10. Using the Data

Throughout Chapters 4–8 in this Assessment Manual, a series of questions has been provided to guide the assessment process. Based on the data collected through the assessment, answers to these questions will provide a picture of the community's gang problem.

Once data are collected, they must be put into a format that is suitable for effective storage and retrieval. This will be critical for completing the analysis stage of the assessment and setting priorities among the needs and problems in the community. In addition, the data collected through this assessment will serve as the foundation for an ongoing database that includes official records and public perceptions of gang activity. Although forms of data that are collected may vary as a community moves from the assessment stage into project planning, implementation, and refinement, the basic procedures for managing data will remain the same.

As has been noted previously, describing a community's gang problem requires the capture and analysis of data from a variety of sources. Each will shed light on some facet of the problem—the level of gang crime, who is involved in gangs and criminal activity, why youth join and remain in gangs, and who is at risk of gang involvement. Because the gang problem is complex and different segments of the community perceive gangs and gang youth differently, the assessment process has been designed to gather information that reflects multiple perspectives. For instance, law enforcement, residents, and youth will be asked about their knowledge of gangs within the community and may respond with different answers. Conflicting responses should be viewed as an opportunity to engage in discussions, to educate, and to inform community leaders and residents.

Analyzing and Interpreting the Data

After data have been collected, entered, and cleaned of errors, the Assessment Work Group should begin analysis and interpretation of the data in preparation for writing a report. For the purpose of this assessment, simple descriptive, cross-sectional, and time-series analyses are all that will be required. After these analyses have been conducted, the Assessment Work Group will notice that multiple forms of data, collected in different ways from different sources, may all address a single common factor in the gang problem. These factors, supported by different types of data, should be highlighted.

It is recommended that sites compile all of the data collected into an Assessment Report, which will be discussed later in this chapter. In preparation for that, each data set should be examined independently, and then examined across all data sets. The objective is to weigh the strength of all the data and find possible correlations across different types of data. Examine the quantitative data from sources such as community demographics, gang crime data, and school demographic and performance data. In what ways do these quantitative data conflict or correspond with the qualitative data from community members, school personnel, gang members, students, and community leaders?

The challenge for communities is to identify data variables and combinations of variables that, when analyzed, reveal information useful for answering questions critical to the assessment. The Assessment Work Group, with help from the Research Partner, should attempt to find the best analytical methods for each type of data to best answer these questions.

Creating an Assessment Report
The final stages of the assessment involve formatting the results, in the form of an Assessment Report, for the Steering Committee. Once the data have been organized, the Assessment Work Group should use them to answer the questions found in Chapters 4–8, by section and data type. The answers to these questions provide much of the substance of the report itself.

The report should be organized by subject matter and type (community demographics, school/student data, law enforcement data, etc). It should note data limitations and conflicts between different data sources. The Assessment Report should include graphic displays of the data and supporting analyses and should describe areas of intersection between different data sets (key findings). It is not the purpose of the Assessment Report to prioritize issues or problems, design solutions, or identify target populations and target areas. Developing a community response based on these data is the Steering Committee's job.

In areas where different types of data point to similar issues, the Assessment Work Group may identify a key finding. Key findings should be highlighted in the report, along with supporting data. **Exhibit 10.1** includes three key findings from one community's Assessment Report.

Exhibit 10.1

Key Finding:
Gangs are involved in a high percentage of robberies and other violent crimes in South Park, leading to resident fear of victimization.

In 2001, gangs were responsible for 21 percent of murders, 9 percent of rapes, 28.2 percent of robberies, and 14.5 percent of aggravated assaults in South Park, according to an archival review of crime incident reports by Metropolis Police Department officers. (See **Table 1**.)

Table 1—Violent Crimes in South Park						
	1999		**2000**		**2001**	
	All	Gang-Involved	All	Gang-Involved	All	Gang-Involved
Murder	15	3 (20%)	14	1 (7%)	19	4 (21%)
Rape	59	5 (8.5%)	30	7 (23.3%)	43	4 (9%)
Robbery	424	99 (23.3%)	362	78 (21.5%)	456	129 (28.2%)
Aggravated assault	685	104 (15.2%)	644	94 (14.6%)	678	98 (14.5%)

The data demonstrate a disturbing trend towards increasing rates of gang violence. While gang-related crime increased 30.6 percent between 2000 and 2001, gang-involved robberies increased by 65.4 percent during this period.

Some South Park communities are being disproportionately affected by the gang violence. As previously outlined, in 2001, two of every ten gang-related crimes in Meridian Heights were gang-related, as were three of every ten in Elm Park. Nearly half (49.4 percent) of the robberies in Elm Park in 2001 were gang-related, as were three of Meridian Heights' five murders. While this rate of gang-related violence has been the norm in Meridian Heights for the last three years, the gang-related violence in Elm Park increased 115.6 percent in 2001 over 2000. And while gang-related violence in Riverside and Smithton has remained constant or declined, there was a 67.6 percent increase in gang violence in East Hills in 2001.

