



# BJA Bureau of Justice Assistance Fact Sheet

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## Comprehensive Gang Initiative Program

The phenomenon of 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. These gangs generally are of some specific ethnic or cultural orientation, and thus pose very different and extremely difficult operational problems for criminal justice agencies in developing appropriate responses to the problems.

### Background

In 1988 in response to nationwide increases in the trafficking of crack cocaine by street gangs, the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), U.S. Department of Justice, began concentrating on gangs as a distinct criminal element. BJA provided funding to the Institute for Law and Justice (ILJ)—a nonprofit organization specializing in criminal justice issues—to implement the Urban Street Gang Drug Trafficking Enforcement Program. The purpose of the program was to develop and demonstrate citywide and multijurisdictional enforcement strategies to investigate and prosecute drug distribution and related violent crimes committed by organized urban street gangs. These strategies were used successfully by seven demonstration sites between 1989 and 1994 to combat crime committed by urban street gangs. In addition, the strategies were developed into a prototype to benefit urban jurisdictions nationwide in which street gangs engaged in drug trafficking have become an emerging or chronic problem. This prototype, documented by ILJ, will be detailed in a monograph, *Urban Street Gang Drug Trafficking Enforcement Program Model*, in early 1996.

### Comprehensive Gang Initiative

Despite the success of the Urban Street Gang Drug Trafficking Enforcement Program, BJA recognized that, to be effective over longer periods of time, programs aimed at combating gang-related criminal activity must incorporate both crime prevention and crime control initiatives. Accordingly, in October 1991 BJA awarded a grant for the development of a prototype model of the Comprehensive Gang Initiative to the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF)—a nonprofit organization specializing in criminal justice research—in conjunction with the COSMOS Corporation—a nonprofit research organization specializing in social services issues.

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

- ❑ **Adaptability**—The model must be applicable to a variety of gangs within a jurisdiction and to the many different types of gang problems.
- ❑ **Flexibility**—The model must allow modifications to be made in anticipation of, or in response to, transformations, as gang problems inevitably change in response to intervention and prevention efforts and to changing circumstances within communities.
- ❑ **Multifaceted approach**—The model calls for a variety of government and private agencies to work with police and community members to simultaneously address the many factors that create and sustain gang problems.

This 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 en-

forcement agencies, and numerous public and private organizations can implement this prototype. A monograph, *How To Develop and Implement Local Gang Prevention and Control Programs*, detailing this prototype will be available in early 1996.

In 1993 BJA introduced the Comprehensive Gang Initiative demonstration program to implement the prototype model at four demonstration sites. The four sites selected for demonstration included the Suffolk County, Massachusetts, District Attorney's Office; the Tri-Cities 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.

In FY 1995 BJA continued funding for the four Comprehensive Gang Initiative demonstration sites and will provide continuation funding in 1996. In addition, 10 sites participating in BJA's Comprehensive Communities Program (CCP) will receive funding in 1996 to implement the Comprehensive Gang Initiative Program model. CCP provided funding in FY 1995 to 16 jurisdictions with high rates of crime for the development of a strategy that demonstrates a jurisdiction-wide commitment to community policing, coordination among public and private agencies, and an active role by the community in problem solving.

## Program Goals

The Comprehensive Gang Initiative is a dynamic, ongoing effort that brings agencies and individuals together to reduce gang-related harm in communities. Its goals are:

- ❑ To identify promising and effective programs for preventing and controlling gang-related drug trafficking and violence.
- ❑ To provide the capability to implement effective gang prevention and control programs in selected jurisdictions.
- ❑ To disseminate effective gang prevention and control programs.

## Key Program Components

The Comprehensive Gang Initiative model has the following key components:

- ❑ **A focus on harmful behaviors.** Concern about gangs stems from their harmful behavior toward individuals, the community, or property. This approach seeks to reduce or eliminate harmful behavior.
- ❑ **Continuous diagnosis of problems.** Understanding a problem requires collecting information about a problem and then carefully examining the problem's elements and possible causes. Responses can then be developed specifically for the defined problem.
- ❑ **Coordination of groups or agencies in their response.** The best approaches currently involve several agencies or groups handling a number of facets of local gang problems and focusing on suppression, intervention, and prevention. Such efforts may include community groups working with schools, parks and recreation, prosecutors, the police, and other public and private organizations.
- ❑ **Monitoring of performance.** Responses to problems must be continually monitored to ensure that they are proceeding as planned, to determine if the response is solving the problem, and to detect signs indicating the response needs to be modified, either because the nature of the problem has changed or because the response resulted in unintended negative effects.
- ❑ **Evaluation of impact.** Evaluation of responses to gang problems is conducted to help persons in authority decide whether a response was successful and whether it should be continued, and to help managers and staff improve their selected responses.
- ❑ **Adaptation to change.** As a result of the direct responses to gang problems and the indirect impact of demographic and economic changes, the nature of gang-related problems is likely to change. Communities involved in gang problem solving must adapt their responses to these changes.

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## Technical Assistance

Under a grant funded and administered by BJA, PERF provides on-site and telephone technical assistance and support to the 4 demonstration sites and the 10 sites implementing the gang initiative under the Comprehensive Communities Program. Limited telephone technical assistance is available at no cost from PERF to other communities interested in implementing the Comprehensive Gang Initiative model.

## For Further Information

For additional information about the Comprehensive Gang Initiative Program and technical assistance, contact:

### **Police Executive Research Forum**

Suite 9102  
300 M Street NW.  
Washington, DC 20037  
Tel: 1-202-466-7820

For other gang-related information, contact:

### ***Law Enforcement Branch***

#### **Bureau of Justice Assistance**

633 Indiana Avenue NW.  
Washington, DC 20531  
Tel: 1-202-514-5943

To be included in the mailing list for forthcoming BJA gang-related publications, contact:

### **Bureau of Justice Assistance Clearinghouse**

P.O. Box 6000  
Rockville, MD 20849-6000  
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Fax: 1-301-251-5212  
Bulletin Board System: 1-301-738-8895  
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### **U.S. Department of Justice Response Center**

Tel: 1-800-421-6770

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