



GUNS TO GARDENS GUN BUYBACK PROGRAM

OUR STORY

In 2016, a woman named Kira Jones called us and asked if we would meet her for a cup of coffee to discuss creating a gun buyback program in New Mexico. We agreed to the coffee, but to be honest, we were not that interested. We, like many, were under the incorrect assumption that gun buybacks were ineffective and just a “feel-good” effort. We explained to Kira that we did not do gun buybacks. She asked if she could show us pictures from an Albuquerque, New Mexico gun buyback in which she had recently participated. At the buyback, over 400 working guns were taken off the streets. We saw piles and piles of semi-automatic handguns, rifles, and even assault weapons. Convinced, I laughed confessed to her that I came to the meeting uninterested and then said, “We do gun buybacks now”. From that day, with much trial and error and a lot of hard work, we have eventually built what is now known as the Guns to Gardens buyback program. To date, we have dismantled over 1500 firearms through 16 New Mexico gun buybacks.

UNEXPECTED OPPORTUNITY

Over the years of doing gun buybacks in New Mexico, we have discovered that a gun buyback provides an opportunity to bridge the divide between gun violence prevention advocates and people in your community who are gun enthusiasts. All surrendered guns are dismantled on-site, with sparks flying and the sound of metal being cut. Minutes later, the gun is rendered useless. The dismantled gun is tossed into a heap of metal and wood. It will later be forged into a gardening tool. At the moment of transformation – when the gun is dismantled – it loses its power to kill. Local news stations tend to show both the guns being cut up and the pile of dismantled guns. By the evening, these images are in living rooms throughout New Mexico via local news. We think of this as an opportunity to open and even change the dialogue about the role guns play in our society. The images of a gun being transformed into a gardening tool is an opportunity for us to explore the issue from different points of view. Dismantling and forging them into objects that sustain life rather than take lives has provided an unexpected entrée into the complicated discourse about our identity as a nation that both loves and despises guns.



WHY A GUN BUYBACK?

Over the last several years, gun buyback programs have steadily gained the support of both communities and law enforcement departments across the country. NMPGV gathers data from participants through an anonymous survey asking why they are turning in their guns. The data is clear that gun buybacks make a difference. The majority of people who participate are doing so for safety reasons. Gun buybacks also reduce the number of guns in our communities, making the job of law enforcement safer.

BELOW ARE SOME OF THE REASONS PEOPLE HAVE PARTICIPATED IN OUR GUN BUYBACKS.

(Use these as talking points to get your police or sheriff's departments on board)

- Changing circumstances in a home.
- Children in the home. (Many grandparents are now taking care of their grandchildren while parents are at work. They do not want to worry about their grandchildren getting ahold of their guns.)
- A family member with suicidal ideation.
- Substance abuse.
- A loved one has died leaving an unwanted firearm in their home.
- A family member has inherited a gun.
- The gun is no longer used for hunting.
- A person in the home has dementia.
- A person in the home is dealing with a medical crisis.
- The gun fires incorrectly, making it dangerous to the person shooting. (Firearms are the only object not regulated for safety in the United States)
- The gun was used in a suicide

MORE MESSAGING GUIDELINES

Gun buyback events are just one part of a multifaceted approach to end the gun violence public health crisis in our nation.

These events will help to elevate the conversation on the dangers of having a gun in the home and in our communities, and promote safe storage practices.

Any program that reduces the number of guns in our homes and communities will make us safer.

Fewer guns mean fewer stolen guns, fewer guns getting into the wrong people's hands, and fewer gun injuries and deaths.

Gun buybacks are 100% voluntary and have nothing to do with stopping people from acquiring, owning, or using guns.



TOOLKIT

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

Funds Needed:

- 1) Funds for gift cards (\$10,000 -\$15,000.00).
- 2) If necessary, funds for lodging volunteers.
- 3) One-time fund to buy a chop saw and ongoing funds to replace blades.

