

## Chapter 10. Evaluation and Sustainability

It is a common perception that evaluation occurs after a project ends. In reality, data collection should be built into the project design and should be ongoing for evaluative purposes so it can shape project design and sustainability for the life of the project. Securing and maintaining the commitment of the cooperating agencies to collect essential data is critical to evaluating a project's success.

During the process of designing an implementation plan, the Steering Committee should consider sources of data that will be important to measure outcomes from the project's efforts. The data collected during the assessment process helps to establish a baseline from the onset of project activities.

At a minimum, communities should plan to collect the following data for the purposes of evaluation and sustainability:

- **Police incident report data**, in the same crime categories and fashion as was collected during the assessment, for the purposes of measuring impact and potentially adapting/modifying suppression activities.
- **Police intelligence data**, in the aggregate form, for reporting to the Steering Committee, key agencies, and Intervention Team on gang trends.
- **Individual client data**, to determine the types of clients being served, the dosage of activities, and the impact of project activities. Data should include, but should not be limited to:
  - Individual characteristics (race, age, gender, level of gang affiliation, and other factors such as family structure, etc.).
  - School attendance/activity level, pre- and postinvolvement in the project.
  - Criminal history and/or activity subsequent to being involved in the project.
  - Employment history, pre- and postinvolvement in the project.
  - Probation referrals and/or violations, pre- and postinvolvement in the project.
  - Substance use levels, pre- and postinvolvement in the project.

Reporting on individual data should be done in an aggregate, analyzed form to protect client confidentiality. These data can be used to show project effectiveness and also to ensure that the project is serving the proper target population.

- **Participation of key agencies**, including hours of services provided to clients, contacts (by duration) with clients, and suppression activities by hours and number of personnel involved.

The Steering Committee, the involved agencies, and the community need to know how well the overall implementation plan is working and how to improve it. The Steering Committee should monitor progress made during implementation, using data and other information, and make any necessary changes to ensure that objectives are being met and the committee's mission is being accomplished. Project staff also should document the project's impact and identify barriers to its overall functioning, as well as methods to overcome those barriers. The following questions may be appropriate for self-evaluation of the Steering Committee's progress in the implementation plan:

- What is being accomplished by each objective?
- How will this work be measured? What is success?
- What are the indicators that the plan is moving in the desired direction?

The Steering Committee can also measure changes in community perceptions about gangs through surveys of community members, families, clients, and school/agency personnel. These surveys should measure perceptions of the work that is being done and overall feelings about the gang problem in the community. (Has it gotten better? Stayed the same? Gotten worse? Are the right things being done? What else should be done?)

While some of this data analysis and collection can be done by a talented data analyst, quantitative data on project clients will probably require the assistance of the Research Partner. Other persons with professional evaluation expertise who are associated with the Steering Committee or involved in the initiative may be willing to conduct an evaluation.

The benefits of an effective evaluation include:

- Knowing where to focus energy for project improvements.
- Knowing when you are falling behind schedule and when to make mid-course adjustments.
- Knowledge of and ability to document project success.
- Providing support for grant applications.
- Knowledge that staff are making a difference.
- Ability to report success to Steering Committee, staff, and funders.

Congruent with evaluative and data collection efforts, sustainability planning should begin during the assessment and planning phase and continue through implementation. One of the key roles of the Steering Committee is to provide for the sustainability of the project. Ideally, the implementation plan developed during the initial planning stage will lay a foundation for sustainability by ensuring ongoing data collection and analysis for self-evaluation.

Several factors were common to projects that were sustained by local communities. These communities:

- Standardized and institutionalized data collection to show project outcomes. Access to these data was invaluable for leveraging funds and resources.
- Utilized strong and engaged Steering Committees that shared ownership and responsibility for the programs among the key agencies.
- Formalized the participation of key agencies through the use of MOUs and letters of commitment that specifically outlined the roles and responsibilities of these agencies and their personnel, prior to implementation of the Model.
- Did not become reliant on grant funds for the performance of duties that fall within the normal roles and responsibilities of key agencies.

Other successful sustainability strategies included:

- Participating in statewide efforts to further develop anti-gang strategies backed by federal and state funds. Projects that can demonstrate positive outcomes and that have a good reputation in the target community are more likely to be funded as a part of larger efforts.
- Seeking the local business community's support for specific elements of the project such as the Intervention Team, outreach staff, or specific prevention programs.

- Pursuing commitments from key agencies to dedicate staff time to the project prior to implementation through the use of MOUs or letters of commitment.
- Leveraging funds from other agencies or planning for the project to be absorbed within an established agency.
- Requiring sustainability planning from contracted agencies. This may enable project partners to identify resources to sustain specific elements of the project after the original funding expires.