A GUIDE BY TEXAS IMPACT




# VIDAS ROBADAS

## STOLEN LIVES

# HONORING VICTIMS OF GUN VIOLENCE AND ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE

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# VIDAS ROBADAS

## STOLEN LIVES

### CREATED BY TEXAS IMPACT

*A guide to hosting gun violence memorial installations and connecting communities to address gun violence*

## TRIGGER WARNING

This is a guide to hosting Vidas Robadas memorial installations and **discusses sensitive topics** such as **gun violence, homicide, suicide, and mass shootings**. Please take that into consideration when using this guide.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*A heartfelt thanks to the Vidas Robadas team and the Ending Gun Violence volunteer team for leading this project;*

*and to the dozens of congregations and hundreds of people who had the courage to stand up and say enough is enough.*

*Their radical compassion transformed Vidas Robadas into a sacred part of the movement to end gun violence.*

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# A PROJECT HONORING VICTIMS OF GUN VIOLENCE

## WHAT IS VIDAS ROBADAS?

Vidas Robadas, also known as Stolen Lives, is a Texas Impact gun violence awareness and prevention project.




Inspired by other national gun violence prevention projects, Vidas Robadas is centered around installations of t-shirts that name or represent members from our communities whose lives were stolen by gun violence. These memorials are hosted and displayed by community stakeholders such as congregations, student groups, advocacy organizations, or any other group concerned about gun violence.

Through memorializing victims, Vidas Robadas localizes and makes visual the reality of gun violence. Every t-shirt memorial represents a space that could have been filled by the body of a neighbor, friend, and loved one whose life was stolen by gun violence. Such powerful images help cut through divisive political rhetoric and create opportunities for people to have real, meaningful conversations on why there is violence in our communities and what we can do to prevent it. It is an awareness project grounded in shared humanity and collective action.

## WHY DO WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT GUN VIOLENCE?

Gun violence is a uniquely American problem. While violent crime rates fluctuate all the time, the mass shooting epidemic has demonstrated the shocking potential for violence in our society. In a time when people feel divided and political tensions are rising, we must take violence prevention measures seriously. More is needed than just thoughts and prayers.

Gun violence is a complicated issue. Communities are affected in a variety of different and often misunderstood ways. For instance, despite receiving less media attention than other forms of gun violence, gun suicides make up the majority of gun deaths. To address America's violence problem holistically and thoughtfully, there is a need to raise awareness about all aspects of gun violence.

# GOALS OF VIDAS ROBADAS

***As a project, Vidas Robadas seeks to***

## 1. ENGAGE

***communities in raising awareness, learning about gun violence, and investigating potential solutions.***

Vidas Robadas begins with using t-shirt installations that memorialize members of the community as a means to raise awareness of gun violence. Vidas Robadas calls on communities to learn about gun violence as a broad issue, about how it is affecting their immediate community, and how they can work to reduce it.

## 2. CONNECT

***the various silos of advocacy, violence prevention, and communities of faith.***

By approaching violence from a place of human loss, Vidas Robadas provides an opportunity for communities to have good-faith conversations between elected officials, advocates, survivors of gun violence, and other key stakeholders.

## 3. MOBILIZE

***stakeholders to create long-lasting, positive change.***

Lastly, Vidas Robadas calls on communities to back up their installations with advocacy initiatives. As stated earlier, gun violence is a complicated and pervasive issue—that means it is going to take the efforts of everyone at every level of government to start making meaningful, lasting change.

**Violence prevention is tough work. It is a serious and somber issue that often brings up strong opinions, especially when guns are involved. We must take the issue seriously and work to address it in every way possible. Vidas Robadas is a first step in starting that work.**

To get involved contact
**vidas-robadas-team@texasimpact.org**

# SECTION ONE: ENGAGE

## Creating a Vidas Robadas Installation

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# OBTAINING VIDAS ROBADAS MEMORIALS

***Getting Started***

*Vidas Robadas installations consist of t-shirts that name or represent members from our communities whose lives were stolen by gun violence.* ***But how to do you actually obtain these memorials?*** *You can either take an installation from a former host or make one yourself.*

## Option 1: Inherit Memorials from a Prior Host

Vidas Robadas started in 2023 in the inner-city westside of San Antonio at Divine Redeemer Presbyterian Church. At Divine Redeemer, around 20 congregants gathered to create over 200 t-shirt memorials for victims of gun violence from their neighborhood over the last 5 years. Since then, the project has grown into a national movement with dozens of installations and thousands of t-shirt memorials.





