



# An Evaluation of the Trauma-Informed Abusive Partner Intervention Program

## Interim Results

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Programs for people who cause harm to their intimate partners have existed since the 1970s. Although policies around and implementation of such programs vary from place to place, most traditional program models aim to make participants more accountable by educating them and teaching them skills for nonviolence. In recent years, domestic violence (DV) experts have called for programs with traditional models to incorporate trauma-informed approaches that better consider participants' trauma histories, needs, and experiences. One DV service organization in New York City, the Urban Resource Institute (URI), created a program that aims to incorporate such innovative practices. Through the Criminal Justice Investment Initiative (CJII), the Manhattan District Attorney's Office (DANY) funded the URI to plan and implement the Trauma-Informed Abusive Partner Intervention Program (TI-APIP). The TI-APIP curriculum is available to individuals charged with an intimate partner violence (IPV)-related crime through mandated weekly two-hour program sessions for 26 weeks. The Urban Institute's Justice Policy Center was funded by DANY to conduct process and outcome evaluations. This brief provides high-level findings from the midpoint of Urban's work and focuses on early findings from the process evaluation.

# Introduction

Under the CJII,<sup>1</sup> DANY partnered with Urban's Justice Policy Center through a competitive solicitation to conduct comprehensive, mixed-methods process and outcome evaluations of URI's TI-APIP.<sup>2</sup> The TI-APIP is a unique program for individuals charged with crimes related to IPV that aims for participants to take accountability for their actions in mandated two-hour program sessions once a week for 26 weeks. The TI-APIP stands out for its focus on employing a trauma-informed curriculum and offering wraparound services to participants whenever possible, including counseling and referrals to social service supports.

The CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance (ISLG) serves as the CJII's technical consultant and provides oversight to both the TI-APIP program evaluation and the program. Urban's evaluation focuses on collecting primary data on the TI-APIP's participants enrolled in 2020 and 2021 and the results of our full analyses will be released in a final report. For this brief, we also reviewed administrative data collected by ISLG for participants referred in 2019 at the inception of the program. The goal of the evaluation is to understand whether the TI-APIP's model is effective at reducing participants' trauma, risk factors for criminal legal involvement (e.g., attitudes and behaviors, mental health), and violence between partners.

## Evaluation Activities to Date

The beginning of the evaluation coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Urban's evaluation team adjusted activities accordingly, including by pivoting all originally proposed data collection activities to be conducted remotely. During the evaluation period reflected in this brief—January 2020 through May 2021—the evaluation team conducted the following data collection activities:

- held an in-person kickoff at the TI-APIP program space in February 2020 with program stakeholders
- developed a logic model in consultation with URI staff to serve as a guide for program activities as well as to outline short-, intermediate-, and long-term outcomes for the TI-APIP
- collected and reviewed all program material, protocols, curricula, and policies
- conducted 11 in-depth interviews with the TI-APIP staff and leadership, DANY leadership and prosecutors, and referring defense attorneys
- held regular biweekly meetings with the TI-APIP staff<sup>3</sup>
- conducted two virtual observations of the TI-APIP group sessions

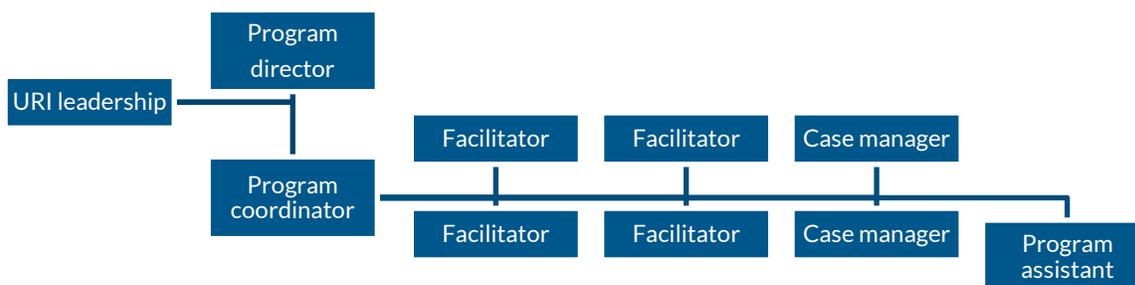
# Background on the TI-APIP

The Criminal Justice Investment Initiative requested proposals for a trauma-informed abusive partner intervention program in February 2016 and selected URI as the provider following a competitive proposal review process. URI is a human service organization in New York City that has provided DV and homelessness support services for over 40 years. In 2018, the CJII committed \$1.475 million to URI for the development of the TI-APIP. It funded URI for a nine-month planning phase from July 2018 to March 2019, a three-year program implementation phase from April 2019 to January 2022, and one final year (through January 2023) for the collection of final performance data and coordination with this evaluation.

The TI-APIP is led by a program director and a program coordinator and is staffed by two case managers, four additional group facilitators, and a program assistant, with supervision from URI leadership (figure 1). All staff working with the TI-APIP are trained in DV and human service provision, as discussed later in this brief.

