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Addressing Community Gang Problems: A Model for Problem Solving

Monograph

U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
810 Seventh Street NW.
Washington, DC 20531

Janet Reno
Attorney General

Raymond C. Fisher
Associate Attorney General

Laurie Robinson
Assistant Attorney General

Noël Brennan
Deputy Assistant Attorney General

Nancy E. Gist
Director, Bureau of Justice Assistance

Office of Justice Programs
World Wide Web Home Page
http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov

Bureau of Justice Assistance
World Wide Web Home Page
http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA

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1–800–421–6770

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Addressing Community Gang Problems: A Model for Problem Solving

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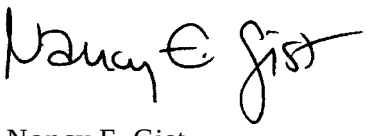
Foreword

Urban street-gang involvement in drug trafficking and violent crime is becoming increasingly widespread—not just in large cities, but in suburban areas and small towns as well.

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) recognizes that programs aimed at combating gang-related criminal activity must incorporate both crime prevention and crime control initiatives to be effective over long periods of time. Accordingly, in October 1991, BJA initiated the development of a prototype model of the Comprehensive Gang Initiative.

BJA is pleased to present this monograph, *Addressing Community Gang Problems: A Model for Problem Solving,* as a product of that initiative. The model can assist local communities in addressing gang problems by focusing on a comprehensive strategy for preventing and controlling street-gang drug trafficking and related violent crime with components ranging from prevention to suppression. Police, other law enforcement agencies, and numerous public and private organizations can implement this prototype.

A companion monograph, *Addressing Community Gang Problems: A Practical Guide,* provides additional indepth guidance to communities developing their unique responses to local gang problems.



Nancy E. Gist
Director

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Contents

Executive Summary ..... **ix**

Chapter 1 Introduction **1**
Purpose of the Comprehensive Gang Initiative 1
Comprehensive Gang Initiative Principles and Key Features 2
About This Monograph 3

Chapter 2 Gang Problems: What We Know Affects What We Do **5**
What We Know About Gangs 5
What We Know About Gang Problems 6
Barriers to Addressing Gang Problems 7

Chapter 3 Defining Gang Problems **11**
Why Is There Concern About Gangs? 11
Identifying Gang Problems 12
Cutting Problems Down to Size 12
Labeling Problems 14

Chapter 4 Solving Gang Problems **17**
Scanning Stage 17
Analysis Stage 18

Chapter 5 Response and Assessment **25**
Response Stage 25
Assessment Stage 28

Conclusion **31**

Appendix A Bibliography **33**

Appendix B Sources for Further Information **35**

Appendix C Problem-Solving Worksheet **37**

Executive Summary

In October 1991 the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) entered into a cooperative agreement with the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) to develop a Comprehensive Gang Initiative prototype model aimed at combating gang-related criminal activity by incorporating both prevention and crime control initiatives. The purpose of this monograph is to provide direction in identifying, analyzing, and responding to gang-related problems and in assessing results in an effective way. Any community facing chronic or emerging gang problems can use this document together with training and technical assistance to determine how best to implement the Comprehensive Gang Initiative.

The purpose of this monograph is to provide direction in identifying, analyzing, and responding to gang-related problems and in assessing results in an effective way.

The Comprehensive Gang Initiative model is based on the following principles:

- **Adaptability.** The model can be applied to a variety of gang-related problems within a jurisdiction and to those problems faced by a variety of jurisdictions.
- **Flexibility.** Modifications can be made in response to, or in anticipation of, changes within gangs, in gang problems as a result of anti-gang efforts, or in circumstances within communities.
- **Multifaceted approach.** The model involves various government and private agencies that simultaneously address the many factors that give rise to and sustain gang problems, and it supports direct community participation in intervention efforts.

In 1993 BJA introduced the Comprehensive Gang Initiative Demonstration Program to implement the prototype model at four demonstration sites. The four sites selected include the Suffolk County, Massachusetts, District Attorney's Office; the Tri-City Task Force of Seven Hills, Parma, and Parma Heights, Ohio; the JAY Initiative of Jefferson County and Aurora, Colorado; and the San Diego, California, Police Department.

What We Know About Gangs and Gang Problems

Research into gangs and their behaviors reveals several general facts that can be applied across geographic, demographic, and ethnic settings. There is a great deal of variability in gangs, gang activity, and gang problems within and among communities. Gang problems evolve in response to direct interventions and indirect factors. Reactions to gangs differ—from denial to sensationalism. Gang problems, like most crime and disorder

conditions, are concentrated geographically. Finally, while responses to gang problems are diverse, the responses can be grouped into three categories—prevention, intervention, and enforcement.

Barriers to Addressing Gang Problems

The most effective approaches to addressing gang-related problems involve several agencies or groups handling a number of facets of local gang problems . . . .

The most effective approaches to addressing gang-related problems involve several agencies or groups handling a number of facets of local gang problems and focusing on suppression, intervention, and prevention. Yet, even with such collaborative approaches, a number of inherent barriers need to be overcome. They include defining gang problems, forming successful collaborations, discerning the difference between ends and means, and determining impact.

Because of the diversity of gangs and their activities, many communities have trouble defining, or even recognizing, their gang problems. The inability to specifically define gang problems results from the absence of a local or national consensus on the definition of gangs and the harm they inflict. This model defines a gang-related problem as a group of harmful incidents that occur in a community, are similar in one or more ways, and cause concern to the public.

When more than one agency or group works with gang issues, lack of coordination is common. While agencies or groups working on gang problems carry out their respective roles, it is essential that their actions be coordinated by a management group made up of representatives of the participating agencies. The management group must guide the agencies in their roles and responsibilities in responding to gang issues.

Uncertainty in problem identification and difficulties in collaboration often contribute to a confusion between ends and means. Under pressure to "do something" about gang problems, agencies tend to implement and promote programs and activities that appear to demonstrate they are taking action against gangs, even though these programs may lack clear goals and objectives based on careful examination of the community's problems and needs.

Also missing in many efforts are analyses of the impact that programs should have on gang problems and how the programs alleviate harm to the community. This uncertainty is often due, in part, to the confusion between ends and means. However, it may also result from an agency's failure to properly document the impact of its actions. Instead, there is a tendency to focus on activities and processes (for example, recording attendance at a community meeting or counting the number of gang-related arrests), rather than on making quantifiable reductions in gang membership, gang activities, or the harm that gangs inflict on the community.

When communities decide to take action to deal with gang problems, it is common for the individuals involved to feel overwhelmed by the concerns associated with these problems—both the broad social problems and the behaviors causing specific harms. The public, media, and local government agencies can become fixated on an undefined "gang problem." A constructive approach is to take large, undefined problems and break them into smaller, more manageable ones, such as addressing graffiti at a specific location rather than citywide. This approach allows for the development of individualized responses that can be assembled into comprehensive solutions.

Solving Gang Problems

Gang problems can be addressed using a comprehensive problem-solving model that encompasses the four stages of the problem-solving process: scanning, analysis, response, and assessment (SARA). This process is designed to solve a problem by clearly identifying it, using numerous sources of information to investigate the problem with different levels of detail, developing a variety of solutions, and conducting an evaluation.

The SARA model . . . encompasses the four stages of the problem-solving process: scanning, analysis, response, and assessment.

- **Scanning.** The initial stage of scanning involves looking for and identifying problems. A problem exists when the following parenthetical terms can be replaced with specific examples: (Victims) are (harmed) by the (behaviors) of (offenders) at or in (places) at (times). Completing this problem statement is an important first step in problem solving; it achieves consensus on the kind of problem being addressed and provides guidance to further understand the problem.
- **Analysis.** The objective of the analysis stage is to develop a thorough understanding of a problem. Although often overlooked, analysis is perhaps the most important part of the problem-solving model because it provides valuable information that can be used to craft appropriate responses to a problem. Analysis is also useful for assessing the effectiveness of responses because it often provides a baseline for simple before-and-after measurements of a response's impact. Analysis consists of straightforward investigation of concrete problems. The best analysis involves creative information collection. A Problem-Solving Worksheet that provides a framework for collecting information from the analysis is included as part of this monograph. After a problem has been thoroughly analyzed, goals should be established for the problem-solving effort. Many problems cannot be solved completely or eliminated; therefore, responses should be designed based on one of the following purposes: totally eliminating the problem; substantially reducing the problem; reducing the harm created by the problem; or dealing with the problem more effectively.
- **Response.** The response stage has three objectives—developing response options that are consistent with the information analyzed,

selecting responses, and implementing the responses. Responses should focus on offenders, victims, third parties, places, and/or tools used to create the harm. The information collected during the analysis stage facilitates the selection of the most effective responses—those responses that take into account community values and often contain input from individuals directly affected by the problem. When implementing a response, programs need clear and consistent leadership, even in the most collaborative efforts.