*Divine Redeemer Presbyterian Church creating t-shirt memorials and setting up the first Vidas Robadas installation in 2023.*

Currently, many of the thousands of Vidas Robadas memorials are being held by Texas Impact and other local groups and congregations, mostly located in Texas, and they still need to be honored and displayed. **If you are interested in hosting these already-made memorials, email vidas-robadas-team@texasimpact.org** to see if there are any currently available and to coordinate getting them and the materials to hang them.



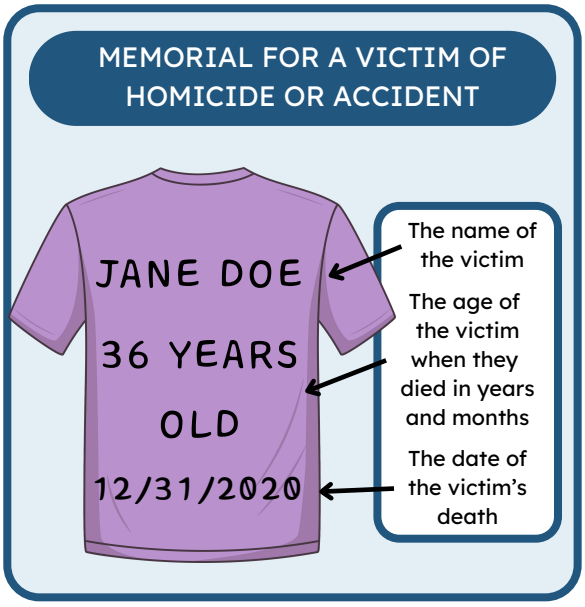
# CREATING VIDAS ROBADAS MEMORIALS

## Option 2: Creating Memorials

Gun violence is a broad and complicated issue that affects a variety of demographics in different ways. In pursuit of raising awareness for all aspects of gun violence, we create different types of t-shirt memorials to highlight the types of gun violence.

### Guidelines for Victims of Homicides and Accidents:

For homicide and accidental shooting victims, we use multicolored t-shirts to create memorials that include the victim's name, age, and date of death. Writing the names of victims on shirts connects participants to the humans behind the statistics, while the victims' age helps show the indiscriminate nature of gun violence.

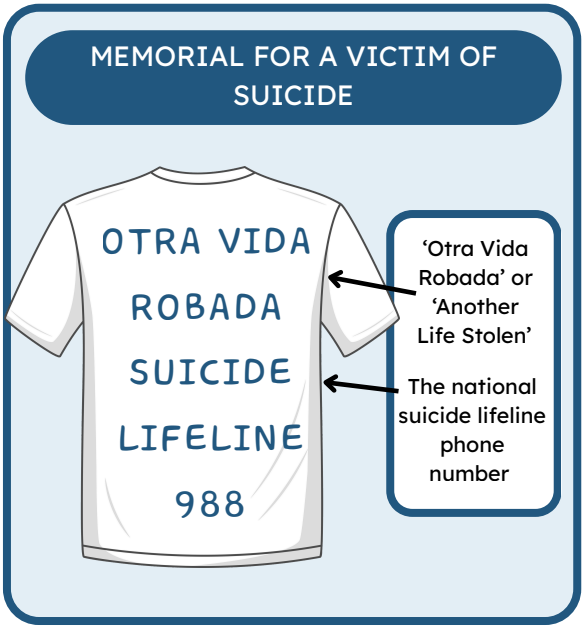



### Guidelines for Victims of Suicide:

For victims of suicide, we use white t-shirts with blue writing to create their memorials. **Due to the sensitivity of suicide, we do not write the names of victims of suicide on memorials unless it is specifically requested by their family**. Instead, we write "Another Life Stolen" or "Otra Vida Robada" in blue, as it is the color of suicide prevention.

