

2. Getting Started

Committed leadership must be available at the outset to oversee the assessment process, provide direction for the data-collection phase, and guide the community in using the data to plan further action. Sites that have conducted comprehensive gang assessments have found the following administrative structure to be effective.

First, policymakers in key agencies must be engaged to commit to fully participate in the assessment, allow access to data from their agencies, and allow staff members to work on collecting and analyzing data. This group of policymakers will be referred to as the **Steering Committee**.

Because it is unlikely that agency heads and community leaders will have the necessary time to handle the details and day-to-day activities of conducting the assessment, a smaller work group should be convened by the Steering Committee. This **Assessment Work Group** will represent the key agencies in the work of the assessment process, including gathering, analyzing, and compiling the data in a usable form. These individuals may serve in a dual capacity on both the Steering Committee and the Assessment Work Group, if they desire, or may be appointed by the key agencies to work on the assessment.

In general, the analysis required for the assessment is not complex, but a partner with experience in manipulating and analyzing data may be helpful for some pieces of the assessment. This individual/agency will be referred to as the **Research Partner**.

Because the relationships between interacting agencies can be quite complex, and because the collection, analysis, dissemination, and action-planning from this assessment require a great deal of work, it is essential that an individual coordinate this effort. This individual will be referred to as the **Project Director**.

All of these designated groups/individuals will be discussed in greater depth in this chapter.

The Steering Committee

Assessments are of little use if the results or recommendations are not accepted by those who have the authority to implement the approaches proposed to respond to the gang problem. Since these individuals must ultimately agree to a plan for addressing and solving gang problems, it is vital that they be involved in the effort from the beginning.

Steering Committee membership should be diverse and composed of key policymakers and administrative leaders of agencies and community organizations concerned with the community's gang problem, as well as other, more informal community leaders. The members should have decision-making responsibilities, be able to make agency policy changes, and be influential with community groups and/or neighborhood groups.

A critical aspect of conducting a comprehensive assessment is commitment to support the project by the primary law enforcement agency and the office of the mayor or county executive. The Steering Committee should also include representatives of:

- Probation (juvenile and adult)
- Parole (juvenile and adult)

- Prosecution
- Courts (juvenile and adult)
- Schools (mainstream and alternative)
- Youth and family agencies
- Business community
- Faith community
- Manpower and job-training agencies
- Grassroots organizations
- Public housing
- Local neighborhood associations
- Federal and state agencies, if appropriate

It is suggested that a well-respected and active member of the community assume the duties of Steering Committee chair. Chairs in communities that have conducted these types of assessments have included directors of community-based agencies, police chiefs, mayors, school district administrators, and other types of agency heads. The main qualifications of a chair include:

1. Strong interpersonal and leadership skills.
2. Perceived as calm, objective, and resistant to political manipulation.
3. Receiving no financial benefit from the assessment.
4. Serving in a professional role where he or she is a peer of other policymakers.

The chair may be appointed by a key agency or may be elected by the Steering Committee membership using bylaws created by the group. For an example of the bylaws used in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, please refer to **Exhibit 2.1** on page 13. The Steering Committee chair should ensure that each committee member is committed to seeing the assessment through to completion. The chair is also expected to conduct each Steering Committee meeting.

The prestige and influence of Steering Committee members give the effort legitimacy. Gaining the buy-in of key agencies for the assessment, asking key agencies to provide a written commitment to participate in the assessment, and providing access to data are pivotal factors in succeeding in this work. For a sample letter of commitment and a memorandum of understanding, please refer to **Exhibit 2.2** on page 17.

The committee's job during the assessment phase is to provide overall leadership to the entire effort, create or appoint the membership of the Assessment Work Group, determine what data will be collected and how, provide some of the personnel needed to complete the technical work, facilitate access to data and other resources, and determine how the data will be used and/or disseminated. This initial commitment guarantees assistance from organizations that are directly represented on the committee throughout the assessment process.

An important initial role for the committee is to develop a consensus on gang-related definitions that will be used for collecting gang crime and other data. This consensus on definitions must be achieved

prior to collecting data. The Steering Committee should refer to **Exhibit 2.3** on page 18 to guide the discussion of the following terms:

1. What is a gang?
2. Who is a gang member?
3. What is a gang incident?

It may be helpful for a member of the Steering Committee to have a legal background. This individual can brief the committee on existing laws or statutes relating to these topics and assist with the creation of bylaws. This subject will be discussed in more depth in **Chapter 3, Collecting the Data**.

