

Guidelines for developing a crime prevention strategy



Justice

1. Introduction

The Crime Prevention and Community Programs Division of the NSW Department of Police and Justice leads the development of evidence-based policies and programs to prevent crime and reduce reoffending in NSW. In achieving its objectives, the Division works in partnership with communities, government agencies, businesses and other service providers. The Division is committed to achieving goals identified in the NSW State Plan (www.nsw.gov.au/stateplan), specifically:

- reduced rate of crime, particularly violent crime
- reduced re-offending, and
- reduced levels of anti-social behaviour.

The *Children (Protection and Parental Responsibility) Act 1997* (“the Act”) provides for the Attorney General to support Councils leading crime prevention activity in NSW. Under Part 4 of the Act, Local Government is identified as the lead agency for identifying and implementing local crime prevention strategies in NSW. These guidelines support the development of an evidence-based strategy designed to reduce crime, as per the provisions of section 32 of the Act.

Pursuant to Part 4, Division 3 of the Act, the Division has processes to support the endorsement of a crime prevention strategy by the NSW Attorney General as a safer community compact. Councils whose endorsed safer community compact targets a priority crime are eligible to apply for a grant to implement the crime prevention strategy’s action plan.

2. Crime prevention strategies

Effective strategies that prevent crime involve firstly the acknowledgement of a crime risk and secondly the development of actions designed to reduce that risk. To be effective, it requires a thorough understanding of a local crime problem, where and when it occurs, who is committing it and who is affected by it.

Most crime that occurs is opportunistic, it’s not planned or very well thought through, and can be reduced by removing the opportunity to commit it and increasing the likelihood of an offender being caught. Crime occurs where the opportunity to commit it is high and the risk of being caught is low. Research into patterns of crime has shown that crime is not simply a function of where people live but reflects the opportunities for crimes to occur.

Crime is more likely to occur in some places rather than others (hotspots) and at some times more than others (e.g. alcohol related assault is more likely on Friday and Saturday nights and break and enters are more likely during weekdays). Crime is also more likely to be committed against some people more than others (e.g. repeat victims), and against some things more than others (such as stealing items that are easy to sell).

Our research and experience shows us that effective crime prevention and reduction measures target these factors specifically. Strategies that aim to reduce criminal opportunity and increase risk are known as situation prevention measures (refer to the Situational crime prevention

factsheet on the Preventing Crime website: www.crimeprevention.nsw.gov.au/Lawlink/cpd/ll_cpdiv.nsf/vwFiles/SituationalCrimePreventionFactsheet_March2008.pdf. It is these situational crime prevention techniques that are most effective in local crime prevention activities and should be the focus of a local crime prevention strategy. The “Twenty-five techniques of situational crime prevention” (page 2 of the factsheet) is useful for identifying local factors that may encourage or control crime.

3. Developing a crime prevention strategy

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There are five key stages in the development of a crime prevention strategy

1. Develop a crime profile
2. Research crime prevention approaches
3. Negotiate support
4. Develop an action plan
5. Implement and monitor your crime prevention strategy.

3.1 Develop a crime profile

A crime profile will allow you to get a clear idea of the types of crime affecting your area and help you to determine what type of crime will be the focus of your strategy. The crime profile should identify the level and types of the crime; where the crime occurs; and the factors that influence the incidence of that crime in a local setting. Acknowledgement of where and why a crime is occurring, who is committing it, and who are the victims of it will enable you to develop strategies that can specifically reduce that crime. A crime profile should be developed in partnership with your Police Local Area Command.

Data analysis

Analysis of crime trends in your local government area will help identify the most prevalent crime(s). The “LGA Ranking” and “Crime Trends” tools on the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) website can be used to identify where your LGA is ranked in NSW for key crimes, as well as long term trends for these crimes. When considering the key crime(s) to be targeted in your LGA, consider those crimes that have the greatest number of reported incidents; are consistently ranked significantly higher than NSW averages for that crime; and/or those that continually increase at a higher rate than they increase elsewhere in NSW.

The BOCSAR website (www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/bocsar) provides data for your whole LGA. Your Police Local Area Command can complement this data with details of key locations for crimes within the LGA; the factors that contribute to the occurrence of the crime; and a profile of who is involved in this crime, considering both offenders and potential victims.

Police will also be able to advise if there are any factors that may have caused a sudden increase in a crime, or whether the crime is likely to be impacted by other factors such as targeted Police operations. This information is essential to ensuring that your crime prevention strategy is relevant and targeted to local circumstances.