Gang members readily admitted their violent tendencies. According to interviews with 104 known gang members, 76.7 percent reported being involved in assaulting or battering someone with a weapon in the past year. Similarly, 69.9 percent had threatened to attack a person without using a weapon. One-third (35.9 percent) had robbed someone using a weapon or without a weapon, one-third (35.9 percent) had assaulted someone using a dangerous weapon, and 30.1 percent had participated in a drive-by shooting.

The high level of violence actually seems to drive gang membership in the area. When known gang members were surveyed about possible causes of gangs in the community, 62.5 percent said "protection" and 57.7 percent said "power." When gang members were asked why they joined a gang, the need for protection again rated highest, with 43 percent of the gang members surveyed stating it was an important or very important reason for joining. Interestingly enough, only 32 percent of community leaders and 11 percent of residents believed that youth joined gangs seeking protection. Also, only 21 percent of community leaders and 9 percent of residents thought that youth joined gangs seeking power/status. None of the focus group parents suggested that youth joined gangs seeking power or protection.

Nonetheless, gang-involved youths' expressed desire for power and protection may be indicative of a general fear for personal safety in a community where nearly 50 percent of gang members stated that drug dealing, possession of a gun, shooting guns, threats/intimidation, and gang-on-gang confrontations were a serious to very serious problem.

When asked about how safe they felt in their communities, 74 percent of gang members surveyed claimed they did not feel safe in their communities. About 85 percent of these respondents attributed this fear directly to the presence of gangs in their neighborhoods. School survey data indicates that, depending on the school, up to 18 percent of respondents had knowledge of gang members bringing guns to school within the past six months. This finding is especially important because the perceived availability of guns (and drugs) was found to be a significant predictor of both gang involvement and antisocial behaviors.

While nearly 60 gangs were identified as operating in the assessment area during 2001, 32 of these gangs committed only one crime in the assessment area during the three years reviewed. Many (such as the Latin Kings, Kingston Cholos, and Mara Salvatrucha) are much more active in other parts of the city. Nineteen gangs were documented as being involved in between two and nine violent crimes for the same period. Ten gangs were in fact responsible for 65 percent of the community's violent gang-related crimes. These ten gangs have documented membership of nearly 400.

South Park residents expressed concern and fear about the level of gang violence in their community. While key leaders most frequently identified vandalism and graffiti as the problem caused by gangs, 52 percent of community residents saw fear for safety as a problem, followed by increased violent crime (49 percent) and increased drug crime (48 percent). In focus groups, parents echoed the sentiments of community residents, stating that increased fears in the community, and specifically fear for safety, were the significant problems caused by gangs.

Key Finding:

Low educational attainment is pervasive in South Park, and school-related risk factors seem to be a contributing influence on youth gang involvement; school failure makes area youth more vulnerable to joining a gang, keeps them involved in gangs, feeds the area's cycle of violence, and keeps gang members trapped in a cycle of poverty and unemployment/underemployment.

The Meridian Heights, East Hills, and Elm Park areas of South Park have the lowest overall educational attainment levels in the city. This low educational attainment is likely connected to unemployment and underemployment in South Park. The area's unemployment rate is significantly higher than that for the entire city, and the majority of working South Park residents are significantly more likely to work in fields requiring lower levels of education, such as manufacturing or construction, and less likely to work in technology, administrative, scientific, financial, health, or other professional fields.

The area's low educational attainment rate is evident from 2000 Census statistics, which demonstrate that 64.2 percent of the area's population over the age of 25 did not receive high school diplomas or GEDs. There is some evidence that these low educational attainment rates are not improving. Data on the number of youth graduating from Washington and Lathrop High Schools suggests that far less than half of all students graduate. (See **Table 2**.)

School problems seem to be linked to gang involvement, as 42 percent of community leaders, 41 percent of gang members and 24 percent of residents cited problems at school as a possible cause for gangs in the community. School problems were ranked as the third most likely cause for gangs in the community by focus group parents. Teachers and school staff also identified academic failure as a factor influencing gang involvement. Some teachers attributed the students' failure to "a lack of commitment to education" on the part of youth and their families.

Table 2—Graduating Class Size as a Percentage of Freshman Class Size (Four Years Earlier)		
	Washington	**Lathrop**
Class of 1999	28.4%	38.6%
Class of 2000	31.2%	39.7%
Class of 2001	35.5%[*]	42.0%[*]
Class of 2002	37.8%[*]	36.5%[*]

One teacher noted that students failed because they did not have the social skills and/or academic skills necessary to function in the classroom. Two high school teachers saw the size of the high school as a factor. In larger schools, it is difficult for some youth to know where they belong. As one teacher observed, gang involvement is a way to "control relationships." Middle school and high school teachers and administrators agreed that the 9th grade was a particularly difficult period.

