

## Municipal Action Guide

### Evaluating Comprehensive Strategies to Reduce Gang-related Violence: A Municipal Action Guide

Angela M. Wolf, Ph.D.

#### The Challenge

Gang activity and gang-related violence plague cities across the country. Municipal leaders often respond by engaging multiple stakeholders to design comprehensive, local solutions that typically include a range of prevention, intervention, and suppression approaches. These strategic planning initiatives guide cities in assessing the nature and scope of the problem; defining goals, service strategies, and programming priorities; and identifying ways to coordinate and focus efforts. While evidence-based best practices offer a range of specific and focused methods to draw upon, cities and counties must consider “what works” or is replicable based on their unique set of circumstances and needs. Evaluation data can impart critical information for project stakeholders to use in determining the impact of a comprehensive initiative.

Significant investment is required for developing, designing, and implementing an evaluation. In difficult economies, funding for evaluation is often placed last, after service delivery and implementation oversight. Assessing individual program outcomes and grantee accomplishments generally proves easier than measuring the success of an entire initiative. The number of variables involved in a comprehensive planning effort requires complex evaluation design and data collection methods. Also, the complexity of implementing a comprehensive approach in a frequently changing political and economic environment, with a wide range of interrelated outcomes achieved over varying amounts of time, makes measuring and interpreting results particularly difficult.

#### Strategies

Evaluation illuminates the overall value of a given strategy and approach. It can justify ongoing investment and resource expenditures for gang violence prevention, recommend how to focus efforts moving forward, and demonstrate overall results. For policymakers, evaluation can establish that changes in policy or practice have helped reduce gang violence and increased community safety in cost-effective ways. For agency heads and administrators, evaluation can aid in decisions concerning whether new and existing programs should be continued, improved, expanded, or curtailed. For frontline staff, evaluation can provide an important source of participant feedback and program refinement. For all stakeholders, evaluation can explain how the implementation of strategic priorities has impacted service delivery, collaboration, funding, and administrative functioning.

Each city or county will want to tailor its evaluation strategy, using different methods at different times, to understand different aspects of its comprehensive initiative. While the range of available approaches is wide and varied, a comprehensive initiative might want to consider one or more of the following:

#### Service Delivery Implementation and Impact Evaluation

Comprehensive gang violence reduction/prevention strategies frequently recommend new or targeted programs (e.g., job readiness training, truancy prevention, mentoring, wraparound case management). Evaluation can help cities understand more about the implementation and impact of these services. Evaluators might look at who was served, what services were delivered, the duration and frequency of services, the cost of services, and the individual changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior that resulted from service delivery. Oakland’s “Measure Y” evaluation initiative considers whether funded programs are reaching the right populations, whether positive change is occurring for individuals and neighborhoods, and whether the cumulative package of services is impacting the overall problem. The evaluation focuses on assessing (1) intermediate and long-term outcomes (including employment status, truancy and suspension rates, and criminal justice involvement); (2) individual assets and risk factors; and (3) client changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior as a result of participation. Evaluators annually administer client

pre-/post-tests, analyze service data, and examine crime trends. The 2009–2010 Measure Y evaluation report provides detailed data about the total cost for services, aggregate client demographics, service hours delivered, and a variety of youth outcomes. One of the most significant findings demonstrates an overall decrease in recidivism for youth and adult probationers and parolees receiving Measure Y services. Work experience and vocational training programs are most closely linked to these reductions.

<http://measurey.org/evaluation>

### Systems-change Evaluation

Documenting how a comprehensive strategy has affected the way systems operate and work together to reduce gang activity and violence in a given city or county can provide further evidence for municipal leaders about the impact of an initiative. Systems-change evaluations study shifts in policy, governance, funding, data sharing, or administration (e.g., the passage of new tax measures, the creation of new oversight commissions, the appointment of new administrative entities/officials to manage operations, the implementation of new performance measurement systems, etc.). The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation–funded “Reclaiming Futures” initiative looked at the impact of systems-change efforts in 10 unique communities across the country using 10 different inter-organizational reform efforts to deliver substance abuse services for youth offenders. Researchers conducted biannual surveys of between 10 and 40 people per site over a three-year period to assess the quality and effectiveness of the local juvenile justice and substance abuse treatment systems. Findings showed positive and statistically significant changes at each site across a range of key indicators including overall effectiveness of treatment, the role of families, the use of screening and assessment tools, and the use of client information in planning interventions for youth.