Throughout the assessment process, the Steering Committee should meet periodically (monthly or bimonthly seems to work best) to discuss the progress of the assessment. The assessment should be conducted in an orderly fashion because some data will lead to collecting additional data. The Assessment Work Group should provide periodic briefings to the committee on early findings from the data-collection effort, and committee members should use this time to begin to familiarize themselves with the data collected at each stage.

During multiple stages of the assessment process, Steering Committee members may be called upon collectively or individually to clear barriers, create policies and/or protocols for data collection, and determine data collection plans. Memoranda of understanding or other written documents should reflect this ongoing and important role.

The Assessment Work Group

The Assessment Work Group is responsible for collecting and analyzing data and preparing it in a useful form for the Steering Committee. A few hard-working individuals can share these responsibilities. In fact, it is preferable to assign responsibility for this work to a core group of four to six persons representing the key agencies. At least one law enforcement officer will need to be assigned to this group to collect the law enforcement data. Limiting the group to this size enhances communication among the team members, improves the quality of the work they do, and shortens the time needed to conduct the assessment by reducing the need for meetings, memos, and progress reports. Other workers will likely be needed to distribute and collect survey forms, conduct interviews, or participate in other data-collection activities, and these workers may be drawn from the key agencies, local community organizations, or a local college/university partner.

The Assessment Work Group should ask the Steering Committee to review all major decisions about the data-collection methods to be used. Although it is the Assessment Work Group's job to handle the details, the Steering Committee must know about and have an opportunity to comment on the populations to be surveyed, the format of surveys and other instruments, and the types of data to be collected and analyzed. It is a good idea to hold a meeting early in the assessment process so the Steering Committee can brief the Assessment Work Group members on their plan and roles. The Assessment Work Group also must keep the Steering Committee informed of barriers to the data-collection process. If barriers are encountered in collecting data from agencies, Steering Committee members should be willing and able to troubleshoot on behalf of the Assessment Work Group to obtain the relevant data.

The Assessment Work Group should apprise Steering Committee members of progress at all stages of the assessment and provide periodic briefings on early findings from the data. For example, when the community resident survey has been completed, the Assessment Work Group could provide early

findings from preliminary examination of that data. Or, as gang crime data are analyzed, a briefing could be provided on the most prevalent crimes gang members are committing and when they are committing them. Even though the data are not fully analyzed at this point, this gives the Steering Committee an incremental look, by type, at data that will be important to other aspects of the assessment. Steering committees in most communities have found that the vast amount of data from the assessment was somewhat overwhelming when presented to them all at once. These periodic briefings also will have the added benefit of keeping Steering Committee members engaged in the project.

After the data have been collected and analyzed, the team should provide a report to the Steering Committee, answering any questions that arise from the data. This report will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 10.

The Research Partner

The Assessment Work Group may want to include a Research Partner to assist in data collection and analysis and in writing the final Assessment Report. The Research Partner should have demonstrated experience and skills in traditional data-collection methods and analysis practices and the ability to display and explain data in oral and written formats. It is recommended that someone from a local planning or analysis unit work with the group on some aspects of the data collection. For other types of data, a local college, university, or other research-capable organization could provide this assistance.

Most of the data analysis that will be performed for the assessment (community demographic data, law enforcement data, school demographics data) is relatively simple and can be performed by someone with a strong background in Excel or a similar data analysis program. However, collecting and analyzing the perceptions data (community, community leader, youth/student, and gang member), which requires dealing with human subjects, can be a more complex task. For these work products, a partner at the college or university level is recommended to help create protocols to protect the confidentiality of participants, and in some cases (particularly with youth/students and gang members) to conduct interviews or focus groups. This partner can also be very helpful in conducting the more complex analysis these types of data may require. The Research Partner should be a true partner with the Assessment Work Group and Steering Committee, providing support to both groups in explaining analysis processes and how the data can be interpreted.