Key Finding:
The correlation between school problems and gang involvement is supported by the school survey data. An examination of this data indicated that there were three significant predictors for gang involvement in the school domain: school grades, the perception that one's grades were better than most school peers, and meaning or perceived relevance of school activities. So the lower the student's grades, the weaker the perception that the student's grades were better than those of most of his/her colleagues, and the less s/he perceived meaning/relevance in school activities, the more likely the individual was to be gang-involved.

Table 3—Class Sizes in 2000–2001				
	Lathrop High School		**Washington High School**	
	2000	**2001**	**2000**	**2001**
9th Grade	833	768	1,160	1,093
10th Grade	568	510	281	257
11th Grade	593	489	426	477
12th Grade	589	538	348	256
Total Population	2,583	2,305	2,215	2,083

Additional data further evidences the connection between school problems and gang involvement.

- One in three gang members (41.9 percent) blamed problems in school for causing youth to join gangs.

- More than half of the interviewed gang members (54.4 percent) reported that they had dropped out of school at least once, and virtually all (94.1 percent) had been suspended at least once. One in three (40.1 percent) had been expelled from school at least once.

- Gang members who have left school tend to be less well-educated. Of those youth interviewed who were not in school or not of school age, more than half (54 percent) had a 9th grade education or less.

- Gang members who reported being out of school also reported having lower grades than those still attending school.

- In at least one area high school, a large number of students are not moving from 9th grade into 10th grade. The data does not indicate why these students do not seem to be moving ahead educationally. (See **Table 3** above.)

- Almost half (49.1 percent) of the interviewed youth came from homes where either Spanish only (35.6 percent) or Spanish and English (13.5 percent) were the primary languages spoken.

- These language barriers led to school-related problems for youth. One in every seven students at Washington High School (13.3 percent) or Lathrop High School (15.3 percent) is listed as requiring bilingual or ESL educational services at the high school level.

- One in three male gang members (38.5 percent) and 75 percent of female gang members stated that getting into an educational program would entice them to leave the gang lifestyle.

Additionally, gang members tended to report fairly high levels of participation in delinquent behaviors at school. A student survey conducted with youth in South Park indicated that 15 percent of Washington High School students and around one in every ten students at Smith, Walker, and James Middle Schools reported gang members bringing guns to their schools in a six-month period. Up to one-third of students at Greater South Park schools indicated that gang members had sold drugs at their school in a six-month period.

The Assessment Report

It is suggested that the Assessment Report be organized as follows:

Section 1: Executive Summary—This section should provide a brief summary of the key findings from the assessment.

Section 2: Key Findings—Three to five statements of fact supported by multiple data sets, along with a summary of the supporting data.

Section 3: Data Sets—Answers to the questions posed in Chapters 4–7, in order, using supportive data organized in a readable fashion with tables, charts, and graphs as necessary to illustrate the data.

Section 4: Summary of Resources—This section should provide a summary of the resources in the community that address gangs and gang-related issues. The discussion should center on answers to the questions in Chapter 8 (Community Resources Data). A complete list of the agencies, organizations, and other sources may be provided as an appendix to the Assessment Report.

Section 5: Methodology—A brief description of the methods used to collect each data set during the assessment.

Even the most thorough and comprehensive assessment will remain incomplete. There will always be conflicts in the data. For example, youth may say that jobs are the biggest problem, while their parents and teachers are more worried about gang violence. Other vital data may be simply unavailable. Additionally, qualitative data that measure community members' opinions and ideas are not as accurate a basis for decision-making as hard facts, and may even be self-serving, but they help to counterbalance the qualitative data.

The Assessment Work Group should be up-front in describing the assessment's limitations.

A few guidelines apply to the report itself:

- The purpose of the report is to help the Steering Committee develop priorities in dealing with the gang problem.

- Do not leave out important findings that may not specifically address gangs. The identification of these issues is important for the overall community assessment and should be reported. For instance, although a finding on high rates of youth suicides may not directly correlate to a community's gang problem, it is still an important public health issue.

The Assessment Work Group should not think that its work is over when the report is written. It is important to satisfy the committee that all the important bases have been covered, and this may mean that parts of the assessment must be rewritten or even that further data must be collected. The willingness of the Assessment Work Group to satisfy the committee's concerns and curiosity can be an important factor in developing a consensus around the findings, though doing so can be frustrating. It is better to hold several meetings to satisfy any concerns the Steering Committee may have than to launch a major effort with stiff opposition.

Once the Steering Committee has achieved consensus around the data provided in the Assessment Report, this data can be used for planning purposes and shaping an individualized response to the community's

specific gang problems and contributing factors. A discussion of a planning process that can be used for these purposes is found in "Implementing the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model."