<http://www.reclaimingfutures.org/evaluation>

### Population-level Outcomes

In addition to analyzing the impact of program delivery and systems-change efforts, evaluation can highlight how an initiative has affected population-level indicators such as educational attainment, job placement, unemployment, and health status. Santa Rosa’s “CHOICE” program evaluation model includes an assessment of the long-term effect on youth outcomes such as education status, school dropout, and community-wide violence indicators. The analysis provides a “big picture” perspective on how the community is faring over time and highlights whether broader impacts are occurring beyond those attributable to service delivery. The most recent data suggest that indicators are generally trending in a positive direction. Over the past five years, rates of juvenile arrests and weapons offenses are lower; API school test scores are higher; and high school suspensions are down for Santa Rosa youth.

<http://ci.santa-rosa.ca.us/departments/recreationandparks/programs/MGPTF/CHOICEGrants/Pages/default.aspx>

### Community and Stakeholder Perceptions

Collecting information from community residents and other stakeholders offers further insight into the experiences of those served and those involved in the implementation of a comprehensive strategy. San Bernardino’s “Operation Phoenix” commissioned researchers from California State University–San Bernardino to study resident and business owner perceptions of the problem and the changes attributable to implementation after an initial eight-month period. Findings revealed that residents felt safety had improved overall, the target neighborhood was a better place to live, and police were resolving more problems. Business owners reported seeing more customers in their stores and feeling more comfortable with increased police presence. The full data set is available online.

[http://www.ci.san-bernardino.ca.us/cityhall/mayor/operation\\_phoenix/operation\\_phoenix\\_homepage.asp](http://www.ci.san-bernardino.ca.us/cityhall/mayor/operation_phoenix/operation_phoenix_homepage.asp)

Using multiple approaches simultaneously offers municipal leaders both a range of information and a variety of viewpoints/perspectives on their initiative. In addition, considering what others in the field are doing can inform evaluation design and development. Several case examples (including three from the California Cities Gang Prevention Network) are included at the end of this paper as references for cities and counties considering how to evaluate their work.

<http://www.ccgpn.org>

### Common Evaluation Questions

- How has the collaborative defined the scope and nature of its strategy?
- Does the strategy have clear goals and objectives (both process and outcome) that can be measured over time?
- What are the components of the strategy (administrative and operational changes, new or reorganized programs, population-specific services, etc.)?
- Is implementation proceeding as intended?
- How well are the goals and objectives being met?
- Is the strategy having the desired impact on reducing violence? Which component(s)?
- Is the impact sufficient to justify the time and expense?

## Action Steps

While evaluation designs vary depending on the strategies, needs, and resources of each initiative, the action steps below provide a road map for cities wanting to understand the impact of their comprehensive approach.

**1. Identify resources to support evaluation.** Unless a city finds alignment with a researcher who already has institutional backing, evaluation comes at some cost. Some cities have mitigated the expense by building evaluation into the total budget of their initiative, earmarking a certain percentage of the total for these costs (e.g., Oakland's Measure Y legislation allocates 3% annually to evaluation). Other cities (e.g., Minneapolis, Chicago, and Memphis) have looked to private foundations or the private sector to support their evaluation work. A third option is to engage a university with a vested interest in violence prevention to sign on as a partner (e.g., the Naval Postgraduate School in Salinas helped that city design and evaluate its initiative).

**2. Consider evaluation results when planning programming.** Including evaluation as a priority from the beginning will provide ongoing insight into the successes and challenges of an initiative in a given community. While assessing the full impact of a strategy on long-term outcomes (e.g., homicide rate reductions) may take years, measuring intermediate outcomes, such as the number of youth receiving services or staying in school, can demonstrate a positive impact in the short run. These results can guide decisions about program planning and resource investment, and have the added benefit of creating energy and momentum for the initiative.

**3. Engage an independent evaluator.** Hiring a third-party evaluator brings an unbiased, academic perspective to the analysis of a comprehensive strategy. Find someone with experience in violence prevention and gang violence reduction who is familiar with a wide range of social science methods and is a "good fit" with the components of the initiative. For example, a strategy designed to increase community engagement in gang violence prevention efforts requires an evaluator who understands linkages across systems and who has experience working with diverse community members and groups.