- **Assessment.** The assessment stage provides useful feedback on how well the response is working. This information can be used to change the response, improve the analysis, or even redefine the nature of the problem. Information gathered through assessment can also be used to plan strategies for classes of problems and to revise the problem-solving process. The assessment should focus on the problem statement, rather than on the response. An assessment plan should link the implemented response with the problem that was identified during the scanning stage. The true impact of a response is measured by its effect on the harm suffered. Good assessment plans also include several measures that might capture "unintended consequences." While there are no definite rules for assessing gang problems, the methods of information collection used in the analysis stage can be replicated during the assessment. Assessments need not be difficult. Collecting a handful of measures (perhaps four or five) from different vantage points should demonstrate a response's effectiveness. It is important to take multiple measurements during assessment in case some measurements are not sensitive enough to illustrate impact. Assessing the effectiveness of the problem-solving effort emphasizes the importance of developing clearly defined goals, thoroughly documenting the entire process, and taking baseline measurements.

The assessment should focus on the problem statement, rather than on the response.

Conclusion

The Comprehensive Gang Initiative model provides a method for overcoming the barriers faced by agencies and groups attempting to address gang-related problems. It is a dynamic, ongoing process that provides guidance in examining a problem and finding out what factors allow the problem to persist. Answering the questions raised by the model is essential in selecting an appropriate response to gang-related problems in communities.

Introduction

This monograph was developed for agencies and groups participating in the Comprehensive Gang Initiative, a demonstration program of the Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice. The purpose of this monograph is to provide direction in identifying, analyzing, and responding to gang-related problems and in assessing results in an effective way. Together with training and technical assistance, this document can be used by any community facing chronic or emerging gang problems to determine how best to implement the Comprehensive Gang Initiative. A companion monograph, *Addressing Community Gang Problems: A Practical Guide*, provides additional indepth guidance to communities developing their unique responses to local gang problems.

. . . this document can be used by any community facing chronic or emerging gang problems to determine how best to implement the Comprehensive Gang Initiative.

Purpose of the Comprehensive Gang Initiative

The purpose of the Comprehensive Gang Initiative is to demonstrate a comprehensive program that prevents and controls emerging and chronic urban street-gang drug trafficking and related violent crime by identifying, promoting, and implementing promising strategies in selected jurisdictions. The Comprehensive Gang Initiative seeks to accomplish the following objectives:

- ❑ Assess existing community programs for preventing and controlling illegal drug trafficking and violence by gangs.
- ❑ Develop a comprehensive gang prevention and control process model for cities with chronic or emerging gang problems.
- ❑ Develop training and technical assistance materials that document how to replicate the model in selected sites.
- ❑ Provide training and technical assistance to demonstration sites.
- ❑ Evaluate the comprehensive gang program demonstrations.
- ❑ Disseminate the results of the demonstrations.

The Comprehensive Gang Initiative strategy focuses on the analysis of local gang problems and the selection of the most effective intervention components as a systematic process, consisting of a set of analytical steps. Applying such an approach locally will result in tailormade interventions. The composition of each local comprehensive strategy—the mix of police, prosecutorial, educational, counseling, and other components—will differ from one community to the next according to the types of gangs encountered and their variable harmful behaviors.

Because gangs thrive in disorganized communities, any local intervention must rally the community to organize and work together.

Because gang problems continually change, partially in response to interventions, any local intervention must have a strong problem-analysis component that not only gathers intelligence, but also includes data analysis and community input. Gang problems are multifaceted; therefore, local interventions require a collaborative approach. Because gangs thrive in disorganized communities, any local intervention must rally the community to organize and work together. This approach is based on the premise that, although the nature of gang problems change, gangs have existed for a long time and are not likely to disappear.

Comprehensive Gang Initiative Principles and Key Features

The Comprehensive Gang Initiative model is based on three principles:

- **Adaptability.** The model can be applied to various gang-related problems within a jurisdiction and to those problems faced by different jurisdictions.
- **Flexibility.** Modifications can be made in response to, or in anticipation of, changes within gangs—and changes in gang problems resulting from anti-gang efforts or changing circumstances within communities.
- **Multifaceted approach.** The model involves various government and private agencies that address the many factors that simultaneously give rise to and sustain gang problems, and it supports direct community participation in intervention efforts.

The Comprehensive Gang Initiative model also is based on the following key features:

- **Focus on harmful behaviors.** Identifying and reducing or eliminating gang behaviors that cause harm are central elements to solving gang problems.
- **Continuous problem diagnosis.** Gang-related problems are as diverse as the communities in which they appear. Each problem must be understood to be solved; this requires careful examination of the problem's elements and possible causes. Specific responses can then be developed for the defined problem.
- **Response coordination.** Although local governments still typically address their communities' gang problems primarily through police efforts, collaboration with other agencies and community groups is becoming more common. Currently, the best approaches involve several agencies or groups handling a number of facets of local gang problems and focusing on suppression, intervention, and prevention (Spergel, 1991). Such efforts may include community groups working

with schools, prosecutors, police, parks and recreation, and other public and private organizations.

- **Performance monitoring.** Continuous monitoring is needed to ensure that responses to gang-related problems are proceeding as planned, to determine if those responses are providing solutions, and to detect signs that they may need modification because either the nature of the problem has changed or the response resulted in unintended negative effects.
- **Impact evaluation.** Evaluating responses to gang problems will help authorities in deciding whether a response was successful and should continue, thus assisting staff in improving responses.
- **Adaptation to change.** As a result of direct interventions and indirect variables such as demographics and the economy, the nature of gang problems is likely to change. Those involved in solving problems related to gangs must adapt their responses to changes and constantly examine the environment to detect and analyze new or changing problems.

Those involved in solving problems related to gangs must adapt their responses to changes and constantly examine the environment to detect and analyze new or changing problems.

In summary, the Comprehensive Gang Initiative is a dynamic, ongoing effort that brings together agencies and individuals to reduce the harm inflicted by gangs on communities.

About This Monograph

The remainder of this monograph presents the SARA model for solving gang-related problems from the Comprehensive Gang Initiative. Chapter 2, Gang Problems: What We Know Affects What We Do, lays the foundation for the model and discusses what is known about gangs, gang problems, and barriers to dealing with gang problems. Chapter 3, Defining Gang Problems, provides guidance on defining gang problems in a manageable way by focusing on gang behaviors that cause harm and striving for small wins. Chapter 4, Solving Gang Problems, and Chapter 5, Response and Assessment, describe the four stages of the problem-solving model: scanning, analysis, response, and assessment. Relevant examples illustrate the concepts and instructions presented.

Appendix A contains a bibliography of readings related to solving gang problems. Appendix B lists sources for further information. Finally, Appendix C provides a worksheet to guide community leaders through the stages of the problem-solving process.

Gang Problems: What We Know Affects What We Do

The growing complexity of the interrelated problems of gangs, drugs, and violence calls for an understanding of gangs and the problems they create, how problems are dealt with, and how problems are concentrated. This knowledge affects how we respond to gang problems. This chapter discusses what is known about gangs, gang problems, and barriers to dealing with gang problems. This information is the foundation for the Comprehensive Gang Initiative process model presented in the remaining chapters of this monograph.

What We Know About Gangs

The phenomena of juvenile and adult gangs, drug trafficking, and urban violence are far from new. In the past they have been treated as separate problems, an approach meeting with disappointing results. Experience has shown that these problems are interconnected—posing an even greater threat to communities. One result of this total effect is the increase in drug-related homicides among gang members. Much of this violence appears to be random, affecting innocent bystanders as well as its intended targets.

