

Chapter I. Weed and Seed

Overview

Violent crime in many American communities remains unacceptably high despite the significant accomplishments in crime reduction that have been made through several new initiatives of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). Weed and Seed is an outstanding example of one of these innovative approaches to crime reduction.

In 1991, DOJ established Operation Weed and Seed as a community-based, multiagency approach to addressing violent crime, gang activity, drug use, and drug trafficking in communities that were hardest hit by violence and eroding social and economic stability. Weed and Seed is designed to reduce the impact of violent crime on communities; provide prevention, intervention, and treatment services for substance abuse and other social problems; and revitalize communities through improved housing and economic development.

Weed and Seed is a comprehensive strategy—not simply a program—to assist communities in bringing people and resources together to prevent and control crime and improve the overall quality of life. The Weed and Seed strategy stresses collaboration, coordination, and community participation. This approach gives communities experiencing high crime and social and economic decay a comprehensive structure, critical planning tools, and access to a national network focused on crime prevention, citizen safety, and neighborhood revitalization. The initiative allows communities using the Weed and Seed strategy to develop and undertake efforts tailored uniquely to the issues, needs, and concerns of each neighborhood.

Operation Weed and Seed began in three pilot sites in 1991; since that time, it has spread quickly to designated high-crime areas throughout the nation. By early 2005, more than 300 communities had become Weed and Seed sites.

Weed and Seed is managed and administered at the national level through the Community Capacity Development Office (CCDO), a program office within DOJ's Office of Justice Programs. CCDO provides various services, technical assistance, training programs, and resources to support local Weed and Seed strategies. CCDO developed this manual to assist new and existing Weed and Seed sites with creating and implementing Weed and Seed strategies. Contact CCDO directly at 202-616-1152 for additional information on any of the issues discussed in this manual.

Vision

The Weed and Seed strategy is based on a two-pronged approach:

1. Law enforcement agencies and criminal justice officials cooperate with local residents to *“weed out”* criminal activity in the designated area.
2. Social service providers and economic revitalization efforts are introduced to *“seed”* the area, ensuring long-term positive change and a higher quality of life for residents.

The Weed and Seed strategy recognizes the importance of coordinating federal, state, local, and tribal offices; law enforcement agencies; and criminal justice initiatives with social service providers and private-sector and community efforts to maximize the impact of existing

programs and resources and identify and fill in gaps in services.

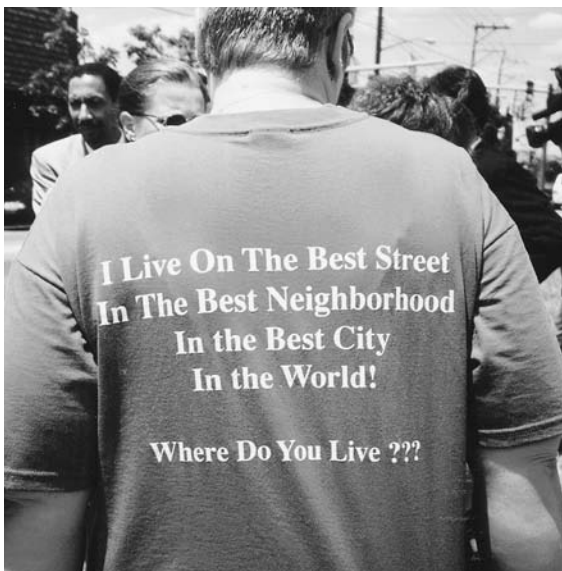
It also recognizes the importance of community participation. Community residents must be centrally involved and empowered to assist in solving problems in their neighborhoods. In addition, the private sector is a pivotal partner in the Weed and Seed strategy.

Goals and Objectives

The purpose of Weed and Seed is to reduce violent and drug-related crime in designated high-crime communities throughout the nation. A comprehensive approach is used to reduce and prevent crime and improve residents' overall quality of life. As a result, law-abiding citizens are able to live, work, and raise their families in a safer and more prosperous environment.