Forms Needed (all of which are in the Appendix):

- City resolution.
- Surveys for participants.
- Gun tally sheet.
- What law enforcement can expect from your group.
- Report for law enforcement.
- Safety protocols.
- Digital flyer. (Feel free to use the flyer provided in the Appendix with your logo and your police department's logo.)



ITEMS TO TAKE TO BUYBACK

- Chop saw and blade.
- A sturdy table to cut up guns. This can be two sawhorses and a thick piece of plywood.
- Long extension cords.
- Sturdy containers for gun scraps.
- Map of parking lot with table configuration.
- Surveys.
- Gun tally sheets.
- Sharpies.
- Clipboards for survey and gun tally with pen attached.
- Gun locks/gun safety info.
- Two folding tables and chairs for volunteers. (Police departments can often supply these.)
- Sandwich board sign to direct traffic where gun buyback is located.
- Tablecloth with your logo.
- Water for volunteers and sunblock.

HOW TO BEGIN

1. Meet the police chief and/or mayor of your city. Talk to them about doing a gun buyback and use the talking points listed on Page 1. Offer them one of our reports (Appendix) so that they can see how other states are participating, as well as a pamphlet regarding what can be expected on the day of a gun buyback. (Appendix)

We have used the example of prescription drug take backs to help with comfort levels. Most people understand that prescription drugs are necessary but that it is good to get the unwanted drugs out of homes when the drugs are no longer needed. It is the same with firearms.

QUESTIONS THAT MAY ARISE

IF A GUN WAS STOLEN, WILL IT GO BACK TO ITS RIGHTFUL OWNER?

Yes. law enforcement partners will run all guns through the National Instant Criminal Background Check System NCIC database to check for stolen firearm. If they are flagged as stolen law enforcement gets it back to its rightful owner. To date, we have had about a dozen guns flagged at our gun buybacks. All of them were stolen years before and they were returned to their rightful owners.

WHAT IF A CRIME GUN COMES IN?

We have done 16 gun buybacks and have never received a crime gun. It is not surprising that criminals do not use a weapon to commit a crime and then take that gun and go to a police station to get a grocery card.

DOES THIS GO AGAINST SECOND AMENDMENT LAWS?

Absolutely not. There are no statutes in state or federal governments that make it illegal to destroy a firearm.

2. Involve partnering organizations such as hospitals, universities, faith-based organizations, family advocacy groups, etc.

HELPFUL HINT

Try to set the date a couple of weeks before a holiday as people will want gift cards for grocery stores or camping equipment, etc.

3. Get your city involved. Work with them on a resolution in support of the gun buyback. Make sure that they promote the buyback as they would any community event. (Example of a city resolution is in the appendix.)

4. Build your team.

Volunteers: (7 is a good number)

Our experience has been that people enjoy volunteering for gun buybacks. It is important to choose volunteers carefully and, if possible, use the same team for future gun buybacks. These events take a lot of responsibility and involve safety protocols that need to be strictly adhered to.

Breakdown of volunteer duties:

We have one person who organizes everything, including volunteers. This person is the coordinator of the buyback and is the go-to person if problems arise, etc.

- **Two volunteers who are both knowledgeable about guns and know how to use a chop saw safely.** These will be the volunteers who dismantle the firearms and are two of the most crucial people on the team. The two people we use are both welders so they have all the safety equipment they need as well the knowledge to safely operate the chop saw. They are also marksmen with extensive knowledge about firearms. It may be a bit of a search to find these volunteers, but they are out there. Try your local community college, which may teach welding. Retired law enforcement can also be a good source.
- **A volunteer who knows everything about firearms.** This volunteer will be the person who identifies each firearm being turned in. There will be participants who suggest or insist that their semi-automatic rifle is an AR 15 to get the higher-valued gift cards. The firearms expert volunteer will also help identify whether or not the gun is in working order or something else is questionable.
- **A volunteer who is your press coordinator.** (If possible, have this person be the press coordinator for all of your programs.) We have a retired newscaster. She knows the press and how to get their attention. We are lucky to have her.
- **A volunteer to do the surveys.** It is best if this volunteer is a people person and bilingual if you live in a Spanish-speaking state.

