

Art revealing the U.S. gunfire epidemic.



Counting. Caring. Connecting.

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*For the latest media releases and coverage, see [SoulBoxProject.org/press-kit](https://SoulBoxProject.org/press-kit)*

## **The Project**

The Soul Box Project is a national community art project raising awareness about the scale of the U.S. gunfire epidemic. Participants make and display 3-x 3-inch origami boxes representing persons killed or injured by gunfire. From 2017-2021, individuals from 39 states contributed to the Project's successful campaign to collect and exhibit 200,000 Soul Boxes on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., October 16-17, 2021.

The Project continues its mission by facilitating exhibits--large and small--of the collected Soul Boxes. Communities may borrow a selection of the panels exhibited in D.C. or create their own smaller displays to illustrate statewide or local numbers of victims of gun violence, defense, accidents and suicides. These exhibits are designed to reach visitors on an emotional level, compelling and empowering them to choose personal actions regarding responsible gun use that reflect their values, priorities and beliefs.

Since the attainment of the 200,000-Soul Box goal, The Project accepts new Soul Boxes in limited numbers. A Box made by a friend or family member memorializing a loved one lost or injured may be mailed to Portland to become part of the collection. The act of folding a Soul Box, alone or with others, is found by many people to provide solace and promote dialog, empathy, and healing.

The Soul Box Project was created by Leslie Lee, a Portland, Oregon, studio artist who wanted to take action after hearing about the Las Vegas music festival shooting in 2017.

*"What we are trying to do is have someone walk into these displays and have an 'ah-ha' moment. It might mean a person goes home and locks up a gun. Or a mother talks to her kids about the futility of anger and retribution. Or a gun club adds another safety class. Or a voter writes to his legislators. Every one of those actions is a success. **We need to appeal to each other on an emotional level if we want the current gun culture to change.**"*

*Leslie Lee, Founder*

## **The Numbers**

Several organizations track the number of gun deaths, injuries and incidents. For clarity, we use [GunViolenceArchive.org](https://GunViolenceArchive.org). More detailed information can be found there.

- **Over 80,000 people** were killed or injured by gunfire in the U.S. in 2021. This includes acts of defense, accidents, suicides and violence. These numbers represent approximately a 14% increase throughout the COVID pandemic--10,000 additional people killed or injured in the U.S. **annually**.
- **Over 100 people** are killed **each day** in the U.S.

On October 16-17, 2021, The Soul Box Project exhibited 200,000 Soul Boxes on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. At that time, this represented the number of people killed or injured by gunfire in the U.S. in just three years.

## The Process

- **Anyone can make a Soul Box.** Printed instructions and a video are available at SoulBoxProject.org
- **Folding** a Soul Box can be a **healing, meditative act.**
- Coming together as a **group** to fold Boxes provides a chance to **share experiences** and **remember victims.**
  - Faith groups, families, craft groups, friends and neighbors have all spent time folding together.
- Organizations may continue the project by making and exhibiting these locally-made Soul Boxes in their own communities.
- Soul Boxes (on easily hung, modular panels) are available to communities to borrow and exhibit anywhere in the U.S.

## The Mission

OUR MISSION: The Soul Box Project raises awareness of the U.S. gunfire epidemic by counting and honoring victims, offering healing participation to those seeking solace, and providing dramatic visual support for all initiatives working for a safer, more civil society.

OUR VISION: The Soul Box Project envisions a society where all people living in the U.S. are empowered to choose actions regarding responsible gun use that reflect their values, priorities and beliefs so that we can live in safe communities, talk to resolve conflicts, have schools focus on learning, gather to worship in peace, and thrive in economies that foster trust and unity.

## FAQs

**Is it significant that the Project represents people killed and injured by gunfire in the U.S.?**

**YES.** While many organizations address deaths by gun violence, Soul Boxes represent victims of gunfire – violence, as well as suicide, defense and accidents. Those victims include people killed *or* injured by gunfire.

**Are Soul Boxes only made by people who want to get rid of guns?**

**NO. The Soul Box Project attempts to bridge the so-called gun divide.** Soul Boxes can be made for any person killed or injured by gunfire and can be healing for anyone experiencing this loss through violence, defense, accident or suicide.

**Can a bunch of paper boxes really change things?**

**YES.** The Soul Box Project **follows the tradition of past community art and counting projects:**

- The **AIDS Memorial Quilt** began in 1985 and eventually filled the National Mall in Washington, DC with 37,440 individual panels in 1992, helping to change the trajectory of a deadly epidemic.
- **Monument for our Kids** (March 2018) displayed 7,000 pairs of empty shoes in front of the capitol building in Washington, DC, representing the [estimated 7,000 children](#) who have died from gun violence since the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012.
- The **Vietnam Veterans Memorial** in Washington, D.C. lists 58,318 people killed or missing in action during the Vietnam War.
- There have been many projects counting Holocaust victims, including the **Children's Holocaust Memorial**, where schoolchildren in Tennessee collected millions of paper clips, one for every person who died in the Holocaust.