

Chapter 3. Selecting Sites for Weed and Seed Implementation

Overview

This chapter focuses on the process of selecting and designating a community as a Weed and Seed site. The designation of a community is a critical element in defining the future success of the initiative's implementation. Several components of the selection process should also be carefully considered early in the development phase of the site.

Some basic steps should be considered in the beginning phase of the community selection process. The focus of Weed and Seed is to assist neighborhoods or tribal communities that are experiencing criminal activity as well as economic and social challenges. The ability to clearly identify these economic, social, and criminal justice challenges will also contribute to the development of the overall strategies used to address these challenges. The information collected and analyzed during this phase will play an important role in the development of community-specific strategies for implementation.

Geography of the Site

Weed and Seed sites range from a few square blocks to several miles. There is no hard-and-fast rule about the geographic size of a site. A site's selection should be based instead on its local needs and resources and should be made by those who are familiar with the area and committed to positive change. Site selection should include representatives from multiple sources—not just local government and law enforcement, but also local residents.

Population of the Site

The population in Weed and Seed sites ranges from 3,000 to 50,000, with urban areas having larger numbers mostly where the population is denser. A population range from 10,000 to 20,000 may be most common; however, successful sites have had both small and large numbers of residents. Other variables that have a profound impact on the functioning of a Weed and Seed site also should be included in the site selection process.

In addition to the objective analysis of geography and population, numerous important data should be included in discussions about designating an area for Weed and Seed. By collecting and analyzing these data, the Steering Committee will be able to make the best decision about the site designation. The following list explains some of the data that will be useful in this phase of development.

Crime Data

The local police department can provide the Steering Committee with dependable crime statistics and other information on the types and frequency of crimes committed in the area. These data will also permit analysis and comparison with prior years and with other parts of the local jurisdiction. Comparison data for the surrounding city, county, or other designated area will be required. Crime data are a vital component in determining the needs of the community relative to Weed and Seed. The data accessed should focus on the removal of chronic and violent street criminals from the designated

high-crime area. The data should consist primarily of crime suppression activities designed to identify, apprehend, and incapacitate violent street crime.

School Data

Schools can provide information on the number of school-age children in the designated area. The schools can also provide vital information about dropout rates, truancy, violence, and the number of students eligible for subsidized meals. Creating a positive relationship with the schools can provide collateral benefits to the Weed and Seed strategy such as developing programs for youth and perhaps even establishing a Safe Haven in a school building.

Social Service Data

Information on welfare, public housing, and other forms of public assistance should be used to select the designated community. The Census Bureau documents most of this information, as do various agencies within the city, county, tribal or other locality. If the area to be considered extends into the county's or another area's jurisdiction, that jurisdiction may have additional data. Connecting with county or other jurisdictional officials may also help bring resources to the Weed and Seed effort.

Census Tract Data

All cities are divided into census tracts. Although most people do not know what tracts make up their community, this information is easy to find. The data collected by census tracts are useful because they contain important information about the area's demographics (facts and statistics by category) related to Weed and Seed. The census tracts, however, will not necessarily conform to community-defined boundaries. In fact, it is not uncommon for the tracts to be larger than the potential site. If the site is dramatically different from the census tract boundaries, it will be necessary to extrapolate the data for the Weed and Seed site.

Resident Input Data

Data gathered from residents, local businesses, and other community leaders will help to complete the information-gathering phase about the points of concern in the designated area. The people who live and work in the community will have firsthand knowledge of problems that are not always reflected in the objective data available from external sources. This information can add an entirely different and vital perspective.

Master Plan

Although the ultimate goal with Weed and Seed is to develop a local strategy that can be effectively implemented, this strategy will not be the first planning tool developed for the community. The Steering Committee should obtain a copy of the jurisdiction's master plan to find out what the jurisdiction's officials have drafted. Although there may be a small charge for a copy, this plan is important because it identifies the activities to be accomplished over a period of time. To the extent that the plan includes detailed activities for the potential site area, it is important to know what these plans are and how residents and other stakeholders will be affected.

