

PLAN STRATEGICALLY*

Strategic Overview

The Action Brief *Why Invest* outlined the social harm caused by crime, drew attention to the ever-increasing proportion of municipal taxes devoted to police services and stressed the opportunity costs to cities of not using the “promise of prevention”. A key element in changing the situation is a permanent strategic planning process that uses data to guide programming.

Most Canadian cities have an overall strategic plan, a transportation plan, a health plan and so on. Few have a detailed plan to reduce crime and to enhance community safety.

The United Nations, the World Health Organization, and other organizations have recommended engaging key stakeholders such as residents, community leaders, police, and housing officials in a strategic planning process to reduce crime and to enhance community safety.

Ottawa, Montreal, and Waterloo Region are among the cities that are successfully pioneering crime prevention planning in Canada. Other cities including Edmonton, Halifax and Winnipeg are now engaged in the planning process.

Planning and implementing successful crime prevention programs will require additional resources. Experience in some Canadian communities has shown that a city will need to invest at least one dollar per citizen to establish and to sustain a process that will ensure scarce resources are effectively used to reduce crime and to enhance community safety. Action programs are over and above this investment.

Action for Municipal Stakeholders

1. Establish a strategic planning process involving key stakeholders in four key steps:
 - Analyze the crime problems in the city;
 - Establish priorities and select the best strategies;
 - Implement the programs;
 - Evaluate the process and its outcomes.
2. Manage the process through actions identified in *Take Responsibility* and *Engage the Public* while providing financial support as identified in *Why Invest* to allocate and attract the funds proposed in *Invest Smartly*.

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Justification

The Planning Process

Planning is one of the keys to successful crime prevention. This brief will outline some simple steps that you can take to ensure that programs implemented in your community will result in reduced crime and a better quality of life for residents. This brief focuses on long-term strategic planning, but a similar process can be applied to shorter-term local issues that must be resolved quickly.

The first step is to **analyze your community's crime and disorder problems** and to consider the community context of these problems. This information will help you to **set priorities**. You cannot do everything at once, so you need to determine which crimes and which communities should be targeted for prevention programs. This step is like a medical diagnosis — without detailed knowledge of the problem, it is difficult to recommend the proper treatment. Focusing on specific problems also helps determine who needs to be involved in prevention programs. It is much easier to coordinate the work of different agencies if everyone understands the nature of the problems and knows their role in preventing them.

The next step is **bringing community members together** to work on solutions. It is better to involve people at the planning stage rather than to develop programs and then ask for their help and cooperation. Initially, a planning group will have three tasks: to **help set priorities**; to **decide upon the best strategies** to use; and to develop ways of **involving the rest of the community in the implementation** of the selected programs.



The final steps are **to implement and to evaluate** your programs.

Experience has shown that this planning process is essential. Crime often reflects deep-seated problems in a community such as poverty, poor housing, and social exclusion. It is not easy to overcome these problems and to build a healthy community, but it can be accomplished if you do a good job of planning and implementation.

STEP 1 – Analyzing Problems and Setting Prevention Priorities I: AN OVERVIEW OF CRIME IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Your first task is to conduct an initial appraisal of your community's crime problems. This stage sets the context for the rest of your planning.

Key Questions about Crime

1. Which areas have the highest rates of crime?
2. What are the most serious crime problems in the highest crime neighbourhoods?
3. What are the trends in crime — is crime increasing or decreasing? Which communities are most affected by fear of crime?

Key Questions about the Community

1. What are the demographic characteristics of the highest crime neighbourhoods (i.e. age, race, gender, etc.)?

Sources of Data for Crime Prevention Planning

1. Crimes reported to the police – when most Canadians think about crime rates they mean Statistics Canada's reports of crimes recorded by all Canadian police departments. However, many crimes go unreported by victims.
2. Victimization surveys – a national victimization survey is conducted every five years by Statistics Canada. This provides information on crimes not reported to the police and detailed information about victims and risk factors.
3. Self-reported crime surveys – people can be asked about their offending.
4. Mapping studies – mapping studies carried out by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics in several cities show how crime is linked with neighbourhood characteristics.
5. Social indicators – measures of income, social networks, institutional resources, community engagement and other factors.

2. What are the economic trends in the highest crime neighbourhoods? Is there economic activity? Is there high unemployment?
3. What is the level of fear of crime in the neighbourhood?

