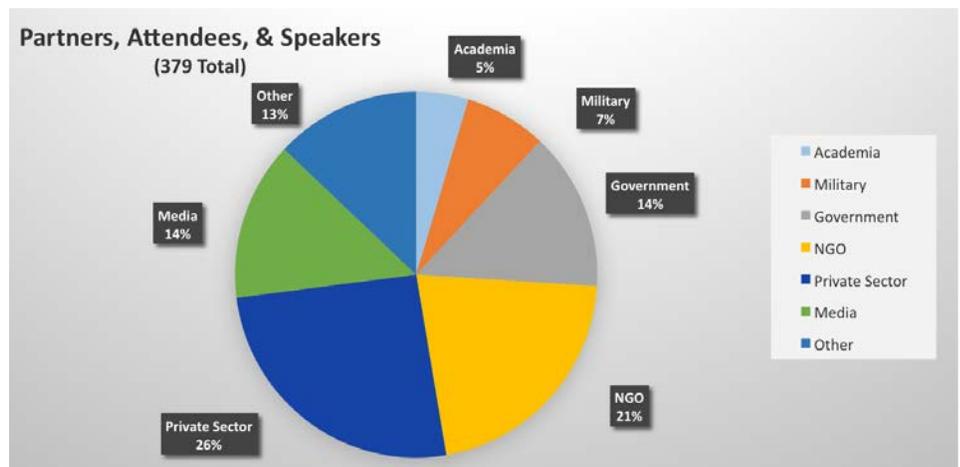
**No one is born a terrorist.** People don't become terrorists because of religion or innate evil, and most individuals turn to terrorism because of community-based affliction. It is unlikely that a single solution is possible, and practitioners must focus on context-specific strategies with multiple integrated approaches. Symposium ex-

perts were virtually unanimous in citing human rights violations, political marginalization, lack of good governance, and systematic barriers to economic opportunities as the primary drivers of radicalization to violence. That does not mean that community-based affliction somehow justifies extremist actions that target civilians for political reasons: certainly, individuals joining groups like ISIS expressing barbaric and tragic behavior may already be too far gone.

**Call to Action:** Our focus should be working towards inclusive governance and human rights, thus preventing the next ISIS. We must develop truly comprehensive responses, including the perspectives of youth, women, and minorities.

## The pace of recruitment to violent movements far outpaces the resources we put forth to prevent it.

Extremist groups are spreading their messages through brutal content that becomes viral and reaches a huge number of people through social media. The experts at the Symposium were overwhelmingly skeptical that military action like airstrikes will create any sort of long-term solution, with ISIS members killed only replaced by new recruits. Yet, with the current counter-ISIS military campaign costing taxpayers \$11.6 million per day, activities to prevent the radicalization process are similarly funded - only not per day, but alarmingly over the course of an entire year. During the Symposium, Secretary Johnson shared that DHS will have



program funding of approximately \$10 million total for prevention activities for the first time. The State Department received significantly more funding this year for terrorism activities, but Congress chose to earmark the funds for support to law enforcement overseas, not for the boost in engaging governance, livelihoods, and outreach to marginalized communities that will break the cycle of terrorist recruitment.

**Call to Action:** The most effective forms of CVE are currently the least funded. Symposium Participants believe funding and resources should be diverted to more effective tactics.