- **Two volunteers to do the gun tally.** They will communicate to the participants how many gun(s) were accepted, the type of gun(s) they are, and how much they will receive in gift cards. We allow participants to mix and match their cards (e.g. Target, Walmart, Albertsons, Gas, etc). Again, these volunteers should be good with people (and at least one bilingual if possible).
- **Two volunteers handling the gift cards.** They will pull gift cards to give to the volunteer doing the tally sheets. We prefer two volunteers, as we like to keep an eye on the cards. If a certain kind of gift card runs low, the gift card volunteer will let the tally volunteer know so buyback participants don't choose a card that you have run out of.
- **One or two volunteers to serve as runners.** These volunteers will be in charge of taking the unloaded guns after they have been cleared by police to the person with the chop saw. These volunteers should be in relatively good shape and comfortable with a lot of walking and correctly carrying firearms.

BEFORE GUN BUYBACK

ASSEMBLE YOUR TEAM:

If this is your first gun buyback, make sure to meet with your team and do some practice runs with a toy gun. You may want to do this at the police station so that you get an idea of spacing in the parking lot.

MEET WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT:

We usually meet a couple of times with law enforcement to go over the buyback. Make sure one of these meetings is at the location of the buyback itself. This will help you create a map of where tables and chop saws will be located and to go over all of this with the police department. We find that the shape of a horseshoe works best. Check that the electrical sockets for the chop saws are working and can handle the electricity load. The area for chopping the guns should not have dry weeds, etc. as there will be sparks from the chop saw.

PRESS AND ADVERTISING THE BUYBACK:

It is best to have one person who organizes the press and advertising of the event. Our survey asks where participants heard about the gun buyback to help refine the process for future buybacks. We have found that the police department's Facebook as well as community Facebook pages are great (and free!) ways to advertise. We also try to get a story in the local newspaper a week ahead of time. We do as many radio shows as possible, and sometimes will even buy or solicit free ads on local radio stations. In our state, country music stations are a great place to advertise. Think of who your gun-owning audience is and target those stations with those demographics.

FUNDING:

Funding can come from many sources. Below is a list of potential funders:

Discretionary funds from city councils.

Foundations who give to gun violence prevention projects.

Private donors.

District Attorney offices.

Attorney General offices.

Churches.

Hospitals.

Private, local organizations.

GIFT CARDS:

At our first gun buyback, we had low gift card amounts for each firearm and we took in only a small number of guns. Below is the pricing system that we have found works the best. Every community is different. In some East Coast states, they receive a lot of guns with much lower amounts. The gift card is simply a way of thanking the participant and not compensation for a sale. All guns must be in working order to get a gift card. We offer to take broken guns off their hands and dismantle them. If BB guns are brought in, we offer \$25.00 in cards, but we do not put this fact on the flyer.

PURCHASING GIFT CARDS:

Purchasing of gift cards can take some time as many stores will only allow you to purchase \$1,000.00 per visit. We start a couple of weeks before the buyback so that we can go repeatedly. Sometimes, it is possible to go to the same store twice in one day if you go in the morning and evening. We buy cards from Amazon, Target, Smith's and Albertson grocery stores, and Walmart. (Make sure the Walmart in your area does not sell firearms!)

- Only buy cards that can be used throughout your state. (You do not want to be left with a lot of cards from a local store that can only be used in that city.)
- We choose not to buy Visa Cards because we do not want someone turning in their dad's hunting rifles so that they can turn around and buy a new semi-automatic handgun.
- Make sure not to buy cards at a store that sells guns. Walmart stores in New Mexico used to sell guns, so we did not buy cards from them. They recently reversed that policy and stopped selling guns. We have now begun to use Walmart cards, as many people in our rural areas shop at these stores.
- Find out where most people shop in the area and focus on getting your cards there and from Amazon. In New Mexico, Walmart and Target are where people do most of their grocery shopping.