The interrelated problems of gangs, drugs, and violence have been addressed in a variety of research studies. Although much recent research suggests that the relationship of gangs, drugs, and crime may vary by the type of gang, these findings are inconclusive. One reason is that researchers have not been able to agree on how to define a gang, making an ultimate link among gangs, violence, and drugs difficult to establish. Another reason for the uncertainty is that researchers have not made appropriate distinctions among different types of gangs. Some gangs are clearly involved in drug trafficking, drug dealing, and violence; some are not. Klein and Maxson are quite clear in their assessment of gang problems: "The assumption of dealing with common phenomena from city to city is not only inappropriate, it is grossly inaccurate," (Klein and Maxson, 1989).

Some gangs are clearly involved in drug trafficking, drug dealing, and violence; some are not.

A few general but important facts about gangs can be applied across assorted geographic, demographic, and ethnic settings:

- **Gangs are diverse.** There is a great deal of variability in gangs, gang activity, and gang problems. Gangs vary by ethnic makeup, involvement in predatory crime, drug-related activities, age of members, propensity

toward violence, and organizational stability and unity. Even for a single factor such as drug trafficking, there is variation among gangs in the types of drugs sold, the aggressiveness used in expanding drug markets, and the willingness to use violence. These variations exist within and among different communities.

- **Gangs change.** Gangs evolve, partially in response to direct factors (prevention, intervention, and suppression efforts) and partially in response to indirect factors (demographic shifts, economic conditions, and influence of media).
- **Reactions to gangs vary.** Some communities choose to deny that a gang exists; others experience sensationalism if one is identified. Some communities develop task forces and networks to address gang issues; others conduct assessments to determine the nature and scope of gang problems.
- **Effective responses are diverse.** Communities have developed various responses to gangs; these responses can generally be grouped into three categories—prevention, intervention, and enforcement (often known as suppression).

What We Know About Gang Problems

When confronting gang problems, it is important to recognize one recurring feature of crime and disorder in all neighborhoods: it is concentrated. This characteristic has important implications for dealing with gang problems. Analysis of arrest records and offender interviews shows that offenders differ substantially and the worst 10 percent of criminals commit approximately 55 percent of all crimes (Blumstein et al., 1986). A similar concentration phenomenon exists with gang members.

Crime and disorder are concentrated in all neighborhoods: 10 percent of criminals commit approximately 55 percent of all crimes.

- **Concentration of gang members.** Most gang members are only peripherally involved in drug dealing, violence, and crime; a small percentage of gang members account for most of the harm done by their gang.
- **Concentration among victims.** A few particularly vulnerable people run a higher risk of victimization than most individuals: the most vulnerable 10 percent of victims are involved in about 40 percent of all crimes (Nelson, 1980).
- **Concentration of place.** More than 60 percent of crimes are committed at a few particularly dangerous locations (Pierce, Spaar, and Briggs, 1986; Sherman, 1987; Spelman and Eck, 1989) and crime rates are much higher in neighborhoods in which more potential offenders live or visit.

For example, poor, urban adolescent males join gangs and commit property crimes at higher rates than other youths. Because poor youth have few sources of transportation, it is not surprising that they commit crimes near their homes. Neighborhoods with open-air drug markets or bars that cater

to a rowdy or criminal element also attract potential offenders located nearby. Because more offenders willing to commit crimes live in these neighborhoods, more crimes are committed there.

A high-rise retirement complex probably houses few gang members but may attract gang members from the surrounding area who are would-be robbers, if they think the resident retirees carry cash and would not resist an attack. Property crime rates are often high in college communities because students are more likely to leave cars and bicycles unlocked and often leave wallets and purses where they can easily be taken.

However, a neighborhood with many potential offenders or victims can have a low crime rate if the victims and offenders do not come into contact with each other. For example, apartment complexes for the elderly separate this group of potential victims from people who might prey upon them.

Thus, neighborhood gang problems differ in predictable ways for comprehensible reasons. The implications for gang problem prevention are obvious: to reduce the rate of gang problems in an area, it is important to determine the problems in the neighborhood and the actions needed to reduce the number of available offenders or victims or to separate potential offenders and victims. Addressing the entire social problem of gangs is not necessary to realize a substantial impact; selecting a smaller gang problem can yield disproportionately large benefits. Because neighborhoods differ, the best prevention strategies will vary from one neighborhood to the next. Community problem solvers must study an area's social and physical conditions before developing and implementing strategies.

Addressing the entire social problem of gangs is not necessary to realize a substantial impact . . . .

Barriers to Addressing Gang Problems

The more effective collaborative approach to gang prevention and control—versus the single-agency response—acknowledges that related drug, violence, and other problems require a variety of skills, resources, and information to solve them. Although the dedication and hard work of people responding to gangs has resulted in the development of many innovative and effective tactics, a number of inherent complexities remain and must be addressed in a cooperative approach. Such issues include defining gang problems, forming a successful collaboration, discerning the difference between ends and means, and determining the impact of actions taken to address defined problems. Each of these issues is discussed in more detail in the remainder of this chapter.

Defining Gang Problems

Because of the diversity of gangs and their activities, many communities have trouble defining, or even recognizing, their gang problems. Some communities deny having a problem. Many communities address their

gang problems under the direction of an individual with a personal mission (for example, to save children, make a better world, or decrease crime). There is seldom an officially organized or sanctioned response. Often attention focuses on the gang problem only as a result of a deplorable gang-related incident, such as the murder of a police officer. After such an incident, the response may be an overreaction such as a heavy suppression-oriented effort rather than a plan to address the causes of gang activity. The public, media, and local government agencies may become fixated on an ill-defined gang problem rather than on the specific harm caused by gangs. This type of reaction is not surprising, however, considering that communities and government agencies tend to lack experience in identifying and developing responses to specific gang problems.

The inability to specifically define gang problems results from the absence of a local or national consensus on the definition of gangs and the harm they inflict. People often turn first to the police for information concerning gangs. But police departments usually have only one objective with respect to gangs—to control harmful behaviors via suppression. This perspective, while important, does not allow those concerned to assess all the factors that contribute to gang problems. Information should be gathered from all resources available to the community (for example, police, schools, courts, and community groups) to develop a clear picture of gangs and the problems they cause.

Forming a Successful Collaboration

. . . a management group made up of representatives of the participating agencies . . . should guide the agencies in their roles and responsibilities in responding to gang issues.

When more than one agency or group works with gang issues, lack of coordination of efforts is common. A lack of collaboration can also occur when different units of the same agency address gang problems; this fragmentation is often the result of turf divisions or the bureaucratic division of labor or services. One of the most important components of a successful approach to gangs is multiagency cooperation (Spergel, 1991). While the agencies or groups carry out their respective roles in the effort, it is essential that their actions be coordinated by a management group made up of representatives of the participating agencies. The management group should guide the agencies in their roles and responsibilities in responding to gang issues. The management group must have the political authority to coordinate the effort, but it should not dominate the process.

Discerning the Difference Between Ends and Means

Uncertainty in problem identification and difficulties in collaboration often contribute to a third problem: confusion between ends and means. Under pressure to "do something" about gang problems, agencies tend to implement and promote programs and activities that demonstrate they are taking action against gangs, even though these programs may lack clear goals and objectives based on careful examination of the community's problems and needs. Also missing in many efforts are analyses of the impact that

programs should have on gang problems and how the programs would alleviate harm to the community. Specific gang problems, resulting harms, and desired impacts need to be precisely defined before programs are implemented.

Determining Impact

Although reports of the efforts of practitioners who regularly deal with gang problems—police officers, prosecutors, social workers, community organizers, educators, and others—can provide detailed policy guidance, the credibility of such reports may be questionable without systematic evaluations documenting the effectiveness of their practices. This uncertainty is often due, in part, to the confusion between ends and means. However, it may also result from the failure of agencies to properly document the impact of their actions.