Suicides, on average, make up over half of all gun-related deaths and are on the rise nationally. Despite this, firearm-related suicides receive much less attention than other forms of gun violence. To draw attention to that specific issue, we write "Suicide Lifeline 988" on every shirt below "Another Life Stolen."

The number 988 connects to the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline network, a national service that provides emergency counseling for someone considering suicide. By connecting individuals experiencing a mental health crisis to immediate, real human support the Suicide Lifeline helps save lives. Anyone can chat, call, or text 988 to reach a trained crisis counselor at any time.



# CREATING VIDAS ROBADAS MEMORIALS

***Factors to Consider***

*If your location is interested in creating memorials, here are some things to consider:*

**Long Term Plan**—once a memorial is made, it is incumbent upon the host to either continue to display the memorials (this can be continuous or recurring), or to find the next location to host the memorials.

**Purchasing Shirts**—we strive to have every installation consist of near equal parts multicolor shirts and white shirts, representing victims of homicides and victims of suicide respectively. The different memorials help bring awareness to the makeup of different aspects of gun violence. If a host wishes to highlight other types of gun violence, like domestic violence, they are encouraged to do so.

In our experience, it is easiest to order large quantities of shirts from manufacturers like the Adair Group where shirts usually cost around $2 each. Hosts are welcome to obtain shirts through a variety of other means, but it is important to make sure the shirts are presentable and honor the lives they are memorializing.

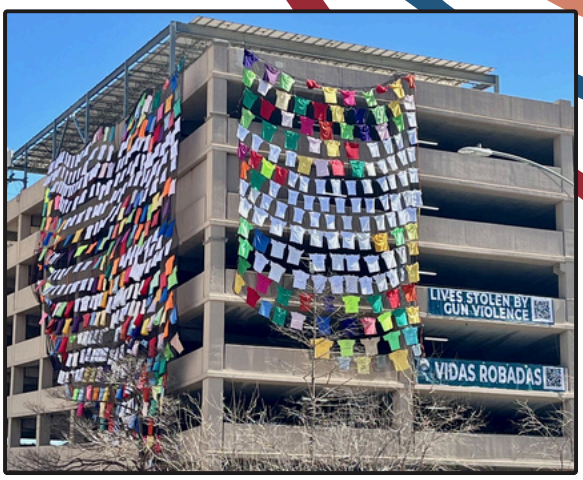
**Naming Victims**—creating memorials usually includes some combination of obtaining names of victims from local officials, working with survivor organizations, and at the request of families of victims. If your congregation is seeking to have a larger installation, consider making a public records request with your County Medical Examiner's Office. These offices often have the most recent data on gun deaths for the county, providing a means to show how local gun violence can be. Some counties do not have a Medical Examiner's Office, in which case it may be more challenging to obtain hyper-localized information. In this case, you can try using local newspapers, checking the national gun violence memorial site, or consider using a larger geographic area. Whichever method you choose, it is important to consider and include gun violence survivors and the families of victims in the process to ensure your Vidas Robadas installation does not cause undue harm or re-traumatize community members.

Honoring stolen lives and talking about safety is an important task; however, it must be done conscientiously. It is always best practice to do an installation in concert with local survivor groups or advocacy groups. These organizations might have specific individuals they want to honor or could provide additional resources.

# DISPLAYING VIDAS ROBADAS MEMORIALS

### How to Display Memorials

*The nature of Vidas Robadas t-shirt memorials makes displaying an installation quite flexible. Installations have been displayed in compact urban settings, outdoor areas, inside buildings, and even draped along parking garages. Any creative or new idea to display a Vidas Robadas installation is welcome, so long as the memorials are respected and treated with care.*




## Types of Displays

Installations are flexible, but are dependent on your space. Consider what your location's natural construction lends itself to. T-shirt memorials are about 3 ft by 4 ft and are typically displayed either along clotheslines or placed over T-frames. However, if neither of those options seems best for your location, hosts are encouraged to adapt installations to their environment.