PRICING:

\$100.00 Long gun or pistol.

\$200.00 Semi-automatic handgun/semi-automatic rifle.

\$250.00 Assault weapon.

SURVEYS:

Conducting anonymous surveys is crucial for data collection. The data collected is helpful when raising money for future gun buybacks. It can also be used when speaking with law enforcement departments that you are approaching to participate in a gun buyback. This data helps us analyze why people have guns in their homes, who has access to those guns, storage practices, reasons for turning in a gun, demographics, and even the distance traveled to surrender weapons. Gun buybacks also provide us with an opportunity to gather useful data regarding why people participate in these events, which, in turn, helps policymakers as we work with them to make gun buyback programs available in more communities. Gun buybacks can also serve as an educational program for parents, teachers, and healthcare professionals to reduce unintentional shootings among children, child gun suicides and homicides in America, as well as to provide safe storage options to gun owners and promote community gun buyback opportunities. We have provided a survey in the Appendix.

SCHEDULE

TWO WEEKS BEFORE BUYBACK:

1. Create a digital flyer and have your city and police departments advertise as they would for any community event. (You can use our flyer and put your logo and police department's logo on the flyer.) (Appendix) Ask law enforcement and the city to include the flyer on their social media outlets. Together with your partners, be prepared to stay ahead of messaging in case some negative comments are made on social media. This will be nothing new to law enforcement and city personnel.



2. Purchase gift cards and prepare them for the buyback. Using a Sharpie, write in bold numbers the amount of money each card is worth. Do this even if the card says the amount. These buybacks can be busy, particularly at the beginning, and you will want to be able to recognize and distribute cards quickly. Also, with a Sharpie in large bold letters, label small manila envelopes with the kind of gift card plus their denomination (e.g. "Amazon \$25.00"). Organize cards in a box and obviously keep them in a safe and locked location until the buyback.

3. Confirm your team and meet to discuss who will be doing what.

4. Write a press release. We create the press release four weeks ahead of time as it will almost certainly be required from your police department (and perhaps other partners) to approve the release as their logo will be on it. Police departments get busy and it can take awhile to get the flyer approved, etc. You may also want to have the city's logo on the press release. It has been helpful to get a quote from the police chief and/or mayor for the release. (Appendix)

5. Purchase saw and blades.

ONE WEEK BEFORE BUYBACK:

1. Meet with your team at the location of the buyback and do a run-through. We cannot stress enough how important this is. You will be dealing with firearms and will want everything to run smoothly.

2. Send out a press release to local papers and news stations. Do as many radio interviews as you can. It is great if you can get law enforcement or local faith-based leaders to do these with you. You may even want to circulate a social media blast, with updates and reminders daily.

3. Check and make sure the saws are working.

4. Print surveys and gun tally sheets. Put them on 4 clipboards: 2 with tally sheets and 2 with surveys. Tie pens to the clipboards with string.

5. Pack a plastic container with everything on the list of items needed: Clipboards, gun locks, tablecloth with your group's logo, etc.

THREE DAYS BEFORE BUYBACK:

1. Call news stations to remind them to put the buyback on their calendars. (Do this again the day before and the morning of the buyback.)