Research shows that most programs lack impact measures relating to the alleviation or elimination of the specific harm caused by gangs. Instead, there is a tendency to focus on activities and processes (for example, recording how many people attended a community meeting or how many gang arrests were made), rather than on quantifiable reductions in gang membership, gang activities, or harm caused by gangs.

. . . there is a tendency to focus on . . . how many people attended a community meeting or how many gang arrests were made, rather than on quantifiable reductions in . . . harm caused by gangs.

In the past, gang prevention and control programs were designed for individual locales and situations; they are not adaptable to today's diverse gang problems. A strategy must be developed that can be applied to the continually changing nature and behaviors of gangs.

Defining Gang Problems

Before it is possible to solve gang problems, it is necessary to define them. This chapter provides guidance on defining gang problems in a manageable way by focusing on gang behaviors that cause harm and striving for small wins.

Why Is There Concern About Gangs?

Gangs cause concern because of their harmful behaviors, such as the following:

- ❑ Wearing clothing that displays gang colors.
- ❑ "Hanging out" in public areas and creating a menacing presence.
- ❑ Defacing property with graffiti.
- ❑ Selling drugs.

Wearing gang colors to school can lead to confrontations and fights among members of rival gangs. People are not concerned about Boy Scout or school athletic team uniforms because they are not linked to harmful behaviors. However, the harm associated with the wearing of gang colors makes this behavior undesirable.

"Hanging out" in certain public locations may cause concern if the gang members make rude and intimidating comments to passersby. People may be concerned that the members of the gang will assault them. Community residents are often leery of venturing out into their own neighborhoods for fear of being caught in the crossfire of gang warfare. Here a distinction must be drawn between perception (residents' fears of confrontation) and actual behavior (gang members' threatening and assaultive actions). Though harm is created by both, responses to these two problems may be quite different.

. . . a distinction must be drawn between perception (residents' fears of confrontation) and actual behavior (gang members' threatening and assaultive actions).

Graffiti scrawled on private or public property are unsightly and reduce property values. In addition, rival gangs crossing out graffiti can often lead to violent clashes between gangs. Such a direct link between an action and resulting harm easily identifies harmful behavior.

In some communities, gang members are involved in illegal drug trafficking. Residents are concerned about exposure to such activity, especially when it causes violence among rival drug gangs that may affect residents, their families, and friends. Many other individuals and groups with no gang affiliation are involved in drug trafficking. Even many gang members who traffic in drugs do so on their own and not as a gang activity. Thus,

solutions to drug-trafficking problems may need to focus on specific individuals or locations, regardless of any gang affiliation.

If gang members merely loitered on street corners wearing distinctive clothing and did not threaten or assault people, deal in drugs, or deface property, they would be just another colorful part of city life. Establishing a factual link between a behavior and the harm it causes is critical to identifying and solving problems.

If gang members merely loitered on street corners wearing distinctive clothing and did not threaten or assault people, deal in drugs, or deface property, they would be just another colorful part of city life.

Identifying Gang Problems

When do these gang behaviors become a problem? The following elements constitute a problem (Spelman and Eck, 1989):

- **A problem involves a group of harmful incidents.** Although an isolated harmful incident should be dealt with, it is difficult to analyze and does not require a long-term solution because it will not reoccur. More than one or two incidents constitute a true problem for which a solution can be devised.
- **The incidents that make up the problem must be similar in some way.** A number of similarities may exist within a problem: the incidents may have occurred at the same place or time; the people involved may have similar characteristics or engage in the same type of behavior; or the social or physical environment may provide a similar context for each event. If incidents cannot be grouped, there can be no common solution to prevent future occurrences.
- **A problem must be of direct concern to the public.** Generally, a problem causes concern within a community if someone is injured, property is stolen or damaged, or serious social or economic costs result.

A problem, then, involves a group of harmful incidents that occur in a community, are similar in one or more ways, and cause concern to the public.

The harmful behaviors associated with gang problems vary from community to community and gang to gang. Furthermore, some gang members engage in more harmful behaviors than others. For these reasons, each community should examine the behaviors of its gangs, determine which behaviors are harmful and cause problems, and select responses appropriate to those behaviors.

Cutting Problems Down to Size

When communities decide to take action to deal with gang problems, it is common for the individuals involved to feel overwhelmed by the concerns associated with these problems—both the broad social problems and the behaviors causing specific harm. The public, media, and local government

agencies can become fixated on an undefined "gang problem." A common question is: How does a community or group approach gang problems?

Psychologist Karl Weick (1984) has devised a way of approaching problems that makes them more manageable and thus makes responses to the problems more successful: focusing on small wins. Weick points out that as people begin examining social problems, they tend to do so on a massive scale. For example, they may look at eliminating unemployment, mental illness, homelessness, or crime. Social problems are often presented in this way in an effort to mobilize greater action. Such a broad consideration of social ills tends to overpower a community's ability to conceive innovative ways to address them. When faced with problems of this magnitude, people experience frustration, anxiety, and helplessness, which limit the quality of their responses.

A more constructive approach is to take large problems and break them into smaller, more manageable ones, such as addressing graffiti at a specific location rather than citywide. This approach allows for the development of individualized responses that can be assembled into comprehensive solutions. According to Weick (1984), "A small win is a concrete, complete, implemented outcome of moderate importance." Individual small wins may not seem important, but a succession of meaningful wins sets a positive precedent that may attract support and, at the same time, reduce resistance to future efforts:

A constructive approach is to take large problems and break them into smaller, more manageable ones, such as addressing graffiti at a specific location rather than citywide.

- ❑ Small wins help people learn about a specific problem, their ability and resources to deal with it, and problem solving in general. Small wins are easily understood and rewarding.
- ❑ One small win often leads to additional small wins by bringing in new partners with new information and innovative ways of approaching and solving problems. Thus, the possibility of solving more than just the problems at hand increases. Small wins, particularly a series of them, can attract the attention of policymakers and elected officials.
- ❑ A series of small wins can provide the foundation for a larger win. Small wins bring order into confusing surroundings because they are achievable and provide immediate attainment of precise goals. An accumulation of wins over smaller problems may have an impact on a larger problem.
- ❑ A small win can reflect a major change in a relatively insignificant problem or a meager change in a significant problem. A small win sometimes completely solves the problem at hand.
- ❑ Problems are dynamic; they change in response to an ever-changing environment. Simply addressing a problem causes the surrounding conditions to change. Because of these fluctuating conditions, it is difficult to map out a long-range strategy. Planning for small wins allows flexibility in the response to a problem.

What does the strategy of small wins mean for groups addressing gang problems? Community groups can develop problem statements related to specific harm to be addressed separately instead of a program to wholly eliminate gangs. Examples of such individual problems are driveby shootings at the corner of 8th and Main, a high truancy rate of gang-involved youths at Garfield High School, graffiti on the walls surrounding the Mystic public housing complex, and fights breaking out in the Neely Junior High School due to intergang conflict. Dividing the larger gang problem into discrete problems and focusing responses on reducing or eliminating the harms they create increases the possibility of successfully dealing with gangs.

The strategy of small wins also facilitates the decision of which problems to attack first. For example, a new coalition with little experience working together should select what appear to be relatively easy problems to attack first. Small wins can build the confidence of group members, provide valuable insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the group's operation, and show others that the coalition's efforts are worthwhile.

Labeling Problems

It is tempting to resort to the criminal law code when trying to identify gang problems . . . , but there are weaknesses to defining problems solely in terms of criminal law.

It is tempting to resort to the criminal law code when trying to identify gang problems and their resulting harm. This approach is attractive to police and prosecutors because the law is a familiar frame of reference for them. However, there are several weaknesses to defining problems solely in terms of criminal law (Goldstein, 1990):

- Trying to deal with a distinctive behavior by grouping behaviors under a single statutory term may blur valuable distinctions that would be helpful in developing effective responses. For example, the term "vandalism" can cover several harmful activities committed by gang members, such as spray-painting or etching graffiti, breaking windows, or slicing automobile tires. Each of these problems should be addressed separately. Such an approach is more useful than applying broad categories to define specific gang problems.
- Using criminal statute terms also tends to make people think about responses to problems primarily from the perspective of arrest and prosecution. Arrest and prosecution for harmful behaviors are often appropriate; however, punishment occurs after the harm has been committed and has only a small impact on preventing the harmful behaviors from recurring.
- Finally, some harmful behaviors may not violate the law. For example, a group of gang members hanging out in a public park in the daylight is probably legal. However, because of their presence, others may be reluctant to use the park for fear of intimidation or assault. The behavior causing fear is not illegal, but it is harmful.