**The current silo-constrained approach to CVE is counter-productive.**

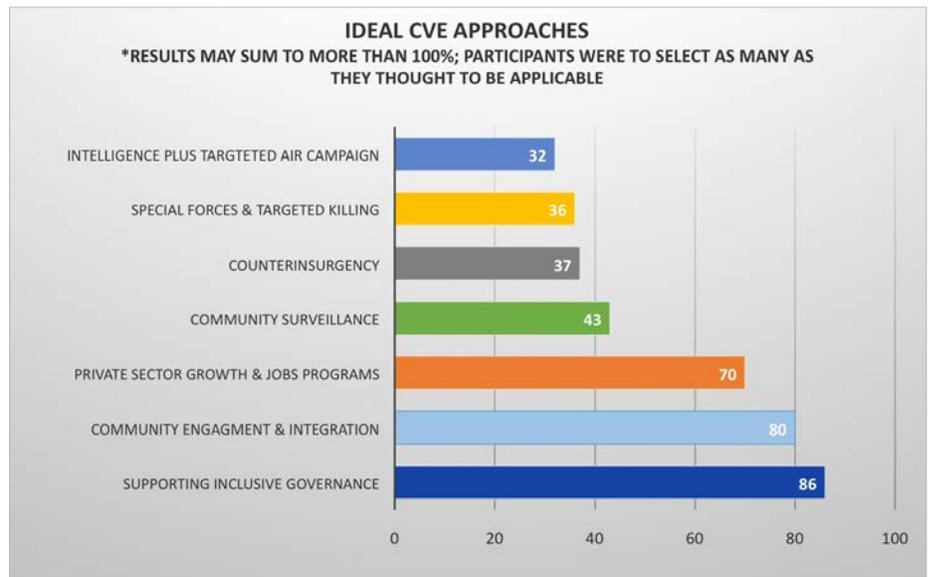
Violent extremist groups are amorphous, entrepreneurial, and resilient, yet our current approaches tend to be donor-driven within the hierarchical bureaucracies of governments, multilateral institutions, the military, and foundations. According to the experts at the Symposium, the lack of integration in approaches forces implementers to focus on small subsets of the complex systems that breed violent extremists, without understanding the secondary and tertiary effects of their intervention on that system. The mismatch between kaleidoscopic drivers of violent extremism and the well intentioned, but silo-constrained intervention strategies, commonly leads to negative unintended consequences and mission failure.

**Call to Action:** Through effective channels of communication and strong leadership, our approaches to undermining the strength of violent extremist groups must be coordinated across silos to be as agile and entrepreneurial as the violent ideologies we seek to weaken. We must broaden the scope of sectors and groups that are working on CVE, including private, public, NGO, and religious groups.

**We know some of what works, but we need more data to prove it.** There have been a range of activities, particularly since 2011, which have aimed at reaching out to disenfranchised communities, creating economic oppor-



More than 380 speakers and participants attended the two-day Symposium. They represented civil society, the tech sector, international development, academic institutions, government, the military and more.



**Figure 2: Ideal CVE Approaches** Parallel to the in-person meetings, a “Virtual Symposium” utilizing cutting edge algorithms that iteratively map the beliefs of conference attendees took place online. In terms of U.S. appropriations, Congress funds the less “effective” CVE approaches (primarily kinetic) at a significantly higher level than what this group of 380 experts deemed most effective. Inclusive Governance and Community Engagement are the least funded of all CVE efforts, yet are strongly perceived to be the ideal. This audience believed that long-term, authentic, and sustained engagement with communities at-risk of radicalization should be the primary focus of both domestic and international CVE efforts.

tunities, and countering the message of groups like ISIS. However, many of these programs have not been properly funded nor adequately designed, and given their role straddling different sectors, it is difficult – and expensive – to gather comprehensive enough data to prove when programs are effective. The experts agreed that new efforts be based in evidence, which includes collection and sharing of data across silos and agencies. That data must move also beyond Washington-driven lessons learned discussions and papers to form the basis for feasible and practical pro-

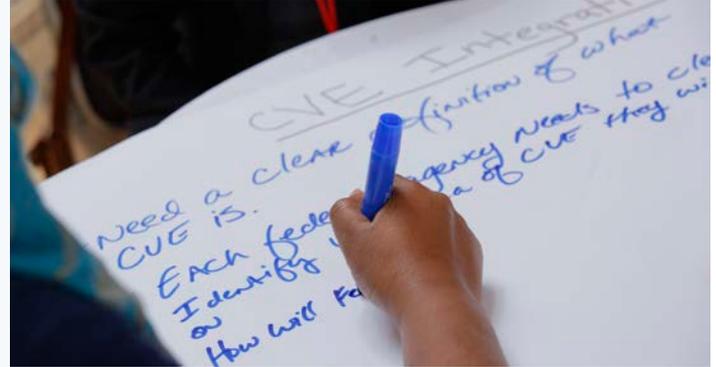
gram designs, metrics, and tools. There is an eager development and peacebuilding community ready to help design the metrics of effective prevention programs for when Congress and donors provide the resources to do so.

**Call to Action:** We need to prioritize better data to inform cross-sectoral implementation. We must effectively monitor and evaluate CVE policies/projects to measure progress, while ensuring we are not further radicalizing, marginalizing, or persecuting the groups we are meant to incorporate.