Engaging an evaluator from the outset enables this person or team to help develop the theoretical underpinnings of the strategy, linking the proposed interventions, resources, and outcomes together. A logic model or theory of change describes the comprehensive approach, what it will do, and how it is connected to the results, and can often serve as the foundation for an evaluation design.

The complex nature of comprehensive violence prevention requires a significant level of collaboration, cooperation, and information sharing between partners and the evaluator. All stakeholders need to have realistic expectations regarding the

evaluation's timeline, focus, and scope, and provide access to data as necessary. Cities must also work with their evaluator to define specific deliverable requirements of the evaluation and a system for how results are fed back to the project team, including data analysis, interim and final reports, and recommendations or conclusions.

**4. Determine the scope and depth of evaluation.** Good evaluation should yield descriptive results that indicate what was successful and what did not work for the given questions being studied. Defining the questions to address is an important initial step in the process. Some examples might include the following: How many youth were served as a result of new programming? Do service providers experience value added from collaboration? Is there an increase in information and data sharing, and what forms does it take? Do community members feel safer in their communities?

Establishing consistent definitions between stakeholders and identifying specific outcomes for study ensure that findings are relevant. When possible, evaluation should choose variables that are defined similarly by different stakeholders and for which data can be reliably and economically collected from existing data sources.

In addition, incorporating multiple methods in the evaluation design offers different insights into the effectiveness and value of the strategy. Combining quantitative data (such as reductions in neighborhood gunfire) with qualitative information (such as the perspectives of community members on gun violence) will yield more robust results.

**5. Release evaluation results to the public.** Given increasingly strained city budgets, transparency and accountability are vitally important to the public, particularly when tax dollars are at stake. Cities and counties should not only share evaluation results internally with the stakeholders involved, but also publicize findings broadly to build support for the strategy as it moves forward. Positive results provide a rationale for continuing the work. Less promising findings allow for refinements in the approach before additional resources are sought or spent.

**6. Establish a schedule for future/ongoing rounds of evaluation.** Evaluation is a continuous, iterative process, which works best when built into each stage of planning and implementation. Findings inform ongoing strategy development, ensure that the desired effects occur, offer lessons for stakeholders, and suggest how to overcome limitations and challenges along the way.

## Resources

### California Cities Gang Prevention Network

The first of its kind in the nation, the California Cities Gang Prevention Network is a collaborative effort between the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) and the National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education, and Families to reduce gang violence and victimization in 13 major California cities. It focuses on identifying and publicizing successful policies and practices that interweave prevention, intervention, and enforcement. The project's website houses detailed descriptions of Network initiatives, relevant and downloadable publications, and information about model strategies for comprehensive gang prevention. Cities can subscribe to receive regular Network bulletins that share news, describe promising strategies, and report on policy changes or funding opportunities by emailing [lgutierrez@sf.nccd-crc.org](mailto:lgutierrez@sf.nccd-crc.org). <http://www.ccgpn.org>

### The National Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center

Housed at the Justice Research and Statistics Association, the National Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center is a new initiative funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) that will provide evaluation and performance measurement information, along with technical assistance, to states and municipalities. The web-based resource center will include evaluation-related publications and a survey of state and local OJJDP grantees that assesses evaluation capabilities and needs. <http://www.jrsa.org/programs/jjec.htm>

### The National Gang Center

The National Gang Center website maintains the latest research about gang involvement; descriptions of evidence-based anti-gang programs; and links to tools, databases, and other resources to assist in developing and implementing effective community-based gang prevention, intervention, and suppression strategies. A number of evaluation articles and summaries are available online. <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/>

## Evaluation Case Examples

### OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model

A foundation of gang violence prevention initiatives today, the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model encouraged cities to focus not just on the needs of individual gang-involved youth but also those of families, organizations, and the larger community. OJJDP has conducted two separate evaluations of the "Spergel model" in several cohorts of cities implementing the approach. The evaluations used a variety of methods, including observation, document review, and one-on-one interviews, to study the factors contributing to success at each site. Findings highlighted that a comprehensive initiative should include a range of strategic priorities such as community mobilization,

social intervention, opportunity provision, suppression, and organizational change strategies. Successful sites had support from local government leadership; incorporated inter-organizational collaboration; targeted gang members and at-risk gang youth; and included a combination and balance of change activities. In addition, strong steering committees, an understanding of local resources and gang problems, OJJDP management and leadership, and strong collaboration and communication among stakeholders influenced the initiative's overall impact. Outcomes included reductions in gang violence and drug-related offenses, increased community awareness, the development of local partnerships to address gang crime, and a deeper understanding of the local gang problem.