FIGURE 1

Trauma-Informed Abusive Partner Intervention Program Organizational Chart



Source: Urban Institute.

Note: URI = Urban Resource Institute.

The program relies on the courts for participant referrals. Staff at the TI-APIP regularly communicate with stakeholders in the Manhattan criminal legal system—particularly DANY attorneys, judges from Part D and the Integrated Domestic Violence (IDV) Part, and the court resource coordinators—to facilitate referrals and stay abreast of relevant court proceedings (Part D is responsible for handling misdemeanor DV cases, and the IDV Part handles DV cases that also have parallel Family Court cases). Box 1 details the roles of the various court actors.

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## BOX 1

### The Court Actors Involved with the TI-APIP

In Manhattan, Part D of the Manhattan Criminal Court is responsible for handling misdemeanor DV cases, and the IDV Part handles certain misdemeanor and felony DV cases that also have parallel Family Court cases. The resource coordinators in Part D and the IDV Part are responsible for establishing and maintaining relationships with community partners and service providers. Attorneys in DANY's Domestic Violence Unit are key in reviewing defendants' cases and making initial determinations as to whether a defendant might be a good fit for the TI-APIP.

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**In a 10-month planning process, URI worked with ISLG, DANY, and two leading experts on abusive partner intervention programs and trauma to create the TI-APIP.**<sup>4</sup> Our interviews revealed that the TI-APIP curriculum was developed by drawing primarily from Allies for Change, a prominent curriculum in IPV programming. The TI-APIP staff also incorporated a few components from the Duluth Model.<sup>5</sup> In addition to a carefully crafted curriculum, the TI-APIP staff rely on their clinical and social work experience to guide participants through the sessions. Therapeutic approaches to the sessions are central to the TI-APIP's success, as we discuss in this brief's Program Sessions section. Lastly, URI staff have experience in running another abusive partner intervention program in Westchester, New York. URI leadership and staff drew on this experience to create the TI-APIP, but the two programs are distinct.

**The TI-APIP measures success both in terms of court compliance (measured by attendance and whether participants are adequately engaging in group sessions) and in terms of how participants are progressing along their individual case management plans and demonstrating behavior change.** According to program leadership we interviewed, the TI-APIP helps reduce the likelihood of future violence by giving an aggressor “deeper awareness, consistency, and skills” to help them reconstruct their worldview while still validating their own experiences and struggles. According to the TI-APIP staff members, “to only measure recidivism is nonsensical” and “we’re not creating nonviolent people. We’re creating people who are more aware of their actions and more prepared to correct them.” In addition, the TI-APIP facilitators also shared that they aim to help participants “reconstruct their understanding of the world” by validating their experiences while still educating them about problematic behaviors and working to hold them accountable for using violence.

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*We're not creating nonviolent people. We're creating people who are more aware of their actions and more prepared to correct them. –TI-APIP staff member*

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## The TI-APIP Participants

The population of focus outlined in the CJJI's 2016 request for proposals included people who use violence against their partners (i.e., abusive partners) and are at least 18 years old, are charged with misdemeanor or certain felony charges in an IPV case in Manhattan, and are mandated to complete an abusive partner intervention program as part of a sentence or plea agreement. The 2016 request for proposals outlined core inclusion criteria and set out a list of minimum criteria for excluding a potential participant from the program, including having a serious mental illness, being charged with a violent felony, having pressing substance abuse issues, and having prior convictions for violent felonies or weapons-related crimes. The TI-APIP currently only enrolls men older than 18, and participants are predominantly people of color ranging from young adults to older men.

### Referral and Connection to the Program

**Participants are referred to the TI-APIP by court resource coordinators and DANY attorneys—and occasionally by defense attorneys—who find their Part D or IDV Part intimate partner violence case defendants to be appropriate for the program.** Key legal system stakeholders involved in connecting people charged with IPV-related offenses to the TI-APIP include the DANY chief of the Special Victims Bureau,<sup>6</sup> DANY attorneys in the Domestic Violence Unit, defense attorneys, Part D and IDV Part judges, and court resource coordinators. Cases that come to the chief of the Special Victims Bureau and other assistant district attorneys in the Domestic Violence Unit to be considered for the TI-APIP predominantly come from either Part D or the IDV Part in Manhattan courts. Part D has multiple judges and more cases, which make decisions on referrals less consistent and compliance monitoring more difficult. There is one presiding judge for the IDV Part. During interviews, stakeholders revealed that, by having a single judge, there may be more consistent compliance monitoring in the IDV Part. Interviews with legal system stakeholders revealed that working with Part D judges can pose more challenges for DANY attorneys attempting to refer defendants for programming because of their larger caseloads.