Ideally, the relationship that is developed with the Research Partner can continue as the Steering Committee moves forward to implement plans addressing the problems that are identified by the assessment; this Research Partner can transition into serving as an evaluation partner. In this role, the partner can help to develop plans and protocols for ongoing data collection, gather and store that data, and provide regular reports to the Steering Committee. The partner can also assist the Steering Committee in identifying ways of measuring its efforts and creating self-evaluation processes that can ensure long-term sustainability of the project.

Confidentiality and Human Subjects Protection

You will collect a great deal of information in conducting an assessment of your local gang problem, some of which will be identifiable to individuals. Care must be taken to maintain the confidentiality of this information and to protect the rights of those who have participated in the study. The U.S. Department of Justice has adopted specific regulations for ensuring confidentiality and protection of research participants. These regulations include:

1. Privacy certificate as required by 28 CFR Part 22. Privacy certificates document the procedures that will be used to secure data.

2. Protection of human subjects as required by 28 CFR Part 46 and the role of institutional review boards (IRBs) in complying with this regulation. 28 CFR Part 46 describes the role of IRBs in ensuring that assessment activities that involve human subjects do not violate their rights. Most universities maintain IRBs, and the Research Partner at each site should be able to provide considerable guidance on complying with these regulations.

Project Directors and Research Partners at each site should become very familiar with these regulations and should ensure that appropriate measures are taken to comply.

The Project Director

Most communities have found that a full-time director is required to ensure the completion of this process. In a few communities, the Project Director has assumed responsibility for coordinating the activities of the assessment as a portion of his or her existing job, but this poses difficulties. Having a full-time Project Director helps ensure that the work of the Steering Committee and the Assessment Work Group is proceeding in a timely manner. The Project Director can also work with directors of community agencies and organizations to negotiate possible turf issues and should serve as the primary contact for all involved in the project. In short, the Project Director is the glue that holds the efforts of the Steering Committee, Assessment Work Group, and Research Partner together during this process. Ideally, this individual should also have the skills and background necessary to transition into the role of directing and executing whatever plans are undertaken by the Steering Committee as a result of the assessment. This continuity has been found to be valuable in areas where comprehensive assessments have been undertaken.

The Project Director may also be invited to make presentations about the assessment and the Steering Committee's efforts to community organizations, service clubs, schools, churches, and others. A sample job description is provided as **Exhibit 2.4** on page 24.

In summary, it is important that the Steering Committee, the Assessment Work Group, the Research Partner, and the Project Director clearly understand their separate functions and how they work together during the assessment and planning year. As mentioned previously, the Steering Committee provides overall leadership for the entire effort, including appointing the Assessment Work Group and overseeing their work, developing an implementation plan, and publicizing the effort. The Assessment Work Group's primary responsibilities are to conduct the assessment and prepare the complete analyzed data that clearly describes the community's gang problem, its impact on all levels of the community, possible underlying conditions that are contributing to the gang problem, and potential areas where action is required. The Steering Committee and the Assessment Work Group must work closely together during the assessment and planning phases.

The Steering Committee will:

1. Provide overall leadership for the entire effort.
2. Create the Assessment Work Group and oversee its work.
3. Develop gang-related definitions.
4. Develop an assessment plan.
5. Publicize the effort.

The Assessment Work Group will:

1. Design a data-collection plan.
2. Conduct the assessment.
3. Provide periodic briefings to the Steering Committee on preliminary findings from the data.
4. Prepare a final report for the Steering Committee.

The Research Partner, as part of the Assessment Work Group, will:

1. Assist the Assessment Work Group in all phases of data collection.
2. Assist the Assessment Work Group in analysis and interpretation of data.
3. Assist the Assessment Work Group in preparation of the data as a final report.

During the assessment, the Project Director will:

1. Manage the day-to-day administration of the project.
2. Maintain appropriate records.
3. Arrange Steering Committee meetings; prepare appropriate minutes for each meeting and other required/requested reports.
4. Coordinate and monitor all data collection by the Assessment Work Group.
5. Serve as liaison among the Steering Committee, Assessment Work Group, and Research Partner, updating personnel on progress and challenges and arranging joint meetings as necessary.