2. Confirm volunteers.



DAY BEFORE BUYBACK:

1. Have a volunteer order and pick up breakfast sandwiches or burritos as well as coffee for volunteers and law enforcement.
2. Have everyone arrive an hour early to set up. **(Keep gift cards locked in the car up until the last minute!)**

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A PERSON SHOWS UP WITH A GUN OR GUNS TO TURN IN AT A GUN BUYBACK

1. The person's car pulls up to law enforcement.
2. Law enforcement removes gun(s) from the trunk of the car and dislodges the gun(s) into a shooting barrel to make sure they are not loaded.
3. Your volunteer who is a gun expert writes down the kind of gun(s) and communicates this to the volunteer with the tally clipboard. (This is happening while police run the gun through the NCIC system.)
4. Law enforcement then runs gun serial number(s) through NCIC to see if the weapon was stolen or used in a crime. (If it is stolen, we still give the person a gift card. They are usually quite shocked that the gun they bought or were given was at one time stolen.)
5. Person with the tally clipboard informs participants what kind of gun(s) they are and how much they will receive in gift card(s).
6. Participant tells the volunteer with the tally clipboard what gift card(s) they would prefer.
7. Gift card volunteer pulls the gift card(s) and hands it to the tally volunteer.
8. While a participant is waiting for their gift card(s), the survey volunteer asks them if they will do an anonymous survey. Stress that this is simply so we can collect data regarding why people participate.
9. Tally volunteer hands gift card(s) to the participant and they drive away.
10. After gun(s) are run through NCIC, the runner volunteer takes them to the chop saw where they are immediately dismantled. We have had participants turn in 15 guns at a time. Do not be too concerned if law enforcement runs behind running the serial numbers. This happens.

TROUBLE SHOOTING

- If you get a long line of cars, have the team coordinator let people know that it should not take too long. (The coordinator is also the extra volunteer if issues arise, etc.) This person needs to be of calm disposition with refined people skills. A survey volunteer can also use this time to do the survey.
- We also accept toy guns. A lot of teachers bring these in because they look so real. We do not, however, give gift cards for toy guns.
- If you run out of cards, we suggest you stay until the end to let people know. Sometimes they will still want to turn in their gun(s) even without the bonus incentive a gift card. (We had one man refuse gift cards after turning in nine long guns.)
- If “Second Amendment gun enthusiasts” show up at your gun buyback, intending to buy weapons from participants, inform law enforcement who will ask them to leave.
- Have all volunteers keep their eyes open for suspicious behavior. Once in a while, a group of angry men will show up to a buyback. Immediately inform law enforcement and have them handle the situation.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- There may be participants who arrive early. We strongly suggest that you do not start until the advertised time.
- The first two hours will be the busiest and then it tends to taper off. We did have one buyback that was busy for four straight hours.
- If press shows up, ask them to be discreet. Participant anonymity is crucial. There can be no pictures of cars, license plates, faces, etc. We find it is best to send them to the pile of guns and the chop saw. That is the photo op. Your coordinator and/or press person can work with the press during the event.
- Make sure gift card volunteers keep an eye on the gift cards so that the tally person is aware if a certain kind is running out. This avoids having someone be promised a certain type of card when they are already gone.
- Throughout the event/day, post on social media how many guns are being brought in with pictures. These are some of our most circulated posts.

AFTER THE BUYBACK:

- If media did not show up, email local media and let them know how many guns were taken off of the streets and send them pictures of the cut-up guns (video too if you have it).
- Make sure the area where guns were cut up is cleaned of all debris as the metal parts are sharp and can cause flat tires.
- We like to leave the place better than we found it.

FOLLOW UP:

Create a report for your records and to give to the police department. (Appendix)

WHAT TO DO WITH GUN PARTS:

Rawtools can help you find a local welder in many areas of the country to forge them into gardening tools. The tools can be sold via your website or social media. We advertise that 100% of sales go to future gun buybacks.

Contact: Mike Martin at Rawtools at <https://rawtools.org>

We drive our gun parts to him in Colorado.

Oftentimes, community colleges have a welding program and they might be interested in creating gardening tools or art with the metal scraps. If possible, have an art opening and invite local press.

APPENDIX

- Surveys for participants
- Gun tally sheet
- What law enforcement can expect from your group
- Report for law enforcement
- Digital flyer (you can use the one provided in appendix and put your logo and police department's logo on the flyer)