<http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/230106.pdf>

### Minneapolis Blueprint for Action

The city of Minneapolis created a "Blueprint for Action" in 2007 (<http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/dhfs/blueprint.pdf>) that defined youth violence as a public health concern and set forth a holistic, multifaceted approach for prevention. The effort was convened by the mayor and co-chaired by the Minneapolis Foundation and an executive from General Mills. The plan outlined four core goals, a series of specific recommendations, and nine key measures to assess results and impact: (1) youth homicide rates, (2) youth aggravated assault rates, (3) school discipline, (4) curfew violations, (5) truancy pick-ups, (6) weapons possession arrests, (7) teen pregnancy, (8) funding for youth development, and (9) high school graduation.

The Blueprint was launched in January 2008, and the Minneapolis Foundation conducted a retrospective analysis of its impact in August 2009 ([http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/dhfs/TMF\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/dhfs/TMF_Report_Final.pdf)). Stakeholder interviews, document review, and case studies revealed accomplishments and lessons learned, and directed future violence prevention efforts. The findings demonstrated that the Blueprint elevated the issue of youth violence, helped leverage additional funding and support, improved collaboration, and engaged the entire community. Among the many recommendations for the future was the use of a developmental evaluation approach—making a long-term investment in continuous quality improvement, adaptation, and intentional change through open-ended questions to guide service development. Developmental evaluation research questions might include "What aspects of the program are most helpful to youth staying in school?" and "How aware are local residents of the violence prevention resources available?"

### Cincinnati Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV)

CIRV is a multi-agency, community-focused collaborative initiative started in 2007 to stop gun violence and associated homicides. Modeled after the Boston Gun Project, CIRV brings together local law-enforcement agencies, social service providers, and community groups to employ a range of strategies including call-in sessions with probationers and parolees, street and community-based outreach, and media campaigns to communicate a zero tolerance for gun violence. The University

of Cincinnati Policing Institute (UCPI) provides research and evaluation support.

CIRV collected significant data before implementation to understand the extent of gun-related homicides in Cincinnati and to identify the street groups involved. Homicide reviews and descriptive studies of street group/gang activities are now conducted annually to guide enforcement efforts and provide comparison points when assessing the impact of the initiative. UCPI prepares an annual report of the process and outcomes related to implementation (<http://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/police/pages/-32719-/>). Results from the first two years indicated a significant decrease in citywide homicide rates. As the initiative continues, UCPI will have the capacity to utilize more sophisticated statistical techniques when studying data trends over time to make more causal links between the outcomes and the CIRV strategy.

#### **Oakland's Measure Y Initiative**

Passed by Oakland voters in 2004, Measure Y allocates approximately \$19 million a year over 10 years to police, fire, and violence prevention programming. Oakland's violence reduction efforts are achieved through a multi-pronged effort informed by the principles of prevention, effective policing, and the targeting of resources to the most at-risk populations, with an emphasis on youth ages 14–25 and neighborhoods. Of the Measure Y funds, \$350,000 is set aside for evaluation activities conducted by Resource Development Associates and Gibson Associates.

The Measure Y evaluation assesses the extent to which the initiative has reduced violence in Oakland, with a primary focus on service delivery and program improvement. Annual reports include extensive data and analysis about Oakland's community policing effort and violence prevention programming, and the impact of the initiative on rates of violence along with other outcomes including truancy, recidivism, employment, and school performance. These reports are published online at <http://measurey.org/evaluation>. The 2008–2009 evaluation report (<http://measurey.org/index.php?page=past-evaluation-reports>) includes a variety of data collection strategies and considers a number of variables. Funded programs are compared with national, field-based best practice models. Service implementation is monitored through site visits, review of program documents and data, and key informant interviews. Outcomes are assessed through matching client service data (client surveys, interviews, and analysis) with public systems data provided by the Oakland Unified School District, the Alameda County Juvenile Probation Department, and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. The impact of community policing is analyzed through key informant interviews, resident surveys, case studies of six communities, and crime trend analysis. The 2008–2009 final report also includes sample evaluation tools as an appendix.