Exhibit 2.1

Pittsburgh Youth Intervention Project

Steering Committee Bylaws

ARTICLE I – Name

The name of the Steering Committee shall be the Gang Free Schools and Community Initiative, also known as the Pittsburgh Youth Intervention Project, a project of the Pittsburgh Public Schools, Safe Schools Office.

ARTICLE II – Purpose

Based on a data driven assessment ending in 2001, this project is established to reduce gang related violence affecting the learning environment of schools as well as the youth attending those schools and residing in communities in the South Park of Pittsburgh.

ARTICLE III – Goals and Objectives

The overriding goal of the Pittsburgh Youth Intervention Project is to participate in the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP) Gang Prevention, Intervention and Suppression Program to implement and test a comprehensive program model design for gang prevention, intervention and suppression that will mobilize the multidisciplinary leadership of the community and reduce the incidence of gang related crime and gang membership in and around the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

ARTICLE IV – Project Director

- A. **Role of the Project Director:** The Project Director shall oversee the fiscal and contractual obligations for the project, ensuring the fulfillment of all OJJDP and the School District of Pittsburgh requirements. The Project Director is the individual who is responsible for the administration of the grant under which this project functions.
- B. **Committees:** The Project Director shall serve as the School District of Pittsburgh liaison to the Steering Committee, permanent committees and other ad-hoc committees. The Project Director is required to attend all regular Steering Committee meetings, standing committee meetings and ad-hoc committee meetings. The Project Director will not be a voting member of the Steering Committee. The Project Director will ensure the meeting minutes are recorded and distributed to committee members.
- C. **Accountability:** The Project Director will report to the Steering Committee concerning the status of the project and other relevant issues.
- D. **Selection:** The Project Director will be an employee of the School District of Pittsburgh, and will be selected by the personnel committee of the Steering Committee. In cases of vacancies the Personnel Committee shall meet within 5 days to develop a plan for replacement selection.

ARTICLE V – Members

Members: The Steering Committee shall consist of members of the community at large interested in gang prevention, intervention and suppression.

ARTICLE VI – Governance

A. Governing Body: The Steering Committee shall be comprised of representatives from:

1. Schools
2. Youth Employment Agencies
3. Grassroots Organizations and Community Mobilization Groups
4. Community-Based Youth Agencies
5. Law Enforcement
6. Prosecution
7. Judiciary
8. Probation
9. Corrections/Parole
10. Public Housing
11. Mental Health
12. Drug and Alcohol
13. Evaluation and Research
14. Government
15. Religious
16. Medical Community
17. Business Community
18. Youth

B. Appointment: The members of the Steering Committee shall be selected by the agency/organization which they are representing.

C. Vacancies: Should a member of the Steering Committee that represents an appointed organization vacate the position, the organization which they are representing has thirty days to appoint another member to the Steering Committee. If the appointing organization fails to do so within thirty days, the Chair of the Steering Committee will contact the head of the organization to obtain the name of a new appointee.

D. Voting: Quorum shall consist of 1/4 of the Steering Committee. No action shall be taken unless the action has been approved by a majority of the members of the Steering Committee. At no time shall a vote be binding if less than 12 voting members are present. Should an appointed member not be able to attend a Steering Committee meeting, another representative from the appointing organization may attend in their absence, but the substitute may not vote on any issues that should arise in the Steering Committee meeting. Substitutions shall be limited to no more than two substitutions per calendar year.

E. Parliamentary Authority: The rules contained in the most recently revised edition of Robert's Rules of Order shall govern the Steering Committee. The Chair of the Steering Committee shall make all necessary rulings.

F. Meetings: The Steering Committee shall have no fewer than 4 meetings within a calendar year. The Steering Committee shall invite the public no less than once a year to

discuss the status of the project. Notice of meetings involving votes shall be sent to the Steering Committee Members by the Project Director at a minimum of 7 days in advance. Public notice shall be in the form of an advertisement in a newspaper of general circulation.

- G. Meeting Attendance: After a member has missed three consecutive meetings, the Steering Committee Chair shall send written notification of the continued obligation as a voting member of the steering committee and if that member/organization deems it necessary to appoint another member to the committee, such member shall be named within 5 days. If no appointment is made, the Steering Committee shall vote upon the removal of such member and/or organization.