Even if the law does not define a problem, it can help define possible responses to it. Thus it is critical to consider legal authority only after a problem has been defined according to harmful, not just illegal, behaviors.

It is important to be careful about the initial labeling of a problem. Sometimes, after it has been carefully examined, the problem appears to be different from the one first identified. Harmful gang behaviors can be identified and labeled by answering the following questions:

Sometimes, after the problem has been carefully examined, it appears to be different from the one first identified.

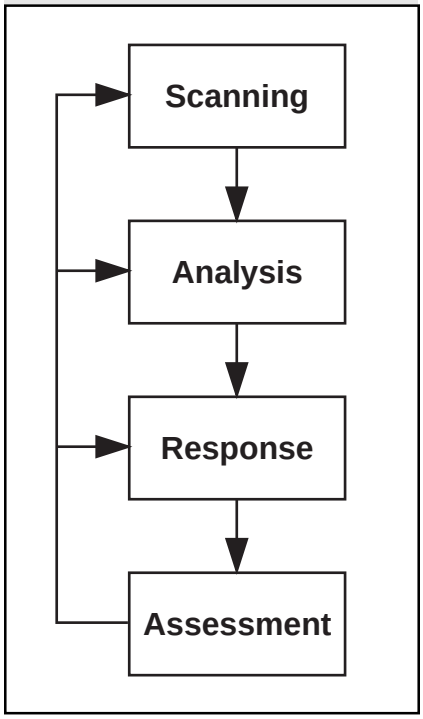
- ❑ In what types of behaviors do local gangs engage?
- ❑ Which of these gang behaviors cause harm?
- ❑ What specific harm do these behaviors cause?
  - ■ Is someone injured?
  - ■ Is something taken?
  - ■ Is property damaged?
  - ■ Are there serious social or economic repercussions?
- ❑ Who carries out these harmful behaviors?

In seeking answers to these questions, it is important to focus on specific activities identified through local experience or awareness.

Solving Gang Problems

Gang problems can be addressed using a comprehensive problem-solving model that encompasses the four stages of the problem-solving process: scanning, analysis, response, and assessment (Eck and Spelman, 1987). This process is called the SARA model (see Figure 1). It is designed to solve a problem by clearly identifying it, using various sources of information to investigate the problem with varying levels of detail, developing a variety of solutions, and finally conducting an evaluation. In addressing gang problems, communities should remember that models are useful tools, but they are not solutions. Herman Goldstein points out that there is a danger in providing models with detailed steps that may oversimplify the process. The fear is "that more effort will be invested in moving mechanically through the recommended steps than in the explorations and thinking that the steps are encouraged to stimulate," (Goldstein, 1990). Nevertheless, models can guide the problem-solving process. This chapter presents the first two stages of the SARA model: scanning and analysis. Chapter 5 discusses the response and assessment stages.

Figure 1. SARA Model



Scanning Stage

The initial stage of scanning involves identifying problems and bringing them to the attention of the group, thereby initiating the problem-solving cycle. Scanning is the responsibility of everyone involved in this comprehensive approach. Potential sources for identifying problems include citizen complaints; census data; police reports, calls for service, and intelligence information; data from other government agencies such as schools, public health, social services, and parks and recreation; media coverage of the community; and community surveys.

In identifying problems, one must remember that a problem consists of a group of harmful incidents occurring in a community that are similar in one or more ways and of concern to the public. Four additional elements are needed to make up a problem—an offender, a victim, and a place and time where they come together.

To identify the problem, a problem statement can be developed by substituting specific examples for the parenthetical terms in the following sentence:

> *(Victims) are (harmed) by the (behaviors) of (offenders) at or in (places) at (times).*

The following are examples of completed problem statements:

- *(Bellwood Elementary students) are (frightened) by the (spray-painted graffiti) of (taggers) in (school bathrooms) during (breaks between classes).*
- *(Store patrons) are (robbed) by (youths) at (convenience stores on Greenwood Avenue) (after dark).*

Completing this statement is a simple but important first step in problem solving; it achieves consensus on the kind of problem being addressed and provides guidance to further understand the problem.

Analysis Stage

The objective of the analysis stage is to develop a thorough understanding of a problem. Analysis is perhaps the most important part of the problem-solving model because it provides valuable information that can be used to craft appropriate responses to the problem. Analysis is also extremely useful for assessing the effectiveness of responses because it can provide a baseline for simple before-and-after measurements of a response's impact. However, analysis is often the most overlooked part of problem solving. Failure to analyze the problem completely may occur because problem solvers have already settled on a favored response and wish to avoid additional investigation that might lead to more responses from which to choose. Failure to analyze also occurs because participants in the problem-solving process believe analysis is difficult, although it need not be.

The best analysis involves creativity in collecting information.

Analysis consists of a straightforward investigation of concrete problems. The best analysis involves creativity in collecting information. The Problem-Solving Worksheet (see Appendix C) provides a framework for collecting analysis information. Information about a problem is collected using the following methods:

- Surveys or interviews of residents, victims, store clerks or managers, passersby, neighbors, offenders, police officers and detectives, security personnel, parks and recreation employees, and teachers.

- ❑ Documented observations of problem locations, including recording pedestrian and vehicular traffic counts, demographic characteristics, and activities of persons in the area; measuring lighting and ambient noise; counting the incidence of litter, vandalism, graffiti, abandoned cars, or other environmental features; and taking photographs or videos, or making sketches, maps, or charts with space for recording information.
- ❑ Statistics including police records, incident reports, and calls for service; court records; school attendance files including truancy and suspension records; sales receipts of local businesses; and sales records of specific tools (such as spray paint).

Understanding the Problem

To learn as much as possible about a problem, it is important to find and examine information that describes an array of problem characteristics (Eck and Spelman, 1987). Data must be gathered on the basic elements involved in every problem—actors, incidents, and reactions. Actors may include victims, offenders, and third parties. A problem is a group of incidents created by the interaction of the actors. Understanding the incidents that make up a problem requires knowledge of the actors' behaviors (sequence of events) and the social context and physical setting within which the sequence of events takes place. Understanding the problem also requires knowledge of the immediate results of the events. Finally, reactions to the incidents by the community (individuals and groups, inside and outside the jurisdiction) and its institutions (private and public) affect the actors and how they interact. The information provided here is an abridged version of the Problem-Solving Worksheet found in Appendix C.

Actors. Actors are the offenders, victims, and third parties involved in the incidents.

Offenders. Offenders are persons who commit crimes or engage in other harmful behaviors. For some problems the offender may be obvious—the students wearing gang colors to school or gang members hanging out on a corner intimidating people. For other problems the offenders may be less obvious—people recruiting new gang members or the group involved in a driveby shooting. The following information on offenders should be gathered:

- ❑ What are the names, age, sex, race, appearance, size, dress, and other shared features?
- ❑ What behaviors of offenders are causing the harm?
- ❑ What benefits do offenders gain from their harmful behaviors?
- ❑ What tools do they use to carry out their actions?
- ❑ What are the sources of these tools? How are they obtained?

- ❑ How do the offenders travel to and from the location of the problem?
- ❑ What activities are the offenders involved in just prior to and during the harmful behavior?
- ❑ Do the offenders act alone or with others?

Victims. Victims are persons who are directly harmed as a result of an offender's actions. As with offenders, it may not always be clear who is a victim. Questions that can help identify victims include:

- ❑ What are the age, sex, race, appearance, size, dress, and other shared features?
- ❑ What tools could prevent victims from being harmed?
- ❑ What activities are victims involved in just prior to and during the harmful behavior?
- ❑ How do the victims travel to and from the location of the problem?
- ❑ Are victims alone or with others?
- ❑ Are people harmed indirectly by the problem? If so, who are they and how are they harmed?