#### **Santa Rosa CHOICE Program**

As in Oakland, voters in Santa Rosa elected to support a ballot initiative in 2004 (Measure O) that provided additional funding for the city's police, fire, and gang prevention/intervention services for the subsequent 20 years through a sales tax increase. Community Crime Prevention Associates oversees the evaluation of the CHOICE program.

The annual evaluation examines four components of the strategy implementation: effort, effect, performance, and results.

- Effort refers to the services delivered, including how money was spent, who was served, what services were delivered, the duration and frequency of services, and what services cost.
- Effect looks at the feedback and experiences of those served in terms of their satisfaction as clients and their individual outcomes (changes in skills, knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors as a result of services received).
- Performance describes whether grantees met their expected goals for efficiency and effectiveness compared with priorities outlined in the CHOICE strategic plan.
- Results provide population-level data on indicators including health status, wellness, and education of youth in Santa Rosa.

A yearly report compiles data into a comprehensive assessment of the overall impact of the initiative and includes program evaluations for each funded program. It is available online.

<http://ci.santa-rosa.ca.us/departments/recreationandparks/programs/MGPTF/CHOICEGrants/Pages/default.aspx>

#### **San Bernardino's Operation Phoenix**

Operation Phoenix is San Bernardino's comprehensive 18-point plan to address crime and violence in a 20-block, severely impacted area of the city using suppression, intervention, and prevention strategies. The collaborative tracks violent crime trend data to assess the impact of Operation Phoenix on the target neighborhood over time. In addition, evaluators from California State University–San Bernardino were commissioned to study resident perceptions of the problem and changes attributable to implementation after an initial eight-month period. The survey included questions on neighborhood safety, police response, and resident commitment to the community. It also asked residents to rank the severity of problems in the neighborhood, identify the highest priority needs that remain, and give qualitative perspective on the impact of the initiative. Detailed findings can be found on the Operation Phoenix website.

[http://www.ci.san-bernardino.ca.us/cityhall/mayor/operation\\_phoenix/operation\\_phoenix\\_homepage.asp](http://www.ci.san-bernardino.ca.us/cityhall/mayor/operation_phoenix/operation_phoenix_homepage.asp)

### **Los Angeles Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD) Program**

GRYD is a multi-year effort established in 2007 to reduce crime and violence associated with street gangs in Los Angeles through prevention, intervention, and suppression strategies. The evaluation design includes both an implementation assessment to provide feedback on the program approach and an outcome assessment to look at changes over time in at-risk levels, gang membership, and community reductions in violence and criminality attributable to the program.

Conducted by the Urban Institute's Justice Policy Center and Harder + Company, the Year 1 implementation evaluation report included an observation of GRYD planning activities; collection and review of relevant documents from service providers; interviews with initiative staff, service providers, local gang detectives, and other gang officers; and onsite observations. While outcome data were collected from the outset, these findings were limited initially because of the need to create standardized information-sharing systems. The first report, published in October 2010, examined the accomplishments and challenges associated with early implementation of the initiative, and outlined the creation of a research design and data collection methods to monitor results moving forward. It is a useful document for early-stage comprehensive initiatives and explains some of the specific lessons learned (such as including program evaluation requirements in service contracts) to help advance evaluation efforts. The report is available online. <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412251-LA-Gang-Reduction.pdf>

## **References**

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*Findings From the Evaluation of OJJDP's Gang Reduction Program*, Meagan Cahill and David Hayeslip, December 2010. <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/230106.pdf>

### **OJJDP's National Youth Gang Center Bulletin**

*Mobilizing Communities to Address Gang Problems*, J.C. Howell and David Curry, January 2009. <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Content/Documents/NYGC-bulletin-4.pdf>

### **OJJDP's Youth Gang Programs and Strategies Report**

J.C. Howell, August 2000. <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/171154.pdf>