The information collected at this stage will be used to help you to decide on your priorities.

II: SETTING PRIORITIES: WHICH PROBLEMS SHOULD BE ADDRESSED FIRST?

You will never have enough resources to deal with all your city's crime problems so you must set priorities. This can be difficult. How do you decide that you should put your limited resources into one high-crime neighbourhood rather than another? How do you determine that domestic violence should have a higher priority than armed robbery? While there are criteria that will help you make this decision, ultimately it is a matter of judgment. However, failure to decide upon your priority problems will spread your efforts so thinly that they will have little or no impact.

Some of the criteria you can consider are:

- Which neighbourhoods have the most serious crime problems?
- What crimes have the highest rates?
- Are some crimes increasing and others decreasing?

- Which crimes most concern community members?
- Which crimes might be the easiest to prevent?
- Are some problems already being adequately addressed by the community and the justice system?
- Would resources be more readily available to deal with some crimes rather than others?

III: ANALYZE YOUR TARGET PROBLEMS AND YOUR COMMUNITY

Your earlier analysis was a relatively quick process using readily available information. Once you have identified target crimes in particular neighbourhoods you should conduct a more detailed analysis. In addition to crime statistics, you may also wish to conduct community surveys, interview offenders, talk to key people in the community, and organize community meetings. You should get as much detail as possible at this stage. The more we know about the crime problem and its community context, the better our chances of success.

Problem Analysis – Information about Your Target Problems

- **Victim or target** characteristics
- **Offender** characteristics
- Patterns of the **location** of offenses
- **Times** when offenses are committed
- Involvement of **alcohol and drugs**
- **Opportunity factors** (such as inadequate lighting or inadequate supervision of apartment buildings)
- Distinctive **methods** of committing the crimes

Community Analysis – Information about Your Community

- **Social characteristics** such as age, gender, race and ethnicity, community stability, school issues, and general socio-economic conditions.
- **Physical characteristics** including type and condition of housing, population density, overall neighbourhood condition, transportation patterns, types of businesses and industries.

- **Community assets and strengths** including neighbourhood groups and associations, cultural groups, community leaders, stable institutions such as churches and businesses, recreational facilities, community programs, and funding programs.

STEP 2 – Selecting the Best Strategies

The most important recent development in crime prevention has been the emphasis on **evidence-based** crime prevention. Evidence-based prevention means using programs that have been successful elsewhere and **not** using programs that have been found to be unsuccessful — a lot of time and money has been wasted because programs are adopted despite research demonstrating that they have not worked elsewhere. You can still be innovative and develop new programs, but when doing this you should pay heed to the lessons that have been learned elsewhere.

Another lesson we have learned is that the most successful crime prevention initiatives are **comprehensive**. The causes of crime are very complex and there are no simple solutions. Rather than relying on a single program or strategy, you should use several different programs that are targeted at different aspects of the problem. To help you think of different strategies, consider these categories:

- Social Development – parenting programs, school programs
- Community Action – Neighbourhood Watch, Citizen Patrols
- Police Strategies – offender-oriented policing, location-oriented policing
- Physical Design – target hardening, improved lighting
- Administrative Strategies – zoning regulations, security ordinances

STEP 3 – Implementing Your Program

Your implementation plan will depend upon the specifics of your program and your community. However, all programs will need to consider two factors that are sometimes neglected.

First, there is a **need to involve the community** in your program. You should make special efforts to engage hard-to-reach groups who may be affected by crime.

Second, you need to consider **maintenance strategies**, so your program is sustained over time. Program activities frequently diminish over time as enthusiasm wanes. For example, neighbourhood turnover means that participation in programs such as Neighbourhood Watch will decline steadily over time unless newcomers are enrolled in the program.

STEP 4 – Evaluation

It is necessary to conduct both process and outcome evaluations. **Process evaluation** involves monitoring the implementation of your program. This is necessary to ensure that critical tasks are done on schedule and that each of the steps has been done properly.

Outcome evaluation involves assessing the impact of the program on the community. Outcome measures can include residents' perceived quality of life, levels of crime fear, and levels of crime. Evaluation allows you to assess your program and to make changes that are needed to ensure the program responds to new issues and opportunities. Evaluation is crucial to the development of effective future programs, as it helps planners to learn from successes and failures.