### *Clothesline Display*



Clotheslines are the easiest method for displaying shirt memorials. Any outdoor-safe rope and standard clothespins are enough to hold memorials. However, make sure to consider the length of the clothesline you are using. If the line is drawn too long, the weight of the shirts will cause the display to drag on the ground. *Pro-tip: fold the arms of the t-shirt in when hanging them along a clothesline in order to maximize the amount of memorials you can hang.*

### *T-frame Display*

T-frames are a more stable and outdoor-friendly way to display memorials, but are more labor-intensive and expensive to make. Like the memorials themselves, t-frames can either be inherited from another host or created. **T-frames usually consist of one 5ft rebar pole, two 2ft PVC pipes, one 4ft PVC pipe, and one T PVC connector**. The PVC connectors fit together to make a "T" shape that is placed over the rebar pole, which should be been driven into the ground between 6 and 12 inches. Memorials are then placed over the frames. *Pro-tip: t-shirt memorials sit better on frames if the arms are pinned to the ends of the PVC.*



# DISPLAYING VIDAS ROBADAS MEMORIALS

## How many memorials are in an installation?

The number of memorials displayed is entirely up to the host. Part of the intention behind Vidas Robadas is to provide a versatile installation that can be displayed in a variety of settings. Installations have been as large as 2,000 shirt memorials and as small as 10. Any number can work so long as they are composed in a way that best uses a given space.





## How long are displays up?

The length of time an installation is displayed is also flexible and depends on the intention behind the installation. For congregations and other organizations that own property, it is typical to display an installation for a month or so. However, for longer periods outside, be mindful that the memorials can fade. Installations can also be displayed for single-day events or other short periods. In such situations as those, other means of displaying the memorials, like foldable frames, might be another good option.

## Signage

In addition to the installation of t-shirt memorials, it is important to include signage. Signs are critical to informing the general public what the memorials represent and what issue they are raising awareness of. Signage should be short, concise, and immediately inform passersby what issue they are addressing. For examples and templates, email vidas-robadas-team@texasimpact.org.




If you have questions, email us at **vidas-robadas-team@texasimpact.org**

# SECTION TWO: CONNECT

## *Events and Outreach*

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# HOSTING AN EVENT

***Raising Awareness***

*Vidas Robadas is meant to raise awareness and spark further action in a community — this requires community participation and visibility. When you are hosting a Vidas Robadas installation, in your planning, make sure to think through the following:*

***How do we raise awareness of our installation in the larger community?***
***How do we make sure the Vidas Robadas installation clearly communicates what it is and what issue it is addressing?***
***How do we lay the foundation for continued work in violence prevention?***

A Vidas Robadas installation garners awareness through the display of the shirts and signage accompanying it, which helps address engagement with the larger community. However, not every group has access to a visible location, and even then spots with great visibility only reach so many people. That is why it is important to plan an event along with your Vidas Robadas display.

Hosting an event provides an opportunity to invite members from the community, elected officials, other organizations, and even the press. Whether it is a short announcement or a full day affair, events can be critical in connecting with the larger violence prevention movement in your community and raising awareness about gun violence outside of your immediate circles.

**Here are several examples of events you could host along with a display:**

## Worship Service

For houses of worship or organizations with connections to houses of worship, consider having a worship service dedicated to the memorials. This provides a natural time to explain to congregations and invited guests what the installation is, why it is important, and why the faith community cares about violence prevention. It also provides an opportunity for congregants and guests to participate in putting up the shirts, creating a powerful experience, while also making the work of putting up the display quick and easy.



## Vigil

Often, Vidas Robadas installations are displayed after someone's life has been stolen by gun violence, or on the anniversary of one such tragic event. If your group wishes to dedicate the display to certain individuals or a certain tragedy, hosting a vigil alongside the displays is a powerful way to honor those lives. Whenever doing a vigil or any other Vidas Robadas event, always seek to have survivors and the families of victims included in the planning.

# HOSTING AN EVENT

## Potluck

Similar to a worship service, an afternoon or evening potluck provides an easy opportunity to call people together to explain the project, explain the need for awareness and intervention, and provide a space for people to talk, connect, and support each other in light of the intensity of the issue.