When considering crime data, it is important to note that certain crimes, such as assault and malicious damage, are often not reported. To gain evidence into the levels of under-reported crime, consult Police and consider data such as input from hospital admissions, reports to hotlines and Council registers (e.g. complaints, maintenance or graffiti). The data that informs your crime prevention strategy should be used as the baseline data for your evaluation.

Situational analysis

Once you have identified the crime you wish to target, use the 25 techniques of situational crime prevention tool to analyse the environment where crimes are most prevalent and explore why crimes occur there. Consider whether environmental design, maintenance or surveillance factors make it easier for crime to occur. If so, seek support from Police to conduct a Crime Prevention Through Environment Design (CPTED) audit. Factors such as poor lighting, overgrown foliage and placement of barriers or signage may be reducing the opportunity for natural surveillance.

Try to gain an understanding of why victims and offenders are in the area, and consider whether there is a chance to reduce the opportunity for offending, or reduce the vulnerability of potential victims. Give thought as to whether levels of offending are influenced by factors such as transport to or from the space; the service of alcohol in or near the space; or whether there are other attractions or services that could exacerbate crime, or that could potentially discourage crime.

Consult with Police and service providers to gain insight into other factors that contribute to the incidence of the crime in the area. Consider community input provided through community consultations for social and other planning purposes recently undertaken. Where further input is required, utilise existing community and service provider networks and interagencies to gain a broad perspective on the factors contributing to crime in the area.

Ensure that you actively engage agencies, businesses or community representatives who have information or expertise regarding the crime, victims and offenders, and potential victims and offenders. You should also consult with your Police

Local Area Command regarding their priorities and confirm that Police are in agreement with your proposed target crime.

Once you have considered all input, you need to consider whether you have access to the expertise, ability, resources and commitment needed to implement the Action Plan that will reduce the identified target crime. Consider what agencies and resources you can access, and ascertain their willingness to commit to a project.

3.2 Research crime prevention approaches

Once you have decided on the crime to be targeted, you should research actions or activities that have been proven to positively impact on the crime you are targeting. When considering suitable actions, ensure that they have been designed to reduce the risk factors and increase the protective factors relating to crime in your community.

For example, if you are researching actions or activities to reduce break and enter crimes, you would initially focus on target hardening, making it harder for the crime to be committed. If you also wanted to reduce the motivation for offenders, you would need to understand why they committed the crime and consider which agency is best placed to implement actions specifically designed to address those risk factors. Ensure that any actions or activities you consider have evidence in support of any outcomes claimed.

A review of crime prevention projects implemented by NSW councils came to a number of conclusions regarding the crime prevention approaches that councils were most effective at implementing. The report found that:

- Efficiently and effectively designed, managed and implemented programs are more likely to be successful than those that are not.
- Programs that have an employed program officer to oversee the program are more likely to be successful than those that do not.
- Programs that aimed to reduce theft crimes such as break enter and steal, steal from dwelling and steal from a retail store were most consistently successful.
- There was no evidence of community arts programs having successfully achieved a reduction in crime.
- Programs targeted at families and parents have generally been unsuccessful.
- No significant relationships were found between awareness raising strategies and changes in levels of crime reporting.

Generally, this review suggests that councils are most effective at implementing situational crime prevention activities. Crime prevention strategies should be developed in close consultation with Police to ensure that your action plan complements local police activity.

The following are useful resources for identifying evidence based crime prevention strategies:

- www.crimeprevention.nsw.gov.au
- www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk
- www.popcenter.org

3.3 Negotiate support

Once you have decided what strategies you are going to implement, you need to engage the support of any agencies that have an influence over the factors causing the crime or that may limit it (refer to Stakeholder

engagement factsheet, which is available at www.crimeprevention.nsw.gov.au/Lawlink/cpd/ll_cpdiv.nsf/vwFiles/StakeholderEngagementFactsheet_March2008.pdf.

For example if your analysis showed a problem with alcohol related crime in a particular area you would need to negotiate support with local licensees and transport providers as a start. You should also negotiate access to any data that you require to enable you to measure the impact of your action plan. Police should always be actively involved in the design and implementation of a crime prevention strategy. Your Police Local Area Command may have established a Community Safety Precinct Committee (CSPC). The CSPC may be able to provide assistance with the implementation and monitoring of your crime prevention strategy. Other participating agencies will vary depending on what crime you are targeting.