Third parties. Why do some offenders, victims, and places pose more problems than others? One reason is that people do not act in a vacuum. Often third parties act (or fail to act) in ways that increase the vulnerability of at-risk people and places. These often-overlooked actors contribute in the following ways:

- ❑ **Controllers,** acting in the best interests of the potential offenders, try to prevent them from committing crimes (Hirschi, 1969; Felson, 1986).
- ❑ **Guardians** try to prevent harm to potential victims (Cohen and Felson, 1979).
- ❑ **Managers** oversee or control places where problems occur (Eck, 1994).

When controllers, guardians, and managers are present and effective, they can reduce or even eliminate a recurring problem. When they are absent or ineffective, they may even make the problem worse.

Important questions to ask regarding third parties include the following:

- ❑ Who could prevent the offenders from acting in a harmful manner (controllers)?
- ❑ Who could prevent the victims from being harmed (guardians)?
- ❑ Who is responsible for overseeing the place where the problem occurs (managers)?
- ❑ Are there others who use the location and may observe the harmful behavior?

Incidents. When examining the incidents that make up a problem, problem solvers should consider the social context and physical setting for the events, the sequence of actions leading up to and including the incidents, and the results of the actions taken by the offenders and victims. Questions to ask regarding incidents are as follows:

- ❑ What harms are occurring?
- ❑ How is the harmful behavior carried out?
- ❑ How long does it take to occur?
- ❑ At what times of day does the problem occur?
- ❑ On what days of the week does it occur?
- ❑ During what months does it occur?
- ❑ What is the specific location of the problem?
- ❑ What tools (or lack of tools) at the location enable the harmful behavior?
- ❑ What policies or practices enable or encourage the problem to occur (for example, bus schedules, opening and closing hours)?
- ❑ What physical barriers are present or absent at the location (for example, barriers to visual observation such as high shrubbery, store counters, walls, roadways)?
- ❑ What are the environmental conditions at the location (for example, well-lit or dark, outdoors or indoors, heated or cooled, music or entertainment, benches that encourage loitering)?
- ❑ What environmental conditions exist when the problem occurs (for example, at night or during the day, or raining or clear)?
- ❑ What social conditions exist when the problem occurs (for example, rush hour, school dismissal, or lunch times)?
- ❑ Are there secondary, or "downstream," harms (for example, a decline in business on a certain block because of street robberies)?

Reactions. Most incidents produce some type of reaction from the community, government agencies, and the media. These reactions are important in understanding the problem because they help define the problem's seriousness and may directly affect the problem itself. Sometimes the absence of a reaction, or a general feeling that the incidents were of little consequence, contributes to the problem. Public perception of a problem's seriousness often affects the responses. A problem perceived to be very serious is more likely to receive greater attention and resources than a problem perceived to be minor. However, a problem that has received widespread attention and is generally perceived to be serious may be more difficult to solve because of misinformation and the actions of powerful interest groups. Questions to ask regarding reactions include the following:

A problem that has received widespread attention and is generally perceived to be serious may be more difficult to solve because of misinformation and the actions of powerful interest groups.

- ❑ What are the reactions and attitudes of people in the neighborhood in which the incidents occur?
- ❑ What are the reactions and attitudes citywide?
- ❑ What are the opinions of people outside the city (for example, investors, job seekers, commuters, tourists, and shoppers)?
- ❑ What are the reactions and responses of public and private agencies and organizations as a result of the incidents (for example, police, prosecutors, courts, corrections, sheriff, legislature, media, businesses, schools, and social services)?
- ❑ How seriously is the problem regarded by the public? Why?
- ❑ What publicity occurred regarding the problem?

Learning more about the actors, incidents, and reactions that make up a problem should aid in more careful specification of the problem statement discussed earlier. For example, reconsider the following:

(Bellwood Elementary students) are (frightened) by the (graffiti) in (school bathrooms) during (breaks between classes).

- ❑ Who are the actors in this incident?
  - ■ Who specifically is harmed? Perhaps the graffiti are in only one bathroom, the girls' room on the second floor, and only second graders use the facility. Monitoring bathrooms and interpreting graffiti may aid in understanding who is being harmed. Perhaps the graffiti warn that someone's money will be taken.
  - ■ Who is committing the harm? Perhaps the offenders cannot be readily identified. The absence of answers points to the need for further analysis. If a specific question cannot be answered, at least in a general way, it will be difficult to develop an appropriate response. For example, if the graffiti are painted by boys from the adjacent Roberts Middle School, then responses to limit restroom passes, place monitors outside the bathroom, or otherwise guard against students spray painting graffiti would likely prove useless.
  - ■ What tools are being used to create the harm? Perhaps broad-tipped markers, as opposed to spray paint or etching tools, are being used to make the graffiti.
- ❑ What do we know about the incidents?
  - ■ What is the physical setting? Perhaps there is a bathroom window that is easily reached from a trash dumpster, allowing the boys access.
  - ■ What is the sequence of events? Perhaps the graffiti are being painted during breaks between morning classes or during the lunch period. Periodic checking of the bathrooms would be useful in pinpointing the exact time of occurrence.

- What are the immediate results? Perhaps the girls are afraid to use the bathroom and are using one on a different floor, making them late for classes.

After collecting the additional information, a revised problem sentence may now read:

(Second grade girls at Bellwood Elementary) are (frightened of being robbed) by the (spray-painted graffiti) of (boys from Roberts Middle School) in (the second floor girls' bathroom) during (lunch period).

The more specific problem statement provides clear information about appropriate and inappropriate interventions. The worksheet in Appendix C helps problem solvers focus on the many types of information they should consider and attempt to collect.

Problem solving requires a balanced approach. It is a mistake to gather and analyze so much information that "paralysis of analysis" occurs and no responses are developed. The analysis should be as practical and action oriented as possible.

It is a mistake to gather and analyze so much information that "paralysis of analysis" occurs and no responses are developed.

Goals and Objectives

After a problem has been thoroughly analyzed, goals should be established for the problem-solving effort. Since many problems cannot be solved completely, responses should be based on one of the following objectives:

- ❑ Totally eliminating the problem.
- ❑ Substantially reducing the problem.
- ❑ Reducing the harm created by the problem.
- ❑ More effectively dealing with the problem.

The information gathered during the analysis stage of the problem-solving process can be used to make decisions about which problems need to be addressed first.

Response and Assessment

Detecting and analyzing a problem are only the first steps in problem solving. This chapter describes the last two stages of the SARA model, the response and assessment stages.

Response Stage

The response stage has three objectives: developing options based on information gathered during the analysis, selecting a response, and implementing the response.

Developing Response Options

After a problem has been identified and analyzed, possible responses need to be developed and listed. These response options should be wide ranging, and no option should be ruled out at this point in the process. The range of possible responses includes the following strategies (Goldstein, 1990):

- **Focus in.** Concentrate attention on the relatively small number of individuals who usually account for a disproportionate share of any problem—those who cause it (offenders), facilitate it (controllers, managers, and guardians), or suffer from it (victims).
- **Connect with other governmental and private services.** A thorough analysis of a problem often leads to an appreciation of the need for (1) more effective referrals of victims and/or offenders to existing governmental and private services; (2) improved coordination among agencies that exert control over the problems or individuals involved in the incidents; and (3) correction of inadequacies in municipal services and development of new services.
- **Use mediation and negotiation skills.** Often the use of mediation and negotiation teams can be an effective response to conflicts.
- **Convey information.** Relaying sound and accurate information is one of the least used responses. However, it is potentially the most effective response to a wide range of problems. Conveying information can (1) reduce anxiety and fear, (2) enable citizens to solve their own problems, (3) help people conform to laws and regulations that are not known or understood, (4) warn potential victims about their vulnerability and advise them of ways to protect themselves, (5) demonstrate to people how they unwittingly contribute to problems, (6) develop support for addressing a problem, and (7) acquaint the community with the

Concentrate attention on the relatively small number of individuals who usually account for a disproportionate share of any problem . . . .

limitations of government agencies and define what can be realistically expected of those agencies.