## Educational Event

If you are in a group or area that is unfamiliar with the realities of gun violence or are in an area with more mixed perspectives on gun violence, consider inviting a guest speaker or a panel of experts to have a conversation about the issue. An educational event, whether a panel or individual speaker, provides an opportunity for communities to learn about gun violence, engage in conversation about it, and connect them to varied and expert perspectives. Panelists can range from advocates, survivors of gun violence, academic experts, elected officials, mental health professionals, and more. There is no perfect combination, but when planning a panel, try to seek a diverse panel of speakers from varying backgrounds and disciplines. It is always best practice to have a voice that can speak to how gun violence impacts survivors and historically disinvested communities.

## Joining Other Events

Sometimes the easiest answer is to join the efforts of others. If there are community safety events, conferences related to gun violence, or any other public event that seems relevant to violence prevention, consider reaching out to ask to bring a Vidas Robadas installation to the event.



# COMMUNITY OUTREACH

## *Finding Partners*

*Regardless of what kind of event, a host should always make sure they include the following in their planning:*

- **Invite local community members**
  This can be accomplished by creating a sign-up with information for the event and distributing it around the area and online.



- **Invite other advocacy and survivor organizations**
  Advocacy is hard work, and it is best done in community. Many local and national organizations are already working on reducing and preventing gun violence.

  National gun violence prevention groups such as Moms Demand Action, Giffords Gun Owners for Safety, and Brady United have local chapters across the country and are great potential partners. Often, they can provide additional resources and are already engaged in local violence prevention initiatives, providing natural next steps for advocacy efforts.

  Community violence intervention (CVI) programs are also natural and great partners. CVI programs are local organizations that often work with cities to identify potential perpetrators and victims of violence and intervene before violence occurs. CVI programs hire and are led by survivors and former perpetrators of violence who come from the communities experiencing the highest levels of violence, giving them a unique expertise in addressing violence at the local level.



# COMMUNITY OUTREACH

- **Invite elected officials**
  Your local, state, and federal representatives are all relevant contacts to invite to your event. **Do not neglect your locally elected officials**—often it is city council members, school board members, or state representatives who will be the most responsive and have the ability to impact gun violence prevention measures at the local level. Elected officials are expected to be involved with and know what their constituents care about, so don't be intimidated when reaching out. All offices should have their contact information online on their public websites.



- **Invite the press**
  For every Vidas Robadas installation and event, it is best to send out a press release to local news outlets that explains what a Vidas Robadas installation is, who is participating/hosting it, where the installation is, how long it will be displayed, and any other relevant information. This information can lead to the press reaching out to the host for questions about the project, so be prepared and decide who will be the press contact and spokesperson. News outlets often have email addresses to contact on their public websites. If you would like a press release template to make the process easier, reach out to Texas Impact.






**Remember, the creation of memorials, the setup of a display, and all following actions can be done in partnership with other organizations.** Vidas Robadas is meant to connect people together to establish networks with the capacity to create long-lasting change. By partnering with other organizations or groups, this distributes the work needed for the project, opens up wider circles for outreach, prevents duplicative advocacy efforts, and provides natural avenues for continued gun violence prevention work.

# SECTION THREE: MOBILIZE

## *Advocacy and Community Initiatives*

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# ADVOCACY EFFORTS

**Next Steps**

*Vidas Robadas is meant to mobilize people to initiate further action in their communities. That means the work is not done after putting up a display and hosting an event. Through raising awareness and creating relationships, paths towards concrete action should present themselves. Vidas Robadas hosts should be thinking about what advocacy efforts or community initiatives they can be a part of after hosting a Vidas Robadas event. This can be done through partnerships with other organizations or by following examples from other areas.*
***Consider the following:***

## Join Other Organizations

As mentioned in the previous section, there are national and local violence prevention groups that have local chapters across the country. Through your partnerships fostered by Vidas Robadas, or by joining their local chapters, see what local initiatives they are engaged in and consider supporting them. Initiatives can include anything from local safety campaigns or advocating for policy at the local, state, or federal level. Here is a list of national gun violence prevention organizations, student groups, and some CVI organizations to check out. These groups might have resources, chapters, or examples of what work is possible in your area.