For example, if an action plan targets alcohol related assault, you should consider engaging representation from a local Liquor Accord; the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing; licensees; transport providers; Chamber of Commerce and health workers. If you are aiming to reduce retail theft, you should consider engaging the Chamber of Commerce; individual business owners, managers and security staff; shopping centre management; and the local Council.

If you have evidence that a particular group within your community is affected by the target crime, either as victim or offender, you should consult with a relevant network or inter-agency that represents or advocates for that group. For example, if a crime prevention strategy targets a crime that disproportionately impacts on young people, then youth representatives and youth service providers should be involved.

If your crime prevention strategy targets a crime that impacts on the local Aboriginal community, representation should be sought from Council's Aboriginal Consultative Committee, your local Aboriginal Community Justice Group, Aboriginal Community Working Party or Aboriginal service inter-agency.

It is also important that you involve all relevant council staff, such as planning and maintenance staff and rangers. Often, councils can address local crime problems by training and utilising existing staff and services.

3.4 Develop your crime prevention strategy

A crime prevention strategy comprises a crime profile and an action plan summarising strategies designed to reduce the targeted crime(s).

Crime profile

A crime profile should clearly and concisely summarise your data analysis and situational analysis, providing a clear rationale for the selection of the target crime, and the selection of any target locations or groups within the community. It should also include details of the factors that were identified as contributing to the incidence of that crime in your community. It is important that your profile provides a rationale for the focus of the crime prevention strategy without stigmatising people or places within the community.

Action plan

The action plan should concisely summarise the actions and activities you have selected to reduce the specific target crime. Should you wish to highlight existing services or programs that can impact on the crime, these should be briefly referenced in an introduction. You should also provide details of any agencies or businesses that have committed to support

you to implement the action plan and give a brief explanation of why they were selected. Your strategy should focus on a small number of actions that can be implemented, as Councils with endorsed safer community compacts will be required to report every six months to the Attorney General on the status of each action in your crime prevention strategy.

For each strategy, you will need to detail:

- the target crime
- what the project will actually do
- a clear and measurable objective linked to a reduction in crime
- the rationale for the selected actions
- the role of lead agency and project partners
- clear performance measures and timeframes.

Your crime prevention strategy and action plan should be developed using the crime prevention strategy template (downloadable in Microsoft Word format from www.crimeprevention.nsw.gov.au/Lawlink/cpd/ll_cpdiv.nsf/vwFiles/CrimePreventionStrategyTemplate.doc). Electronic advice from key partners detailing their commitment and agreement must be submitted along with your plan.

3.5 Implement and monitor your crime prevention strategy

Prior to implementation of your action plan, agreement should be sought from relevant agencies regarding access to data that will:

- enable the actions and projects to be appropriately targeted
- enable selection of appropriate participants or locations for your project, and
- assist with measurement of project outcomes.

Evaluation of your crime prevention strategy should primarily focus on outcomes, giving consideration to the crime prevention strategy's overall impact on the target crime. Evaluation of actions and activities within the crime prevention strategy should consider both process and outcomes. The purpose of a process evaluation should be to identify how the process influenced the crime prevention strategy's outcomes; what factors contributed to the action plan's success or failure; and how easily each action or project could be replicated.

While evaluation should consider the strategy's overall impact on the target crime, a crime prevention strategy targeting a specific location or a small number of people is not likely to impact on an overall Local Government Area's crime statistics. In these circumstances, it is suggested that you negotiate with Police to provide data on crime levels within a specific geographic area. Consider any impact on reported crime statistics in the targeted location against state-wide trends and trends in neighbouring areas.

If your target crime was prevalent at particular times, on particular days, or at particular times of the year, ensure you use appropriate comparative data. If your strategy involves programs for offenders or people at high risk of offending, you may consider obtaining consent from program participants

to report on their offending behaviours and other risk factors prior to, during and after program participation. Use of this data should not enable the identification of individuals, but should be used to measure general project or crime prevention strategy outcomes.

When measuring the impact of a situational crime prevention approach, it is recommended that you contrast levels of the crime in the target site with levels in a control site. A control is a site that is similar in nature to your target site, but that is not subject to the intervention. You should also work closely with Police to monitor whether or not your crime prevention strategy could be displacing crime to another location, or if your actions or activities have influenced an increase or decrease in other crimes.

4. Endorsement of your crime prevention strategy as a safer community compact

Councils can seek the Attorney General's endorsement of their crime prevention strategy as a safer community compact. Some Councils with an endorsed safer community compact are eligible to apply for a grant to implement their action plan.