ARTICLE VII – Officers

- A. Chair: There shall be one Chair of the Steering Committee. The Chair shall preside over meetings. Vice Chair: There shall be one Vice Chair of the Steering Committee. The Vice Chair shall preside in the absence of the Chair.
- B. Term: No officers shall be eligible to serve more than two consecutive terms in the same office.
- C. Election: The Chair and Vice Chair shall be elected by members of the Steering Committee to serve for one year, unless a successor is elected due to resignation or removal. Their term of office shall begin immediately upon election. Election of officers shall take place at the April (or spring) regular meeting of the Steering Committee.
- E. Vacancy: In the event of a vacancy occurring in the office of the Chair, a special election to replace the Chair shall be held at the regular meeting following the Chair’s resignation.

ARTICLE VIII – Committees

- A. Creation: The Steering Committee can establish and abolish ad-hoc committees by a majority vote. Ad-hoc committees shall consist of at least one Steering Committee member serving as the chair or co-chair and may consist of members of the community interested in assisting in the fulfillment of the goals and objectives as outlined by this project.
- B. Members: All standing committees shall include but are not limited to at least one member from the Steering Committee.
- C. Standing Committees: It shall be the duty of the Steering Committee to establish the following permanent committees, and appoint its members:
 - 1. Interagency Team
 - 2. Bylaws
 - 3. Personnel
- Meetings: Standing committee meetings may be held as necessary as deemed by a majority of committee members.

ARTICLE IX – Amendments

- A. Amendment of Bylaws: All proposed amendments to these Bylaws shall be submitted in writing to the Bylaws Committee and reviewed by same. The Bylaws Committee shall take one of the following actions:
1. Recommend approval or disapproval of the amendment to the Steering Committee.
 2. Discuss and approve revisions to the proposed amendment(s) before forwarding the amendment to the Steering Committee for approval or disapproval. In submitting a revised amendment, reasons for the changes shall be provided to the Steering Committee in writing.
- B. Approval/Disapproval: All action concerning amendments to the Bylaws shall be voted upon during a regular meeting of the Steering Committee, following the procedures described in Article VI.

Adopted: October 18, 2004

Modified: March 22, 2005

Exhibit 2.2

Sample Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) for Agencies Participating in the Assessment

Sample Law Enforcement MOU

As part of our participation in this assessment, the South City Police Department will do the following:

1. Modify the police incident report used by our agency to include an identifier for gang crime.
2. Modify our computer system to collect the gang identifier.
3. Train our officers on the new data collection system and identifying gang incidents.
4. Provide personnel to review past and current incident/arrest reports to identify incidents/arrests that are gang-related.
5. Provide aggregate information from these incident reports to the Assessment Team and the Steering Committee.
6. Collaborate with other law enforcement agencies in the sharing of gang data as appropriate.

Deputy Chief Samuel Young will serve as the South City Police Department's representative on the Steering Committee and will attend meetings on a regular basis.

Sample Probation MOU

This memorandum will outline the participation of the South County Probation Department in the South City's Community Gang Assessment. South County Probation Department will do the following:

1. Probation Administrator Kelly Atkinson will serve on the Steering Committee and attend regularly scheduled meetings.
2. Probation officer Mary Klein will be detailed to participate in the Assessment Team and can provide up to 30 hours of data collection assistance to this initiative.
3. South County Juvenile Court personnel will collect and provide information on the criminal histories of 50 gang-involved probationers in an aggregate form to the Assessment Team.
4. South County Probation staff will participate in the community perceptions gang survey.

Exhibit 2.3

Gang Definitions

Many gang researchers believe that the success or failure of communitywide attempts to address gang problems is likely to rest, in part, on how well problems are understood, defined, and diagnosed. Before the assessment can begin, one of the first tasks of the Steering Committee is to discuss and define key gang-related terms—“gang,” “gang member,” and “gang incident.” This is not an easy task. In fact, multiple meetings will probably be necessary to develop these definitions.

Diverse perceptions and definitions of gangs present particular challenges to communities as they attempt to deal with gang problems in their neighborhoods (Decker and Kempf-Leonard, 1995). The term “gang” carries with it many meanings and evokes a number of images for people. Citizens often mistakenly attribute general delinquent and juvenile criminal behavior to gangs. For some, a gang is a small group of four or five adolescents who loiter on a street corner. For others, the term may identify graffiti writers or taggers, drug users, skinheads, or a group of highly organized youth whose purpose is to make money from drug dealing.