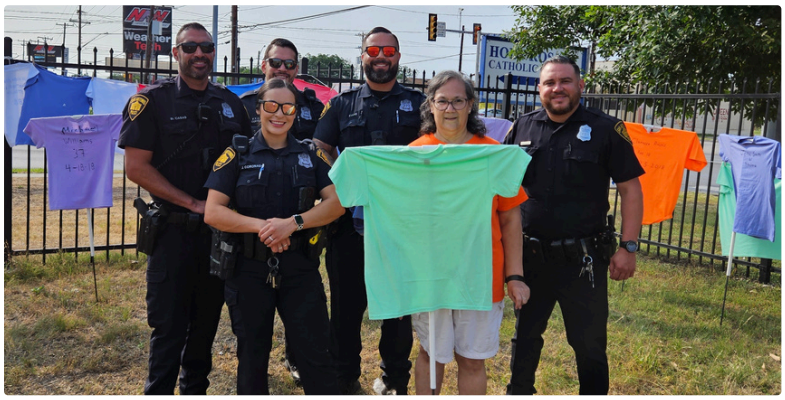
**Local Chapters and Groups**

- Moms Demand Action
- Students Demand Action
- Big Mama's Safe House
- Clergy for Safe Cities
- Community Justice Action Fund
- Cities United
- ATX Peace

# ADVOCACY EFFORTS

## Support City Initiatives

After inviting and making connections with locally elected officials, investigate what violence prevention initiatives your community is or could be engaged in. Here is a list of potential city initiatives that hosts could start or support in their communities.



CHECK OUT THESE LINKS

### City Initiatives

- Austin Office of Violence Prevention
- One Safe Houston
- Philadelphia Civic Coalition to Save Lives
- Indy Peace Fellowship

## Advocate for Gun Violence Prevention (GVP) Legislation

Gun violence is a complicated issue, and, as such, needs to be addressed not just through community initiatives but also through legislation. Lawmakers are elected to represent their communities, so it is their responsibility to listen and respond to the concerns of their constituents. However, engaging legislation can be a daunting task. That is why it is a great idea to partner with other organizations that have experience with public policy. Many of the national organizations that work on community mobilization also engage in advocacy efforts. Other organizations specialize in legislation and advocacy. Take a look at these policy organizations to get an idea of who might be in your area and what the work might look like.

### GVP Public Policy Groups

- Texas Gun Sense
- Everytown for Gun Safety
- Giffords
- Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence
- Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence



# CONCLUSION

## *Putting Vidas Robadas into Action*

*Now, towards the end of this guide, it might seem like a herculean task to accomplish all of the actions that accompany a Vidas Robadas installation, so here are some helpful reminders.*

**This guide is meant to be a resource, not an exact blueprint.** Advocacy is complicated and multi-faceted. There is no one way to engage in it, nor is there one way to host a Vidas Robadas display. This guide seeks to provide information on how to do a Vidas Robadas installation, best practices, and how to maximize the impact of the installation while being conscientious. If your group has ideas on how to do an installation or any other accompanying action that was not mentioned in this guide, please pursue it so long as it is mindful of the sacredness of the memorials and the sensitivity of the topic.

**Many of the steps happen naturally and in concert with one another.** Raising awareness, creating relationships, and planning next steps often all coincide with one another. We segment them for organizational purposes and to emphasize the importance of each component, but they are truly all a part of the same project and goal—bringing people together to make our communities safer.

**Change takes time.** Vidas Robadas is meant to jump-start gun violence prevention efforts, but significant change takes time and the efforts of many. There are things we can do right now to make our communities safer, but gun violence itself is going to take years and efforts at all levels of government to address. It is critical to remember that your work is important and makes a difference, even if some of its effects can't immediately be seen.

**Change is hard and incremental, and that is why everyone must do what they can to reduce violence in our communities. Thousands of lives have been stolen by gun violence; people have lost brothers, sisters, children, and neighbors, and we owe it to them and to our own loved ones to seek positive change that brings communities together. Vidas Robadas, on its own, will not solve our gun violence epidemic, but it can be a part of the solution. And so can you by choosing to host a Vidas Robadas installation and honor lives stolen by gun violence.**

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