**Referring court staff remain flexible in their decisions, and eligibility criteria are fluid in practice.** We learned through stakeholder interviews that set eligibility criteria originally were envisioned for this program, as outlined in table 1. DANY correctly anticipated in the original request for proposals that inclusion and exclusion criteria would be developed further during the contracting phase and as the program began. Conversations with DANY in August and December 2020 revealed that DANY attorneys have discretion over referral processes. For example, if someone has a prior conviction for a violent felony—which would make them ineligible for the TI-APIP—but was arrested for it several years ago, attorneys in DANY's Domestic Violence Unit can use their discretion to recommend that person to the program. Through interviews with court staff, we learned that, though the inclusion criteria from the 2016 proposal serve as a guide for referrals, there are no hard-and-fast inclusion and exclusion criteria.

TABLE 1

**Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for a Trauma-Informed Abusive Partner Intervention Program**

As outlined in DANY's 2016 request for proposals

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
At least 18 years old	Serious mental illness/psychopathy
Charged with a misdemeanor in an IPV case in Manhattan	Active addiction/immediate need for substance abuse treatment
Charged with certain felony charges in an IPV case in Manhattan	Current arrest charges or convictions for: a violent felony, strangulation, any article 130 (sex crime) offense, weapons possession
Mandated to complete the APIP and referred by the Manhattan court system	Prior convictions for: a violent felony, strangulation, any article 130 (sex crime) offense, weapons possession, stalking, criminal contempt, witness tampering, any prior article 730 adjudication

**Source:** Criminal Justice Investment Initiative and District Attorney of New York County, *Request for Proposals for Trauma-Informed Abusive Partner Intervention Program, No.010* (New York: Criminal Justice Investment Initiative and District Attorney of New York County, 2016).

**Notes:** APIP = abusive partner intervention program. DANY = Manhattan District Attorney's Office. IPV = intimate partner violence.

**When determining eligibility for the TI-APIP, attorneys at DANY consider cases individually and consider additional factors that may speak to an individual's ability to succeed in the TI-APIP.** Some of these factors are presented in table 2. When DANY attorneys offer a program-based disposition and recommend where a defendant should be placed for programming, they try to consider multiple factors, including other existing legal proceedings, the person's work schedule, whether they have medical insurance, their financial situation, where they live, and whether the programming is accessible to them. Prosecutors may only know some of this information. Conversations with stakeholders revealed that they strive to make good matches but must balance all the available information. According to both the TI-APIP staff and DANY stakeholders, although Part D can pose more challenges because of its volume of cases, the Part D resource coordinator is particularly valuable because of their ability to meet with individuals and ask important case-management questions—such as what their work schedules or child care responsibilities may be—to obtain full information before referring someone to a certain program.

TABLE 2

Factors Considered by Legal System Stakeholders during the TI-APIP Referral Process

Considerations on behalf of...	Factors ADAs carefully review alongside the TI-APIP Eligibility Criteria
Potential participant/defendant	Prior program participation or other evidence of interest in behavior change Age Willingness of individual to participate in programs like abusive partner intervention programs Willingness of individual to seek additional support services Extent to which a charge matches actual behavior based on details in the case file
Survivor/victim	Interest/readiness to continue the case Maintaining victim safety Other relevant information expressed during contact with DANY
The relationship between the parties	Whether the case centers on isolated violence or a sustained pattern of power and control Children in common
Court and legal factors	Judicial discretion and ability to monitor compliance Discretion of defense to accept or reject the ADA's offer Capacity of ADAs to turn over discovery and file compliance certificates in order to calendar a disposition and begin the referral process given recent New York City bail reform laws

Source: Conversations with Manhattan District Attorney's Office stakeholders in August and December 2020.

Notes: ADA = assistant district attorney. DANY = Manhattan District Attorney's Office. TI-APIP = Trauma-Informed Abusive Partner Intervention Program.

**Staff at the TI-APIP also have input in who is enrolled for programming.** Though court staff may find a participant eligible or fit for the program, the TI-APIP staff may deem a participant unsuitable for the program because of several factors—particularly the level to which a participant may be experiencing untreated and significant mental illness, significant substance use disorder, or severe housing instability. The TI-APIP staff find that it is neither reasonable nor defensible to expect an individual with significant needs that could not be met by a curriculum-based program to adequately engage with it. The TI-APIP staff identify these exclusionary criteria on a case-by-case basis as they meet with potential participants for the initial intake appointments, and they provide referrals for ineligible individuals to external social support services as appropriate.

### The TI-APIP Participants from 2019–2021

Because of early difficulties in defining referral processes, changes in the New York City court system following bail reform legislation (box 2), and several other factors, referrals and enrollment in the program began slowly in 2019 and 2020. From interviews we learned that referrals were functionally

at a standstill from February 2020 through March 2021, but as DANY and the TI-APIP worked together to clarify referral channels and better connect each other to all relevant justice system stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic, this challenge was mitigated. Despite these complications, the TI-APIP enrolled 25 new participants from June 2019 through April 2021.