Each community is different, as are its gang problems. What the Steering Committee should strive for is agreement on definitions for use within its community. Do not worry if total consensus is not achieved. What is most important is that those who are being asked for information know how words are being defined. In some sites, this work may appear to have been done already because many law enforcement agencies have established definitions (some by state statute or local ordinance). Nevertheless, existing law enforcement definitions should not be used in the assessment unless they have been validated by state statute or local ordinance and/or accepted by other agencies that will be involved in the project, and by residents of the community. Law enforcement representatives should be encouraged to be flexible and open to considering alternative views of gangs. It is recommended that the committee start with how law enforcement defines a gang and then invite others to share their definitions or perspectives.

Over the years, many attempts have been made to develop standardized and uniform definitions for these terms. Much of this work is summarized below.

What Is a Gang?

The media, the public, and the community often use the term “gang” more loosely than do law enforcement agencies. Through sensationalized media accounts, some citizens equate gangs with highly organized drug distribution networks (Howell, 2007). While drug use and selling have been features of gang life for many years, the perception has arisen that all gangs are highly organized and heavily involved in the drug trade (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996; Klein, 1995). The public’s definition of a gang often describes a group of individuals—mostly, but not exclusively, inner-city youth—who are highly organized and heavily involved in the drug trade, serious property crimes, and violence.

Law enforcement officials tend to rely on departmental or statutory definitions to describe a gang. In fact, most formal definitions of street gangs come from various law enforcement agencies or state statutes. From the law enforcement point of view, criminal behavior involving a group of individuals is a key component of the definition. However, statutes and law enforcement definitions normally do not distinguish among youth gangs, drug gangs, and adult criminal gangs (which sometimes have features characteristic of traditional organized crime groups).

The National Crime Information Center (NCIC), operated by the FBI, contains a “pointer” system or database called the Violent Gang and Terrorist Organizations File (VGTOF). The NCIC definition of a gang is:

An ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons that have a common interest and/or activity characterized by the commission of or involvement in a pattern of criminal or delinquent conduct.

These acts of criminal/delinquent conduct are defined as:

- Narcotics distribution
- Firearms or explosives violations
- Murder
- Extortion
- Obstruction of justice, including witness intimidation and/or tampering

And any other violent crimes such as:

- Assault
- Threats
- Burglary
- Carjacking

NCIC's definition of a gang also has been adopted by the FBI in conjunction with collection of gang crime data through the National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS), the follow-on to the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) System.

The National Alliance of Gang Investigators Associations has developed a recommended definition of the term "gang":

A group or association of three or more persons who may have a common identifying sign, symbol, or name, and who individually or collectively engage in, or have engaged in, criminal activity which creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation. Criminal activity includes juvenile acts that, if committed by an adult, would be a crime.

The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department defines a gang as:

A group of three or more persons who have a common identifying sign, symbol, or name, and whose members individually or collectively engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal activity, creating an atmosphere of fear and intimidation within the community.

Increasingly, state statutes and penal codes contain gang-related definitions. A selection of these state laws and definitions as well as gang-related municipal codes can be found at the National Youth Gang Center Web site: <http://www.iir.com/nygc>.

In some states, definitions have been developed to enhance penalties for certain types of crimes if committed by a gang member. An example is California's Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act (STEP) of 1988 (California Penal Code, sec.186.20 et seq.), which, with some modifications, has been adopted by a number of other states.

The STEP Act defines a criminal street gang as:

“Any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal,

- a) having as one of its primary activities one or more criminal acts [including 28 specific offenses defined under the law]*
- b) which has a common name or common identifying symbol;*
- c) whose members individually or collectively engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal activity.”*

Since California adopted this definition in 1988, numerous other states have also codified gang definitions into their state statutes. These include, among others:

Arizona: *“Criminal Street Gang” means an ongoing formal or informal association of persons whose members or associates individually or collectively engage in the commission, attempted commission, facilitation, or solicitation of any felony act and that has at least one individual who is a criminal gang member.*

Connecticut: *“Gang” means a group of juveniles or youths who, acting in concert with each other, or with adults, engage in criminal activities.*

