

LISC's Community Safety Initiative

The Community Safety Initiative (CSI) builds formal long-term partnerships between police and community development corporations (CDCs) in troubled neighborhoods to address issues of persistent crime, disorder and fear. By linking innovative policing with strategic economic development, these unconventional allies attract the kind of social and financial investments that make communities safer and more vibrant. Since its inception nearly a decade ago, CSI has made great strides in reducing crime and strengthening neighborhoods in more than a dozen communities in nine cities.

CSI is one of a handful of national programs of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), the nation's leading nonprofit community development organization. Established in 1980, LISC has invested both public and private funds into nearly 2,200 nonprofit groups, resulting in 110,000 homes, 14 million square feet of commercial and community space, and 40,000 jobs. LISC established CSI in 1994 to help neighborhood groups develop alliances with police departments to combat persistent crime and disorder problems.

Since the mid 1990s, CSI has enjoyed a consistent and critical relationship with the Department of Justice through the Executive Office of Weed and Seed (EOWS) and now through the Community Capacity Development Office (CCDO).

Premise

In troubled neighborhoods, improving public safety must be a key part of any plan for revitalization. Crime is important to consider not only because of the real danger it can pose to neighborhood residents, but also because the fear it generates deters investment by businesses and property owners. Even perceptions that a neighborhood is unsafe can drive down property values, reduce customer traffic on a commercial strip, and otherwise reduce quality of life. As a result, addressing public safety and community development goals simultaneously is crucial for sustainable revitalization.

Police departments and community development corporations (CDCs) are both positioned to address safety and quality of life concerns. Yet alliances between CDCs and law enforcement have, historically, been rare. Many factors hinder collaborative safety efforts, including mistrust and differing institutional cultures. The challenge for LISC and its neighborhood partners has been to overcome these barriers and forge cross-industry partnerships that achieve tangible results. As public funding for law enforcement decreases, such resource-sharing collaborations are more important than ever.

Approach

CSI responds to these challenges by building strategic partnerships between police departments, CDCs, and other key stakeholders in troubled neighborhoods. By coordinating their efforts and resources, police can focus enforcement efforts in "anchor" areas where development investments will have significant impact, while CDCs simultaneously engage in new development in hot spots that deters, or even eliminates, criminal activity. CDCs also bring their community organizing expertise to the table, while police can often leverage connections to other public agencies that share responsibility for quality of life issues. These core strategies are based on the understanding that integrating economic development and law enforcement makes

neighborhoods safer for youth and families, and enables institutions to achieve greater impact with existing resources.

As one of LISC's national programs, CSI is now active in more than 20 sites in nine cities across the country, including: Los Angeles, Richmond (CA), Kansas City (KS & MO), Boston, Bronx (NY), Cincinnati, Toledo, Canton (OH), Seattle, and multiple cities in Rhode Island. In these communities and others like them, CSI provides CDCs and police with a comprehensive package of financial and technical assistance, including:

- *Funding for dedicated Project Coordinators* who translate partners' ideas into tangible projects and serve as the primary liaison between police and community members;
- *Resources to support creative programming* that advances each site's unique anti-crime goals, such as forming a new youth center to offer positive after-school time activities, or implementing lighting and façade improvements in a central commercial district;
- *Technical assistance*, including site visits, off-site communication and access to expert consultants to provide guidance in directing and implementing projects;
- *Cross-site training*, such as a CSI listserv, conference calls, and a national conference designed to facilitate sharing of knowledge between sites about effective approaches to merging economic development and crime reduction.

CSI also offers workshops and produces case studies aimed to disseminate the lessons of its 10-year history to a broader audience of practitioners and policymakers. These resources are available to community and police partners in cities across the United States, including those not receiving intensive technical assistance.

As a program within a national intermediary, CSI is positioned to broker relationships across the community development and criminal justice industries. This role enables LISC to leverage new resources for the field and address pressing new safety challenges. For example, CSI is currently supporting demonstration projects to test roles for CDCs in responding to the challenge of offender reentry to low-income communities. With funding from the U.S. Department of Justice (CCDO), these projects promise to yield important lessons for police and CDCs seeking to engage reentry issues.

Results

CSI partnerships across the country have yielded greater-than-average drops in crime and remarkable transformations of hot spots into community assets. As one example, a CSI project in Seattle spearheaded the redevelopment of a dangerous transient camp, leading to a 40% drop in crime (as compared to 9% citywide) and the creation of more than 100 jobs for local residents. As a result of other CSI projects, thriving shopping plazas have taken the place of blighted, vacant commercial strips and attractive multi-family housing now stands in the place of notorious drug houses. CSI has also gained national recognition for its approach from the U.S. Department of Justice, Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, and other leaders in the community development and justice fields.

For a list of current sites and more information about where LISC operates, please visit www.lisc.org/csi.

To contact the CSI, please call or write:

Lisa Belsky

Senior Program Director

LISC's Community Safety Initiative

501 Seventh Avenue, 7th Floor

New York, NY 10018

Phone: (212) 455-9824

Fax: (212) 370-9427

E-mail: lbelsky@lisc.org