The Participant-driven **Unconference** portion of the CVE Symposium encouraged active participation by all, sparking deeper conversations and action-oriented ideas across the CVE practitioner/academic silos. Topics were self-selected as the most pressing issues in CVE through utilizing open space technology (thematic patterns in sticky notes on butcher block paper). Participants were challenged to frame their discussions around “appreciative inquiry,” or what is possible rather than what is not. Symposium organizers and volunteers took notes from all the sessions, the highlights of which are:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Obstacles to Funding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to educate lawmakers and the public on the need for more inclusive CVE funding.</li> <li>• Need to better articulate CVE vocabulary to educate public / philanthropic funders about effective community-led CVE.</li> <li>• Need to improve collaboration between small and large organizations, military, and governments.</li> <li>• In the USG, we need to pursue transfer authority of funds from DOD to State/USAID for development-based CVE.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Engaging Youth and CVE education</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We must improve the way youth are engaged in program design, implementation and evaluation, while exploring alternative models for youth engagement.</li> <li>• CVE programs targeting youth must avoid reinforcing negative stereotypes (i.e. young males are potential criminals)</li> <li>• Need to explore alternative models for engaging youth, such as peer-to-peer mentorship and artistic activities.</li> <li>• Youth desire to be “for” something, rather than “countering” something.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Law Enforcement and CVE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to educate law enforcement on the difference between CVE and CT.</li> <li>• As the “first responders,” we need to provide better training in basic CVE skills rooted in the core values of civil liberties.</li> <li>• Police must work in a transparent way with the communities, so not to be perceived as targeting specific populations within a community.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Crafting Counter-narratives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective counter narratives must be locally-driven with local input.</li> <li>• Counter narratives are not quick solutions, but should be formulated as durable messages that can be socialized over the long-term.</li> <li>• The role of an authentic messenger is key in impactful counter messaging.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Where’s the Data?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of data about CVE is a predominate issue in selecting intervention points and proving effectiveness, however there are some new efforts to train people to collect data.</li> <li>• Partnerships among NGOs and academics are necessary to obtain scientific perspectives and objective guidance.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Monitoring and Evaluation - CVE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need coordinated sharing of best practices between NGOs, the government, and the private sector for CVE; there are working models.</li> <li>• More research must be done on how implementers can prove that a project successfully prevented and/or countered violent extremism.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Breaking Silos in the Interagency &amp; International Communities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of coordination undermines the success of projects because of unintended consequences.</li> <li>• Hierarchical structures and contracting constraints discourage agility and creativity in implementation.</li> <li>• Current communication mechanisms in place are weak and underutilized.</li> <li>• Effective channels of communication and strong leadership are needed.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Gendered Approaches to CVE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Women” are not a monolithic entity; we must support women in determining their own roles in CVE work, and at the individual, community, and national levels.</li> <li>• Women do not live in isolation, but are a part of wider familial and communal bonds.</li> <li>• CVE efforts should not focus solely on women’s inclusivity, but on engaging with families and communities as units of action.</li> </ul>



The **World Café** was a structured process that facilitated open and intensive dialogue among participants, focusing specifically on exploring CVE themes and the most challenging questions at the core of CVE. Participants were divided into groups of four with people they did not previously know. Groups were then asked one question and given 15 minutes to discuss and take notes. Then, the groups rotated two more times to respond to new questions. The following responses were collected from the group notes and are demonstrative of the dozens of simultaneous conversations.

### What does an “integrated approach” to CVE mean to you? Why?

- Integration across agencies and sectors to drive “whole-of-society” approaches.
- Bringing in public/private sectors, academia, and many stakeholders across multiple fields.
- Combining actors in a community (police, youth, religious groups)—get all possible perspectives involved.
- Supporting evidence-based practice, utilizing data, evidence, monitoring, and evaluation.

### How can the CVE Community start to break down the silos that prevent integration?

- Communication amongst stakeholders, including best practices, intelligence, and information.
- Make messaging mainstream and accessible to affected communities and stakeholders.
- Government and interagency coordination.
- Interdisciplinary approach for leaders.
- Emphasize similarities between groups to drive solutions.

### What will you do to begin breaking down the silos in the next week? Month? Year?

- Directly follow up with people and ideas from this symposium. Keep in touch.  
Build a community of practitioners. Connect on a human level.
- Create more spaces like the CVE Symposium for questions to be asked and debated.
- Loosen the hierarchical structures for how we move forward.
- Don’t remove accountability, but allow organizations to think outside the box.
- Encourage and implement cross-sectoral data sharing.