**BOX 2**

**2019–2020 New York Bail and Discovery Reform**

In April 2019, New York state legislators passed a series of bail reform bills that went into effect on January 1, 2020—just as the TI-APIP began. These bills reformed multiple court processes by encouraging automatic pretrial release for most nonviolent cases, increasing the number of cases eligible for cash bail, and mandating that judges consider a defendant’s financial position before assigning bail, among other reforms. ADAs are also now required to turn over all discovery on criminal cases and to file a certificate of compliance before dispositions are allowed, which leads to significant additional administrative tasks for prosecutors and affects the speed of the TI-APIP referral processes.

Understanding the demographic characteristics of participants is important context for thinking through the unique needs of the program. **The average participant in the TI-APIP from June 2019 to April 2021 was a man of color between ages 21 and 29 with an annual income below \$10,000 who identified as heterosexual, spoke English as their primary language, and reported their relationship status as “single.”** Table 3 is a summary of demographic information for the 25 participants who engaged with the program from June 2019 through April 2021. It provides a snapshot of key participant characteristics but does not paint a comprehensive picture of the kinds of people this program is or is not intended to serve, as it only reflects the sample of participant data we were able to analyze at this halfway point in our evaluation.

**TABLE 3**

**The TI-APIP Participant Demographic Summary (N=25)**

Age	Race	Annual household income
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 28% ages 18–24</li> <li>■ 48% ages 25–39</li> <li>■ 16% ages 40–59</li> <li>■ 0% ages 60+</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 28% Black/African American</li> <li>■ 8% white/Caucasian</li> <li>■ 44% Hispanic/Latinx</li> <li>■ 4% Asian/Pacific Islander</li> <li>■ 16% Other</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 68% \$0–14,999</li> <li>■ 12% \$15,000–34,999</li> <li>■ 8% \$35,000–74,999</li> <li>■ 8% \$75,000+</li> </ul>

**Source:** Administrative data provided by the CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance to Urban in August 2021.

**Notes:** TI-APIP = Trauma-Informed Abusive Partner Intervention Program. Client data were missing for one age data point and one annual household income data point. The “Other” race category includes “Multiracial” and “Unknown.”

In August 2021, ISLG shared with Urban aggregate (nonidentifiable) performance data on participants who enrolled from June 2019 to April 2021, to allow for further context in this brief. The 25 individuals who enrolled in the TI-APIP over this period are organized into six cohorts (table 4).

TABLE 4

**The TI-APIP Participant Cohorts**

<b>Cohort number</b>	<b>Cohort date range</b>	<b>Individuals referred to the TI-APIP</b>	<b>Participants enrolled in the TI-APIP</b>
1	Referred 06/15/2019–10/14/2019	14	9
2	Referred 10/15/2019–01/14/2020	1	1
3	Referred 01/15/2020–04/14/2020	6	3
4	Referred 07/15/2020–10/14/2020	2	2
5	Referred 10/15/2020–01/14/2021	3	3
6	Referred 01/15/2021–04/14/2021	9	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>Participants referred from 06/2019–04/2021</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>25</b>

Source: Administrative data provided by the CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance to Urban in August 2021.

Notes: TI-APIP = Trauma-Informed Abusive Partner Intervention Program.

## The TI-APIP Program Flow

For people who have been charged with committing harm to their intimate partner to enter and enroll in the TI-APIP, defense attorneys, prosecutors, or resource coordinators from Part D and the IDV Part refer potential participants to the program. Part D is responsible for handling misdemeanor DV cases, and the IDV Part handles DV cases that also have parallel Family Court cases. Once referred, potential participants begin the enrollment process, and if the TI-APIP staff deem them suitable, they undergo an intake and assessment meeting as well as an enrollment appointment with staff.

### Referrals, Enrollment, and Intake

As part of the intake process, once resource coordinators make referrals, the TI-APIP staff accept them and screen defendants to determine suitability for the program. After screening each referral, the TI-APIP staff contact eligible candidates to begin the intake process. Staff aim to contact candidates via email or phone within three days to schedule an intake and assessment appointment. Because program participation is court-mandated, once participants are referred, they cannot decline to work with the TI-APIP without the courts becoming involved. At the intake appointment, staff collect the participant's background information including race, sexual orientation, primary language, and education. Further, they develop a service plan that outlines assistance options for securing housing, mental health resources, food, and more if needed. They recommend external or internal clinical services (e.g., counseling, substance abuse treatment) for individuals with reported trauma histories accompanied by significant trauma symptomology. During this time, the Witness Aid Services Unit (WASU) at DANY may attempt to contact survivors whose partners are involved with the TI-APIP.<sup>7</sup> If WASU successfully makes the connection and the survivor affirms that they want to be contacted regarding program updates, WASU will then share those updates with the survivor and/or connect the survivor to URI directly.