- **Mobilize the community.** Mobilizing a specific segment of the community helps to implement a specific response for as long as it takes to reduce or eliminate problems.
- **Use existing forms of social control.** Use the social control inherent in existing relationships, such as the influence of a parent, teacher, employer, or church.
- **Alter the physical environment** to reduce opportunities for problems to recur. Adapt the principles of crime prevention through environmental design.
- **Regulate, through statutes or ordinances, conditions that contribute to problems.** Analysis may draw attention to those factors contributing to problems that can be controlled by regulation through statutes or ordinances.
- **Develop new forms of limited authority to intervene and detain.** Expand problem solvers' authority so they can intervene with or detain persons involved in an incident to prevent it from escalating into criminal behavior.
- **Use the criminal justice system only when appropriate,** including (1) straightforward investigation, arrest, and prosecution; (2) selective enforcement with clear guidelines; (3) enforcement of criminal laws that, by tradition, are enforced by another agency; (4) greater clarity in defining behavior subject to criminal justice prosecution or control through local ordinances; (5) intervention without arrest; (6) arrest without the intention to prosecute; and (7) attachment of new conditions to probation or parole.

Use civil laws . . . including those related to licensing, zoning, property confiscation, nuisance abatement, and the use of injunctions . . . to fight gang problems.

- **Use civil law** to control public nuisances, offensive behavior, and conditions contributing to crime. Because most police activity involves arrest and prosecution, people tend to forget that police and local government can initiate other legal proceedings, including those related to licensing, zoning, property confiscation, nuisance abatement, and the use of injunctions.

Responses should focus on offenders, victims, third parties, places, and/or tools. After all possible responses are listed, information about their legality, cost, effectiveness, and value to the community should be collected (Goldstein, 1990).

Selecting a Response

The information collected during the analysis stage of the SARA problem-solving model facilitates the selection of the most appropriate responses from the alternatives listed. The most effective responses take into account community values and often contain input from individuals directly affected

by the problem. In addition, it is common to use several of the alternatives to respond to one problem. Some of these responses may be more important than others; some may need to be implemented before others. In deciding which response, or group of responses, to implement, consider the following factors (Goldstein, 1990):

- ❑ The likelihood that the response will reduce or otherwise affect the problem positively.
- ❑ The effect on the problem's most serious features or most important social concerns.
- ❑ The preventive character of the response (its ability to reduce repetition of the problem or the problem's serious outcomes).
- ❑ The extent to which the response invades the lives of people and relies on legal authority and the possible use of force.
- ❑ The viewpoints of the various people and organizations (stakeholders) likely to be affected by the response.
- ❑ The cost of the response (budget detail).
- ❑ The availability of legal authority and resources.
- ❑ The lawfulness and civility of the response and how it will influence relationships.
- ❑ The ease of implementing the response.

In deciding which response to implement, consider . . . its ability to reduce repetition of the problem or the problem's serious outcomes.

Implementing a Response

The following activities take place during implementation of the response:

- ❑ Listing the tasks required to carry out the response.
- ❑ Selecting a manager or coordinator for the response.
- ❑ Setting timelines for accomplishing tasks.
- ❑ Designing an assessment of the response (discussed later in this chapter).
- ❑ Coordinating tasks carried out by separate groups.
- ❑ Developing a written action plan.

Even in the most collaborative efforts, programs need clear and consistent leadership. Someone needs to assume responsibility for overseeing the response and ensuring that goals and objectives are met. A program coordinator can manage the program on a daily basis to make sure there is timely implementation, problem solving, and staff direction. Several factors support effective implementation of a response (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1991):

- ❑ **Leadership.** Response managers are responsible for communicating information, coordinating tasks, and creating a spirit of trust among

those carrying out the response. Managers should articulate the goals and objectives of the response effort.

- **Teamwork.** The role of each person or group involved in the response effort should be clearly defined. Efforts should be made to facilitate the exchange of information among those involved.
- **Communication.** Response managers need to stay in touch with others involved in the response effort so that they are aware of implementation problems and accomplishments and can obtain problem-solving information.
- **Administration.** An effective, easy-to-use recordkeeping system and a method for obtaining information about the response activities should be developed so that the effort can be monitored continuously.

Assessment Stage

The assessment stage is the final stage of the problem-solving model. Assessment, also referred to as evaluation, provides useful feedback on how well the response is working. This information can be used to change the response, improve the analysis, or even redefine the nature of the problem. Information gathered through assessment can also be used to plan strategies for types of problems and to revise the problem-solving process.

An assessment or evaluation plan should link the implemented response with the problem that was identified during the scanning stage.

Linking Implemented Response With Targeted Problem

The assessment should focus on the problem statement, rather than on the response. An assessment or evaluation plan should link the implemented response with the problem that was identified during the scanning stage. Information collected during analysis is useful for the evaluation. For example, information about the number, size, and frequency of graffiti markings on a specific wall in a given location can provide a baseline (information to compare against) for an assessment of the response. Perhaps four graffiti markings occurred each evening, averaging 5 by 2 feet, and recurring within 24 hours of paint-out efforts. After a response is implemented, the response team should determine whether the response had any effect on the problem—for example, fewer or smaller graffiti markings.

Determining How the Problem Was Affected

An effective response results in (1) better management of the problem, (2) reduction of the problem, (3) reduction of the harm caused by the problem, or (4) elimination of the problem. Therefore, the assessment should indicate in what manner the problem or harm was affected. For example, one could claim success in the previous graffiti example if fewer incidents of graffiti occurred each evening, if the average size of graffiti diminished, or if the time period following paint-outs increased before graffiti reclaimed the wall.

The true impact of a response is measured by its effect on the harm suffered. The graffiti are a means to the harm; the actual harm is the creation of fear among residents. In this case, both the changes in the frequency and incidence of graffiti as well as reduced fear in the community should be documented. A variety of methods can be used to gather this information. For example, fear can be assessed by observing resident behavior (or the absence of behavior) or surveying affected individuals.

The assessment should measure the impact the response has on the problem and not rely on activity or process measurements. In the graffiti example, recording the numbers of arrests or citations for graffiti painting, the number of recreational program attendees, or the number of light fixtures erected in the neighborhood is useful only in describing responses. These measurements reveal nothing about the impact of the response on the problem. Useful assessment measures could include reduced fear, fewer street robberies, or elimination of graffiti in a specific location. Good assessment or evaluation plans also typically include several measures that might capture "unintended consequences." For example, a successful response to a graffiti problem on a public wall might result in more elderly persons or families using the area, indicating their reduced fear. In addition, new stores may move into the neighborhood as a welcome but unanticipated consequence.

Good assessment or evaluation plans also typically include several measures that might capture "unintended consequences."

Collecting Comparison Data

There are no definite rules for assessing gang problems. Generally, the methods of information collection used in analysis can be replicated during assessment. Good analysis helps develop good responses, while good assessment measures success. Unfortunately, analysis and assessment are the most commonly ignored stages of problem solving. Valuable information about problems and effective responses to them is often lost simply because assessments are not conducted.

Assessments need not be difficult. Collecting a handful of measures (perhaps four or five) from different vantage points should demonstrate that a response eliminated or reduced the problem. Thus, a formal assessment of a specific graffiti problem may include taking the following measurements before and after the response is implemented:

- ❑ Photographs of the marked surface.
- ❑ A table reporting the frequency, size, and duration of graffiti. This monitoring can be carried out before, during, and after the course of the response, perhaps weekly.
- ❑ A survey of area residents to determine any change in their level of fear.
- ❑ Statistics on sales or thefts of spray paint in area stores.

- ❑ Retail sales figures of stores adjacent to the problem area.
- ❑ Counts and descriptions of persons using public areas near the graffiti.

It is important to take multiple measurements during an assessment in case some measurements are not sensitive enough to illustrate impact.

It is important to take multiple measurements during an assessment in case some measurements are not sensitive enough to illustrate impact. For example, a lag period often occurs in attempts to reduce fear of community problems. It often takes time for people to become convinced that the source of their fear will not return. Thus, the first two types of data mentioned—photographs and counts of frequency, size, and duration—may become the most important (or only useful) measurements of impact. If a group relies solely on surveys to measure fear, the disappointing results might suggest that the response was ineffective. Clearly, the goals are to achieve and to be able to claim success as a result of the group's efforts.