The primary objectives at each Weed and Seed site are to—

- Develop a comprehensive community-based strategy to control and prevent violent crime, gang activity, drug trafficking, and drug-related crime.
- Coordinate existing and new government and private-sector initiatives, criminal justice



efforts, and human services and concentrate those resources in designated neighborhoods to maximize their impact.

- Mobilize community residents to assist law enforcement in identifying and removing violent offenders and drug traffickers from their neighborhoods, assist human service agencies in identifying and responding to social service needs, and participate more fully in community planning and decisionmaking processes.

Four Components

The Weed and Seed strategy is a multilevel strategic plan that includes four basic components.

Law Enforcement

The law enforcement component is designed to weed out crime and violence, particularly violent crime, gang activity, drug trafficking, and drug-related crime. Efforts are directed mainly at identifying, apprehending, and prosecuting the most serious and visible criminals in the designated area. Reducing both crime and citizen fear returns hope to residents living in distressed neighborhoods and sets the stage for community revitalization.

In most Weed and Seed sites, crime suppression activities are undertaken by joint task forces that represent a collaboration of law enforcement agencies from all levels of government, including tribal governments, and benefit from the various resources each agency brings to the effort. Suppression activities include repeat-offender programs, gun abatement, targeted patrols, intensified drug investigations, and targeted prosecutions. Other law enforcement tactics involve various aspects of the criminal justice system, such as community courts, victim-witness protection and services, and offender reentry programs.

Community Policing

Community policing supports intensive law enforcement operations and serves as a bridge to the seeding components of Weed and Seed. Community policing embraces two key concepts: community engagement and problem solving. Under this model of policing, officers establish an ongoing dialog with community residents to solve crime problems through a systematic process that addresses the underlying causes of crime. Community policing strategies foster a sense of responsibility within the community for solving crime problems, focus on increasing police visibility, and develop cooperative relationships between police officers and residents. Examples of community policing activities include foot and bicycle patrols, police mini-stations, victim referrals to support services, nuisance abatement programs, and police athletic leagues.

Community mobilization is also important in community policing activities. Programs that encourage community participation and help prevent crime include neighborhood watches, citizen marches and rallies, prayer services, drug-free zones, and graffiti removal. Chapter 7 provides more detail on community mobilization.

Prevention, Intervention, and Treatment

The prevention, intervention, and treatment component of the Weed and Seed strategy focuses on neighborhood efforts to enhance protective factors while reducing risks, thus promoting wholesome behavior that can lead to good health, well-being, and personal success.

- Risk factors such as economic deprivation, family management problems, and early academic failure increase the likelihood that a child will develop health and behavior problems in adolescence.

- Protective factors such as positive individual characteristics, bonding, healthy beliefs, and clear standards set by parents and society reduce the impact of risk factors on children.

The prevention, intervention, and treatment component concentrates an array of human services on the designated community to create an environment in which crime and violence cannot thrive. Links among law enforcement and social service agencies, the private sector, and the community must be strengthened to improve the overall quality of services to residents.

Safe Havens are important elements of the prevention, intervention, and treatment component. They provide a mechanism for organizing and delivering an array of youth- and adult-oriented services in a multiservice setting such as a school or community center. All Weed and Seed sites are encouraged to have at least one Safe Haven. Activities conducted in Safe Haven programs include community-based services such as childcare, after-school programs, tutoring, recreation, parenting courses, drug prevention programs, substance abuse treatment, mental health services, family counseling, and medical care.

Neighborhood Restoration

The fourth component of Weed and Seed focuses on improving and revitalizing the economic and social conditions of the designated communities through neighborhood restoration strategies. Expanding the economic vitality of a community helps to keep crime and disorder from thriving. As with the other Weed and Seed components, neighborhood restoration can be achieved only by coordinating federal, state, local, tribal, and private-sector resources. Strategies focus on economic development, employment opportunities for residents, and improvements to the housing stock and physical environment of the neighborhood.

Fundamental Principles

Four fundamental principles set Weed and Seed apart from traditional approaches and are key to the success of the strategy at the community level.