## Key Program Components

Once intake is completed, the TI-APIP staff notify DANY and formally enroll participants. Formal enrollment consists of staff notifying participants of **program expectations** and requesting that they complete a **participant agreement form**, wherein participants sign initial statements about what is required of them (box 3). As part of their intended trauma-informed approach, the TI-APIP staff provide **individual case management** services in accordance with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's eight dimensions of wellness,<sup>8</sup> while aiming to develop a relationship of trust and attachment with participants. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, staff provided 12-week long-term clinical counseling and intervention services at no cost to participants who had difficulties accessing an external clinical provider. Following the transition to the virtual environment and increased enrollment numbers, the TI-APIP no longer provides individual counseling on a regular basis and instead provides individual sessions as needed. Internal clinical services are now limited by decreased staff capacity due to increasing referrals and consequent increasing participant numbers. In response, staff are increasing the number of participants they refer to similar external clinical services.

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### BOX 3

#### Example Items from the TI-APIP Participant Agreement Form

TI-APIP participants complete a 23-item agreement form during the enrollment process. This form defines expectations related to group attendance, engagement, and behavior. The following are examples of two items from that form:

- *"I agree that I am required to attend the TI-APIP sessions weekly for the amount of time (26 sessions) as specified by the program and court."*
- *"I am expected to interact respectfully while I am at the TI-APIP. If I am intimidating or abusive to anyone, from when I enter the building until I leave, on the telephone or in person, there are an array of consequences, up to and including being dismissed from the group."*

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The final and most critical component of the program's activities is delivery of the curriculum. **The program based the TI-APIP curriculum mainly on the Allies in Change Model** but also incorporated some components of the Duluth Model. URI staff additionally applied some of their personal expertise gained in operating the APIP in Westchester County. They deliver the curriculum to participants during weekly two-hour sessions that each participant must attend for 26 weeks. Unique aspects of the model include journaling, didactic presentation, and a dynamic facilitation style. Further information about the actual content of the TI-APIP program sessions and analysis informed by program session observations are presented in the Program Sessions section later in this brief.

## Compliance

**Justice system stakeholders and TI-APIP staff work together to ensure a given participant is properly complying with their court-mandated order for programming.** To maintain compliance, participants must attend all 26 weeks of program sessions, demonstrate regular and consistent engagement in program sessions, engage in curriculum activities, and attend all case management or clinical counseling meetings related to the program. URI sends monthly compliance letters to the court, which include a list of program absences and notes concerning any participants' consistent non-engagement in program sessions. These letters are partially informed by weekly meetings between the courts, DANY, and the TI-APIP, wherein stakeholders discuss updates around court dates and proceedings as necessary for tracking compliance. DANY also monitors program participants for rearrest.

## Identified Outcomes

The intended short- and intermediate-term program outcomes are mostly concerned with immediate behavior changes that in turn facilitate long-term behavior changes. Short-term outcomes include participants' recognition of how their behaviors have worked against both them and those near them, their personal histories with trauma, and how their histories of trauma may inform their decisions. Further short-term outcomes include participants beginning to apply the TI-APIP curriculum concepts outside of sessions and to increase their self-esteem. Long-term outcomes are intended aftereffects of the short-term outcomes and include participants continuing to demonstrate program concepts after their mandated 26 weeks. Further, the program intends for participants to think and behave proactively before engaging in violent thoughts—an aftereffect of recognizing their histories of trauma and how those histories may inform their decisions. **The ultimate intended outcome is that participants do not engage in violence.**

## Program Operations and Early Findings

To date, the Urban evaluation team has completed a range of data collection activities and conducted data analysis. Here we present **additional qualitative findings** by relaying major themes about the TI-APIP that expand on the contextual information provided earlier in this brief.

**All the TI-APIP staff and URI leadership emphasize the importance of maintaining a wraparound, holistic, and culturally responsive approach in providing abusive partner intervention programming.** From interviews, we learned that the TI-APIP curriculum focuses on community healing and full individual development and actively considers the marginalization and precarity that participants are likely experiencing. Stakeholders described that most of the TI-APIP participants are food insecure and/or do not have reliable housing—which are known factors contributing to trauma and are associated with individuals making survival choices that may be criminalized. To meet the immediate needs of participants and, in turn, increase the likelihood that participants will engage with programming, the TI-APIP may provide metro and library cards, may offer snacks in every in-person session and occasionally full meals, and will work to obtain things such as school supplies for

participants as their needs are identified. According to a program facilitator, “for these types of programs to work, it has to be so much more than the one and a half to two hours they are in the room.” Leadership and facilitators at the TI-APIP further recognize that creating culturally responsive programming conscious of structural oppression is essential to meet the needs of their service population, which is mainly composed of men of color. This wraparound approach is a key component of the TI-APIP philosophy, discussed further below.