Knowing the plans for specific areas can assist the Steering Committee in setting the sights for those communities that are slated to receive resources. These plans are helpful in understanding how the jurisdiction proposes to address a particular section's problems and justifies why one area is selected over another. This can help the Weed and Seed effort to leverage Community Development Block Grants (CDBGs) and other federal and nonfederal funding. In addition, it is recommended that activities be coordinated with the local planning office in developing the Weed and Seed strategy.

Selection of a Weed and Seed site entails the collection and analysis of information that highlights community conditions—not only the



stress and problems of a community, but also the level of readiness among its leaders and the willingness of stakeholders to commit the necessary resources to make a positive and long-lasting change in the neighborhood. It is as important to select a community that has signs of potential as it is to identify one that has challenges.

Indicators of Community Potential

Although numerous signs can indicate that a community is experiencing undue stress, they can also reveal its potential. Sometimes, the signs are not immediately visible. It may be necessary to identify and investigate them and to review the available data to help determine the area's potential. Some examples of "community potential" include the following.

Economic Potential

The designated area must have a distinct potential for economic revitalization. If commercial opportunities (shops, stores, or businesses) do not exist in the community, economic resources will be drained from it. Economic and community development on many Indian reservations, tribal communities, and Alaska Native villages may focus on development of enabling laws for

business transaction. In partnering with Indian tribes, basic questions may alert the Weed and Seed committee to excellent opportunities to build a life-long partnership between neighboring jurisdictions and develop other opportunities to raise the quality of life in the area.

Community Organizations

Community-based organizations and faith-based groups are a vital part of the lifeblood of the seeding initiatives in a community. Effective Weed and Seed strategies require the involvement of and collaboration with community organizations. Even the best conceived programs cannot function effectively without resident and community organization involvement.

Resident Capacity

Residents are the lifelines of communities. Traditional economic development efforts often limit the role and significance of residents; however, successful Weed and Seed strategies require resident involvement. Communities in which residents have already begun to organize themselves through neighborhood associations, resident councils, or other organized bodies are indicating a basic understanding of the residents' role as stakeholders in the revitalization of their community. Many residents have experience or expertise in one of the four components of Weed and Seed (law enforcement; community policing; prevention, intervention, and treatment; and neighborhood restoration) that will be a valuable resource.

Selection of the designated area is one of the early steps in determining whether residents are interested in and supportive of Weed and Seed. The ability to mobilize residents to participate at different levels of the Weed and Seed process can set the direction of the initiative and help determine the success of a local strategy.

Through an investigative process, additional resources will be discovered that can be leveraged and stakeholders will be found who have a particular expertise that was not widely known. The possibilities are unlimited, but they often must be “discovered” even for people who are familiar with the area selected for Weed and Seed.

Community Selection Committee

A subcommittee of the Steering Committee may be assembled for the task of selecting the designated area. The key to success in this step is to include people who have useful knowledge as well as those who will be affected by the selection. This group should include residents,



² Gathering data from Indian tribes requires a formal letter of request to the tribal president or chief that outlines the request for data, how the data will be used, and how the data will benefit or disadvantage the tribe, and asks for a designated contact to follow up the request for information. Assistance to interpret tribal data is available through CCDO’s Indian country technical assistance experts.

businesses, law enforcement representatives, tribal or community organizations, and the U.S. Attorney’s Office. Other members can be added if they are deemed important to the process.

The data needed by this selection committee can be found in a variety of places. Usually the committee will need only to access it from agencies that have already done the work of identifying and collecting it. The police department, the city or other jurisdiction planning department, the tribal council, the public schools, the local United Way chapter, the chamber of commerce, the public library, and the public housing authority are all good resources for this information.² A local college or university can also be a useful repository of information and may be able to offer assistance in reviewing and analyzing the material.

Multiple advantages are gained from the site selection process. This process will not only ensure that the Steering Committee has the information it needs to develop the strategy, it will also provide some important contacts for collaboration and coordination in the community. The goal is to identify a site that has the greatest chance of success and one that has a clearly identified need for Weed and Seed.