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● **Collaboration.** Government departments at the federal, state, local, and tribal levels; social service agencies; community organizations; the private sector; and residents play important roles in community safety. Each has a responsibility to the community and a stake in its future. Weed and Seed requires communities to establish a collaborative process to capitalize on the full potential that the systematic interaction of stakeholders can provide. Collaboration leads to permanent channels of communication among stakeholders, partnerships among organizations with similar goals, and a strategic approach to effective crime prevention and restoration. Furthermore, such efforts encourage innovation, help build broad support for the Weed and Seed strategy, and bring about significant pressure that may lead to the acquisition of additional resources.



● **Coordination.** The number of government agencies and community organizations that provide services to citizens is breathtaking. Stakeholders are probably not aware of the many service providers in the area, the goals and objectives of each organization, and whether there are overlapping and duplicative services. Weed and Seed helps bring together the officials who represent these organizations and assists in coordinating their activities. This enables the Weed and Seed Steering Committee¹ to concentrate resources in designated neighborhoods, better match services with community needs, eliminate overlap and duplication, and get the maximum benefit from existing services and programs. Both vertical coordination (across disciplines such as law enforcement, social services, and economic development) and horizontal coordination (across levels of government) are critical to the Weed and Seed strategy.

● **Community mobilization.** Communities empowered to solve their own problems function more effectively than communities that depend on services provided by outsiders. This is true for property owners who take better care of homes than renters and for workers who own part of the company and are more committed than those who simply collect a paycheck. Therefore, it follows that initiatives that empower communities to help themselves, involve residents in decisionmaking processes, and encourage broad citizen involvement will be more effective than those that simply provide services to clients.

● **Leveraging resources.** CCDO disseminates funding to local sites in support of their Weed and Seed strategies. These funds are

¹ When working with Indian tribes, the Weed and Seed Steering Committee will have numerous members and may increase to beyond 25 to 30 members. Tribal representatives from the tribe's governing body, law enforcement, court, social services, and other tribal entities will be involved.

limited, however, and they support Weed and Seed activities nationwide. This level of funding cannot provide the entire amount of resources required to transform and revitalize a neighborhood that is experiencing high crime and social and economic decay. Therefore, the Weed and Seed strategy is an opportunity for communities to leverage available resources (e.g., funding and organizational structures) that will enable them to tap into additional funding streams and receive in-kind resources from federal, state, local, and tribal agencies; foundations; corporations; and other organizations. Weed and Seed sites are well placed to capitalize on numerous funding sources in both the public and private sectors. In fact, they are expected to leverage all available resources to fully fund their strategies for law enforcement, crime prevention, and neighborhood revitalization.

Developing the Strategy

The process for developing a Weed and Seed strategy requires a significant commitment from the community to engage in strategic planning, collaborate with key stakeholders, and coordinate programs and services. Strategic planning involves a specific process that will help the community identify a future vision, manage change, and create the best possible future for residents. The end result of the process is a multiyear detailed plan for community action and change.

The basic characteristics of the strategic planning process are—

- A focused process that concentrates on selected issues.
- Explicit consideration of resource availability.
- Assessment of community problems and needs.

- An action orientation, with a strong emphasis on practical results.
- An emphasis on innovative approaches to problem solving.

Users of this manual should remember that working through the planning steps is not a neat, consecutive process. Work on more than one step typically occurs simultaneously. For example, selection of the Steering Committee may proceed while a community survey is administered in the designated Weed and Seed area. The information in this manual should be viewed in terms of each community's context, character, and environment.

There are five basic planning stages involved in developing the Weed and Seed strategy. Although the strategic plans vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, the planning stages are common across all Weed and Seed sites:

Stage 1: Organize and convene a Weed and Seed Steering Committee.

Stage 2: Select or confirm the designated area.

Stage 3: Conduct a community needs assessment of the area.

Stage 4: Select priorities for addressing community problems and unmet needs.

Stage 5: Identify goals, objectives, and major tasks.

Stage 6: Develop an implementation plan.