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*For these types of programs to work, it has to be so much more than the one and a half to two hours they are in the room. –TI-APIP stakeholder*

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## **A Trauma-Informed Approach**

**In alignment with the original CJII request for proposals and as championed by the TI-APIP staff, the program centers a unique trauma-informed approach that helps boil down the complexities inherent in relationships with violence.** From interviews, we learned that the TI-APIP philosophy is, at its core, that if you help someone with their trauma, they will be more ready and willing to change their behavior—particularly as it relates to the use of violence and perpetuation of negative gender roles. By working to identify and treat trauma symptoms in addition to educating about healthy relationships, the TI-APIP aims to create an environment in which participants can deeply reckon with and begin to change the underlying beliefs and attitudes that lead to their abusive behavior.

**Program facilitators further recognize that engaging with participants and providing instruction must be trauma-responsive in daily practice.** For example, stakeholders shared that participants are sometimes hypervigilant, a common trauma response. We learned in interviews that the TI-APIP facilitators understand that they “can’t pull any wool over [participants’] eyes” and strive to be forthcoming with all information and honest about their goals for each interaction. This intentional facilitation approach reflects the expertise of the TI-APIP staff and demonstrates their commitment to providing holistic, trauma-informed care and education about relationship violence.

**The TI-APIP staff incorporate elements of evidence-based models—the Duluth Model and the Allies for Change Model—while also creating space to discuss systemic issues in each program session.** During the COVID-19 pandemic and the mass racial justice movement in 2020, program staff carved out space in program sessions to allow participants to process police and racist violence in addition to covering topics such as “power and control.” With their clinical training, program facilitators can work toward healing by identifying and mitigating participants’ trauma responses—like hypervigilance and mistrust—while addressing the violence that participants have caused.

**Staff also noted that they incorporate a trauma-informed approach to attendance.** Staff mentioned that their goal is not to seek program dismissal upon a participant's first few absences or truancy. Rather, when participants are 30 minutes late, staff request that they journal and reflect to make up for the session and do not count them absent. Further, participants are allowed to miss and make up three sessions. All absences are reported to DANY, defense counselors, and the courts, as we learned through our interviews with stakeholders. The TI-APIP staff and DANY created scaled consequences for each of the first three absences. At the fourth absence, program staff consider removal or restarting the individual at week one of their experience in the program. In dealing with a population that has experienced a great deal of trauma, staff attempt to bear that history in mind and to not use dismissal as the first tool for dealing with poor attendance.

**Due to COVID-19, programming transitioned to the Zoom videoconferencing platform.** Through our observations, we saw that staff were able to maintain engagement with participants. For instance, during our two program observations, participants were forthcoming with staff, asked questions when they needed clarity, and were open to feedback from other participants. Though a virtual space was not the intended medium for program sessions, staff have been able to maintain participants' engagement.

**The TI-APIP program space, used when the program is delivered in person, further reflects a commitment to trauma-informed practice.** Staff originally provided programming in a Harlem office space, which Urban observed as open and welcoming during a February 2020 site visit. Staff placed a comfortable couch and chair in the lobby/waiting area. Program sessions were held in a room with a large table, chairs arranged in a circle, and a large window. Natural light, known to be more comforting and beneficial to physical and psychological health, easily flowed into the program session space. These structural design choices reflect an attempt to create a safe space likely to facilitate conversation and engagement, as noted below. Staff also maintained a computer lab for participants to access in the Harlem space. These spatial characteristics reflect a commitment to meeting the needs of program participants beyond required programming.

**The TI-APIP staff are trained professionals representing a mix of clinical, social work, and violence intervention backgrounds.** Interview participants noted that URI aims to hire clinicians and case workers with experience relevant to this program; job descriptions prioritize candidates' experience with criminal justice, DV, and trauma issues. Further, we learned that URI provides in-house training for all staff, including the TI-APIP staff, which includes foundational DV training. Before beginning work with the TI-APIP, staff are supposed to attend a four-day onboarding process that includes training on boundaries, de-escalation, and other topics deemed relevant by facilitators at that time.

**Due to the initially slow pace of program referrals, the TI-APIP staff were able to provide wraparound clinical services to all participants, though they no longer are.** Early interviews with the TI-APIP stakeholders included conversations about the program's unique capacity to provide comprehensive case management alongside individualized clinical services for each participant. At the immediate onset of COVID-19, program staff ensured they were available to respond to participants' crises and emergency needs through individual meetings and by providing referrals to additional service

providers, including medical services. However, this ability to provide one-on-one care was in large part facilitated by the slow referral streams and resulting low enrollment numbers. As the demand for the program grows, staff are now grappling with the fact that they may have to limit their provision of clinical services. The TI-APIP operations are moving away from individualized clinical therapy sessions and toward a referral and group counseling-based model.

## Program Sessions

**For each TI-APIP session, two facilitators attend— one man and one woman.** Stakeholders pointed out that, while not without challenges, this structure is part of the Duluth Model and allows for further reckoning with internalized misogyny by the participants.