# Social Media

By using the #CVESymposium hashtag the online audience engaged directly with the participants and expressed their thoughts on topics related to countering and preventing violent extremism. They were more than 4.2 Twitter impressions on the #CVESymposium and more than 1,500 tweets during the event.

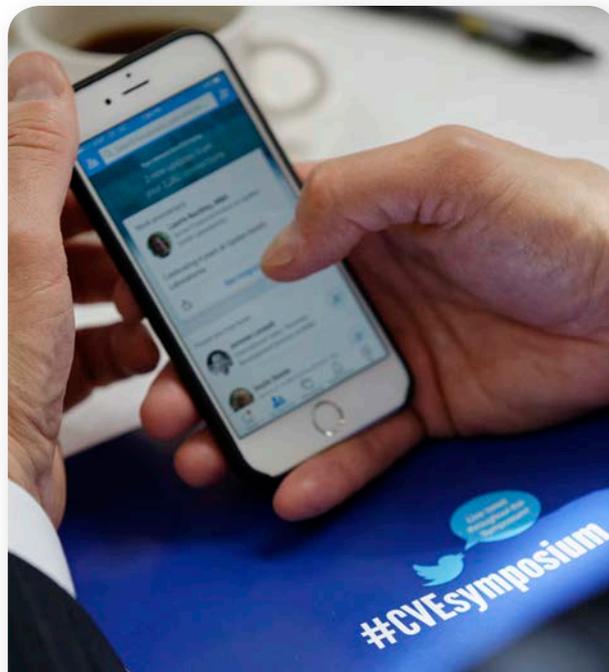
Today, the conversation that started during the #CVESymposium continues online. The @CVE-Community has been growing rapidly. Members of the community are among the main contributors in the difficult discussion on how to counter and prevent violent extremism in the world. Join the conversation online.

**#CVESymposium | Social Media by the numbers**

- 380** Speakers + Participants attended during the 2-day conference
- 4.12 Million** Twitter impressions on the #CVESymposium
- More than **1,500** tweets Using #CVESymposium in the course of **three days**
- More than **300** Online VIEWERS VIA Periscope

Logos for CREATIVE and IPSI are at the bottom.

@CVECommunity



IPSI Retweeted  
**Tatiana** @cusimarenegade · Apr 7  
Unconventional gathering of the minds! GREAT WORK #CVESymposium @CVEcommunity @1977Creative @IPSIinstitute

**CVE Community** @CVEcommunity  
@CVEcommunity Participants offer their insights on solutions #cvesymposium #creative2016

**Robert Trestan** @rtrestan · Apr 7  
Can't solve this problem with weapons - @CoryBooker must invest in people & build bridges between communities #CVESymposium @CVEcommunity

Kevin and 7 others Retweeted  
**Homeland Security** @DHSgov · Apr 6  
At the #CVESymposium, Sec Johnson spoke on our efforts to engage communities in our homeland security mission



**Bethany L.** @blmcgann · Apr 6  
Need to be as adaptable institutionally as we are operationally to #AVE, interagency coordination + local context critical. #CVESymposium



Leland Krivant,  
President of  
Creative Associates  
International



Pamela Aall, Chair of the  
Board of Directors for  
the International Peace &  
Security Institute



Cory Booker, US  
Senator for New  
Jersey (left), with  
Charito Krivant,  
Founder and CEO of  
Creative Associates  
International (right)



Humera Khan, Executive Director of Muffehun  
talking to a reporter during the Symposium



Tom Wheelock, Senior Vice President  
of Creative Associates International  
(left) with Jeh Johnson, US Secretary of  
Homeland Security (right)



Donald Van Duyn (M), Lead Associate, Booz Allen  
Hamilton (left), Susan Reichle, Counselor (middle),  
and George Selim, Director of the Office for  
Community Partnerships at DHS (right)



Cameron M. Chisholm,  
President and founder of  
the International Peace &  
Security Institute (IPSI)



Participants discussing CVE in one  
of the unconference sessions

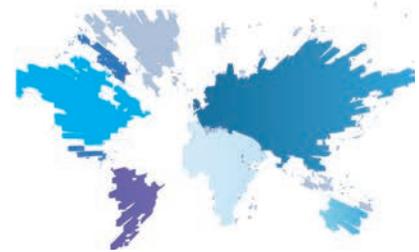
As the first of its kind interactive, public and cross-sectoral forum on CVE, the Symposium brought together more than 380 top thinkers working around the globe and attracted an additional 300 online viewers.

\*All photos by Erick Gibson

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