Regardless of the type of response implemented, the same assessment techniques can be used to measure impact. For example, the previously mentioned measures are appropriate for a paint-out program, a graffiti reporting hotline, or a recreational program that serves children (likely offenders) in the area near the graffiti; intensified police or citizen patrols; increased lighting in the area; or a newly installed graffiti-resistant surface.

Assessing the effectiveness of the problem-solving effort emphasizes the importance of developing clearly defined goals, thoroughly documenting the entire process, and taking baseline measurements. In many cases, work done on the project is not documented making it difficult to attribute any impact to the problem-solving effort. Similarly, failure to measure the magnitude of the problem before initiating a response makes it difficult to prove conclusively that conditions improved after the response was implemented.

Conclusion

This monograph has identified four barriers to addressing gang problems—difficulties in defining gang problems, forming successful collaborations, discerning the difference between ends and means, and determining impact. The Comprehensive Gang Initiative model provides a method for overcoming those barriers. It is a dynamic, ongoing process that provides guidance in examining a problem and finding out what factors allow the problem to persist. Answering the questions raised by the model is essential in selecting appropriate responses to gang-related problems in communities.

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Sources for Further Information

For more information on the Comprehensive Gang Initiative, contact:

Police Executive Research Forum
1120 Connecticut Avenue NW., Suite 910
Washington, DC 20036
202–466–7820
Contact: John Stedman

For more information on community efforts to combat gang activity, contact:

Department of Justice Response Center
1–800–421–6770

Bureau of Justice Assistance Clearinghouse
Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849–6000
1–800–688–4252

Problem-Solving Worksheet

This worksheet is only a guide. If answers are not available for all questions, you can use the worksheet to brainstorm and stimulate thinking and understanding of the problem.

I. List problems identified.

II. Prioritize problems.

Assign priorities by numbering the above problems in order of importance. (The frequency, duration, and severity of the problem as well as the number of persons affected by the problem may also be used in ranking problems.)

III. Select a specific problem.

The problem selected need not be the one listed as the most important in your priority ranking. A less important, more manageable problem may be selected.

IV. Frame the selected problem within the following statement.

(Victims) are (harmed) by the (behaviors) of (offenders) at (places) at (times).
Specify information for each parenthetical blank.

If all items in this statement cannot be specified, additional basic information about the problem must be collected.

V. Determine general goals of the problem-solving effort.

What would be the tangible effects in the community if the problem were removed?

VI. Analyze the problem.	
1. What is the harmful behavior caused by the problem you selected in Section III?	**What are your sources of information?***
a. What harms are occurring?	
b. How is the harmful behavior carried out?	
c. How long does it take for the problem to occur?	
d. How often does it occur?	

*Sources of information include:

Surveys or interviews: of residents, victims, store clerks or managers, passersby, neighbors, offenders, police officers, detectives, security personnel, parks and recreation personnel, and teachers.

Observations: look at the locations: record pedestrian and vehicular traffic counts; record demographic measures and activities of persons in the area of the harmful behavior; measure lighting and ambient noise; count the incidence of litter, vandalism, graffiti, abandoned cars, or other environmental features of the area.

Statistics: police incidence reports, calls for service, or other records; court records; school attendance records, including truancy and suspension; sales receipts for businesses and sales of specific tools (such as spray paint).

1. What is the harmful behavior? (continued)	What are your sources of information?
e. Are there secondary harms (for example, has business in a store or a certain block declined because of robberies)?	
2. Who are the victims?	**What are your sources of information?**
a. What are their age, sex, race, appearance, size, dress, and other shared features?	
b. Who could prevent the victims from being harmed (guardians)?	
c. What tools could prevent the victims from being harmed?	
d. What are the victims involved in before and during the harmful behavior?	

2. Who are the victims? (continued)	**What are your sources of information?**
e. How do the victims travel to and from the location of the problem?	
f. Are victims alone or with others?	
g. Are there secondary victims of the harmful behavior? If so, who are they and how are they harmed?	
3. Who are the offenders?	**What are your sources of information?**
a. What are the names, age, sex, race, appearance, size, dress, and other shared features?	
b. What are the behaviors of offenders that are causing harm?	

3. Who are the offenders? (continued)	What are your sources of information?
c. What benefits do the offenders gain from their harmful behaviors?	
d. What tools enable their harmful behaviors?	
e. What is the source of the tools? How are they obtained?	
f. How do the offenders travel to and from the location of the problem?	
g. Who could prevent the offenders' behaviors (controllers)?	

3. Who are the offenders? (continued)	**What are your sources of information?**
h. What activities are the offenders involved in before and during the harmful behaviors?	
i. Do offenders act alone or with others?	
4. Who are the third parties?	**What are your sources of information?**
a. Who is responsible for overseeing the place where the problem occurs (managers)?	
b. Are there other persons who use the location and may observe the harmful behavior?	

5. What is the specific location of the problem? Are there multiple locations?	**What are your sources of information?**
a. What tools (or lack of tools) at the location enable or encourage the harmful behavior?	
b. What policies or practices enable or encourage the problem to occur (for example, bus schedules, opening and closing hours, plentiful seating, and playing of pleasant music)?	
c. What physical barriers are present or absent in the location (for example, barriers to visual observation such as store counters, walls, high shrubbery, or roadways)?	
d. What are the environmental conditions in the location (for example, well-lit or dark area, outdoors or indoors, heated or cooled, music or entertainment, benches that encourage loitering)?	

6. When does this problem occur?	**What are your sources of information?**
a. At what times of day does the problem occur?	
b. On what days of the week does the problem occur?	
c. During what months does the problem occur?	
d. What environmental conditions exist when the problem occurs (for example, dark or light and rain or clear)?	
e. What social conditions exist when the problem occurs (for example, rush hour, school dismissal, or lunchtime)?	

VII. Highlight the major or unusual findings in the analysis.

Look for innovative opportunities for intervention that show promise for effectiveness.

VIII. Rewrite the problem statement.

Using information from Sections VI and VII, add more specific information:

(Victims) are (harmed) by the (behaviors) of (offenders) at (places) at (times). Specify each.

IX. Brainstorm responses.

List possible options for addressing the problem. Consider all options (even outlandish ideas, such as tearing down a building or closing off a street). Review all findings in the problem-analysis guide to suggest new responses. Consider a wide variety of resources for assisting with the implementation of the strategy.

X. Develop strategies.

XI. Evaluate your efforts.

Referring back to the general goals (Section V) and using the information from problem analysis (Section VI), select four or five measures closely related to the problem-solving strategies to show effectiveness. ***Remember, the assessment should focus on the problem statement rather than on the response.*** This evaluation should answer the following questions: Is the problem reduced or eliminated? How can this reduction be documented? Are there fewer victims? Is there reduced frequency of the problem?

Bureau of Justice Assistance Information

General Information

Callers may contact the U.S. Department of Justice Response Center for general information or specific needs, such as assistance in submitting grants applications and information on training. To contact the Response Center, call 1–800–421–6770 or write to 1100 Vermont Avenue NW., Washington, DC 20005.

Indepth Information

For more indepth information about BJA, its programs, and its funding opportunities, requesters can call the BJA Clearinghouse. The BJA Clearinghouse, a component of the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS), shares BJA program information with state and local agencies and community groups across the country. Information specialists are available to provide reference and referral services, publication distribution, participation and support for conferences, and other networking and outreach activities. The Clearinghouse can be reached by:

- **Mail**
  P.O. Box 6000
  Rockville, MD 20849–6000
- **Visit**
  2277 Research Boulevard
  Rockville, MD 20850
- **Telephone**
  1–800–688–4252
  Monday through Friday
  8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m.
  eastern time
- **Fax**
  301–519–5212
- **Fax on Demand**
  1–800–688–4252
- **BJA Home Page**
  http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA
- **NCJRS World Wide Web**
  http://www.ncjrs.org
- **E-mail**
  askncjrs@ncjrs.org
- **JUSTINFO Newsletter**
  E-mail to listproc@ncjrs.org
  Leave the subject line blank
  In the body of the message, type:
  subscribe justinfo
  [your name]

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