**Program sessions are held once a week for two hours and follow a semiregular structure.** Through observations and interviews, we learned that participants filter in for the first 20 to 30 minutes of the session and have light conversation while facilitators begin the check-in process. If a participant arrives or logs in to Zoom more than 30 minutes past the session start time, it is considered an absence, but participants can complete a supplemental journal activity (in addition to the weekly journal) and negate that absence. If a participant arrives late to a program session by an hour or more, they are marked absent. Participants are allowed to accumulate three absences but are required to complete all session hours as mandated by the courts.<sup>9</sup> In the virtual environment, we observed the regular check-in process in which participants are asked to share any occurrences of abusive or at-risk behavior in the past week, significant life changes, and other life stressors. The check-ins are conducted in a round robin Zoom conversation. This check-in process can take a large portion of the program session if facilitators feel that is appropriate.

**Following the check-in process, facilitators lead participants in curriculum-based activities including group discussions, healing circles, worksheets, and reviewing the Power and Control Wheel.**<sup>10</sup> Specific activities vary depending on the stage of the program curriculum and may also be affected by major current events influencing how participants approach the conversation, such as a federal election. In alignment with their trauma-informed ethos, facilitators allow participants to briefly leave the room if they become triggered or upset in any way.

**At the end of each program session, participants hand in their weekly journals.** Depending on the pace of the program session and past experiences with participants, facilitators may give participants 10 to 15 minutes at the end of a session to wrap up that week's required curriculum-based journal entry before handing it in. Facilitators previously found that one or two participants would regularly ask for one-on-one conversations at the end of program sessions, but these requests are becoming more difficult to fulfill as the program grows and capacity becomes more limited.

**Participants regularly and actively engage in the program.** The session that the research team observed in March 2021—a virtual morning session featuring five participants and two facilitators—followed the program's transition to Zoom because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this session, facilitators aimed to focus on “different types of hurt and disappointments” and led participants in a

healing circle activity. The facilitator who led the healing circle activity went the extra mile to produce a special Zoom screen that better simulated what an in-person circle would feel like. Topics discussed by participants included their families, stressors in their weeks, relearning masculinity, building male emotional support networks, staying sober, and how to actively listen and show empathy for romantic partners. Participants were demonstrably comfortable with each other and expressed excitement to be building a network of support. Through these heavy conversations, participants expressed no visible discomfort, but during particularly heavy moments facilitators named this discomfort and held space with quiet pauses. Facilitators built rapport with participants by participating in the check-in process themselves, smiling and joking when appropriate, expressing excitement about session activities, and recapping major themes and moments discussed in the healing circle.

**Facilitators actively look for indications that participants are truly internalizing the curriculum and/or discussion of the day.** All participants are required to participate in the TI-APIP programming; they cannot simply attend their session. From interviews and ISLG administrative data, we learned that participant engagement has not been a significant issue for the program, as discussed above. Participants also create their own opportunities for verbal program feedback every week, which allows staff to ensure their programming remains relevant and engaging for future participants.

## Identified Challenges

**The primary challenge that we observed with the TI-APIP is the lack of widespread knowledge about it.** Misconceptions about the program arose in our conversations with stakeholders who refer people to the program. One defense attorney stakeholder felt abusive partner intervention programs were not the best solution for their clients. This attorney expressed the desire to address the root causes of what caused participants to enter the criminal justice system and noted, “One of the things that upsets me about what I’m doing now is the idea that participants are labeled, and help is usually not given to them in a way that can help address the problem that got them to court.”. Such misconceptions about abusive partner intervention programs in general may speak to the larger gap in knowledge that court stakeholders have about the program, what it offers, and how it incorporates therapeutic approaches into its sessions—in addition to possible misconceptions about IPV more broadly. This lack of awareness can contribute to low referrals to the program, but URI continues to work with stakeholders to address this gap.

**Stakeholders report that although the free-of-charge structure allows for the TI-APIP to serve people of all economic backgrounds, it does make for an unclear future for the program.** Staff commended their ability to provide the TI-APIP free of charge but expressed uncertainty about the longevity of the program, because it is funded solely by DANY’s CJII. Once the program’s period of funding from the CJII ends, staff may not be able to offer a free trauma-informed APIP.

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*One of the things that upsets me about what I'm doing now is the idea that participants are labeled, and help is usually not given to them in a way that can help address the problem that got them to court. –Interview respondent*

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## Limitations of This Brief

Given we are at the midpoint of the evaluation, the findings in this summary brief have some limitations. First, though we were able to interview court staff and the TI-APIP staff, the findings here do not reflect any perceptions of the program from participants themselves. We were unable to engage participants for primary data collection during the first half of this evaluation. Second, though we interviewed all URI stakeholders involved with the TI-APIP, we did not conduct interviews with a large sample of court stakeholders. Thus, the qualitative findings here do not reflect the views of most court stakeholders in New York City. In the next phase of the evaluation, we will aim to address these limitations through activities to be described in a later publication.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

**Based on the data collected to date and our preliminary qualitative analyses, we can affirm that the TI-APIP has made the following significant strides in launching a program that effectively integrates trauma care as its core component:**

- Court stakeholders have been able to refer participants to the program, though at a lower rate than originally anticipated.
- Staff at the TI-APIP were able to effectively pivot to virtual sessions while also continuing to provide wraparound services and offering individual case management to each participant by phone and Zoom software. Participant engagement levels were not negatively affected by this transition, and the program has relatively few absence-based compliance issues.
- Staff at the TI-APIP were able to implement their trauma-informed approach even in the virtual environment by holding space for all the stressors and difficulties that participants face in their lives and by encouraging peer relationship building while still delivering the curriculum-based programming.
- Staff at the TI-APIP were able to offer more extensive, individualized support hours to each participant when enrollment was low. As the courts continue to reopen in Manhattan and referrals are increasing, URI is actively working to assure that staff have sufficient time to continue offering high-quality sessions and refer out for individual support for those participants who express interest.

- Stakeholders expressed concerns around future funding for the program and interest in securing funding beyond the period of performance allotted in CJII funding.

**In addition to the process evaluation activities described in this brief, the evaluation team is completing the following data collection activities, analyses of which will be presented in the final report in 2023:**

- exit surveys and focus groups with the TI-APIP participants highlighting their experiences with the program and justice system (including experiences of participating in the program during the pandemic)
- programmatic data review of participants to develop a profile of those served throughout the evaluation period
- review of prospective criminal justice data for the TI-APIP participants and a comparison group of people who have similar charges but do not enroll in the TI-APIP, to examine recidivism

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Per [the CJII website](#), “the Office of Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr., established the Criminal Justice Investment Initiative (CJII) to invest approximately \$250 million of criminal asset forfeiture funds in projects that will improve public safety, develop broad crime prevention efforts, and promote a fair, efficient justice system in New York City.”
- <sup>2</sup> Throughout this brief, we refer to the Trauma-Informed Abusive Partner Intervention Program from URI in the way program facilitators reference it: “TI-APIP.” The abbreviation TI-APIP is used by the program’s facilitators but has so far not been used frequently in public materials. It is to be distinguished from the more general APIP (abusive partner intervention programming).
- <sup>3</sup> While these meetings are not part of the formal evaluation activities, in the absence of other data sources, the meetings became an important source of information on the program’s design, evolution, and challenges presented by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- <sup>4</sup> See page 5 of the CJII’s 2021 brief describing the process of establishing the TI-APIP: [https://cjii.org/wp-content/uploads/TI-APIP\\_Policy-Brief.5bFINAL.pdf](https://cjii.org/wp-content/uploads/TI-APIP_Policy-Brief.5bFINAL.pdf).
- <sup>5</sup> These two prominent IPV programs served as the foundation for what eventually became the TI-APIP’s curriculum. [Allies in Change](#) is a group intervention that helps people who cause harm identify the ways they have been abusive or controlling. The model actively employs best practices from the therapeutic field, such as motivational interviewing and cognitive behavioral interventions. The TI-APIP curriculum primarily draws from various components of the Allies in Change Model, and a consultant who is familiar with this curriculum provided training and technical assistance during the development of the TI-APIP. The [Duluth Model](#) is an evidence-based intervention that employs a feminist psychoeducational approach to facilitate group classes and help people who cause harm recognize their abusive behaviors and take accountability. The TI-APIP curriculum draws on a few components of the Duluth Model.
- <sup>6</sup> In Manhattan, the chief of the Special Victims Bureau oversees the Domestic Violence Unit as well as the Sex Crimes Unit, the Human Trafficking Response Unit, the Child Abuse Unit, and the Elder Abuse Unit.
- <sup>7</sup> As in many instances throughout the country, engaging survivors in services that are geared toward their partners who cause harm is challenging. WASU staff make survivors aware of the TI-APIP, but to our knowledge based on interviews with the TI-APIP staff, few survivors expressed interest in being directly connected with the TI-APIP. For more information on WASU, see the [Witness Aid Services Unit webpage](#).

- <sup>8</sup> The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's "Eight Dimensions of Wellness" make up a model for understanding a given individual's wellness through a combination of their social, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, physical, environmental, financial, and occupational health. It adapted this model from Margaret Swarbrick's 2006 article "A Wellness Approach" in *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*. For more information, see the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's *Creating a Healthier Life: A Step-by-Step Guide to Wellness* (2016).
- <sup>9</sup> If there are documented absences, participants can make up for them by attending an orientation session related to accountability, attending an individual counseling session, or extending their enrollment period beyond 26 weeks in accordance with the number of missed sessions.
- <sup>10</sup> The [Power and Control Wheel](#) is a tool used in the IPV service field to help program providers and participants identify and understand the overall patterns of abusive and violent behaviors used by a given aggressor to maintain control over an intimate partner. It was developed in the 1980s as part of the Duluth Model of IPV intervention(s).

## About the Authors

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