Kentucky: *“Criminal gang” means any alliance, network, or conspiracy, in law or in fact, of five (5) or more persons with an established hierarchy that, through its membership, or through the action of any member, engages in a continuing pattern of criminal activity. “Criminal gang” shall not include fraternal organizations, unions, corporations, associations, or similar entities, unless organized for the primary purpose of engaging in criminal activity.*

Illinois: *“Streetgang” or “gang” or “organized gang” or “criminal street gang”: means any combination, confederation, alliance, network, conspiracy, understanding, or other similar conjoining, in law or in fact, of 3 or more persons, with an established hierarchy that, through its membership or through the agency of any member engages in a course or pattern of criminal behavior.*

Nevada: *“Criminal gang” means any combination of persons, organized formally or informally, so constructed that the organization will continue its operation even if individual members enter or leave the organization, which:*

- a) Has a common name or identifying symbol;*
- b) Has particular conduct, status, or customs indicative of it; and*
- c) Has as one of its common activities engaging in criminal activity punishable as a felony, other than the conduct which constitutes the primary offense.*

Researchers who study gangs also have great difficulty in reaching consensus on what constitutes a gang. To appreciate the variety of definitions that have emerged from gang research, the following examples are offered:

Any denotable adolescent group of youngsters who (a) are generally perceived as a distinct aggregation by others in their neighborhood; (b) recognize themselves as a denotable group (almost invariable with a group name); and (c) have been involved in a

sufficient number of delinquent incidents to call forth a consistent negative response from neighborhood residents and/or law enforcement agencies (Klein, 1971).

A self-formed association of peers, bound together by mutual interests, with identifiable leadership, well-developed lines of authority, and other organizational features, who act in concert to achieve a specific purpose or purposes, which generally include the conduct of illegal activity and control over a particular territory, facility, or type of enterprise (Miller, 1980).

Groups containing law-violating juveniles and adults that are complexly organized, although sometimes diffuse, and sometimes cohesive, with established leadership and membership rules. The gang also engages in a range of crime (but with significantly more violence) within a framework of norms and values in respect to mutual support, conflict relations with other gangs, and a tradition of turf, colors, signs, and symbols. Subgroups of the gang may be deferentially committed to various delinquent or criminal patterns, such as drug trafficking, gang fighting, or burglary (Curry and Spergel, 1988).

Who Is a Gang Member?

Gang membership involves very different levels of commitment and participation on the part of the individual. Establishing criteria for membership in a gang is critical to measuring the nature and scope of a community's gang problem and must precede initiation of the assessment.

Once again, law enforcement agencies have attained greater agreement on membership criteria than have researchers. Some agencies have developed gang intelligence systems; and federal guidelines, state laws, departmental policy, or concern about infringement of civil liberties have caused departments to establish criteria for adding gang members to these databases. Documented evidence of gang membership also is required if enhanced penalties are sought under statutes such as the STEP Act.

Increasingly, a law enforcement definition of a gang member begins with a reasonable suspicion that the individual is involved in the criminal activity of a gang. Once that criterion is satisfied, there are usually other criteria to be met before the individual is classified as a member. For example, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department requires that at least one of the following criteria be met before classifying an individual as a gang member:

- When an individual admits membership in a gang
- When a reliable informant identifies an individual as a gang member
- When an informant of previously untested reliability identifies an individual as a gang member and identity is corroborated by independent information
- When an individual resides in or frequents a particular gang's area; or affects their style of dress, use of hand signs, symbols, or tattoos; or maintains ongoing relationships with known gang members; and where the law enforcement officer documents reasonable suspicion that the individual is involved in gang-related activity or enterprise
- When an individual has been arrested in the company of identified gang members for offenses that are consistent with usual gang activity

The NCIC definition of a gang member is very close to that of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, as is the definition recently adopted by the National Alliance of Gang Investigators Associations.

Many law enforcement agencies have also developed criteria for individuals on the periphery of the gang. It is important that such individuals also be identified, for they may represent better targets for diversion and often can be valuable sources of information. NCIC defines a street gang affiliate as “an individual who does not meet the criteria for a street gang member, but is known to affiliate with active gang members, and law enforcement personnel have established a reasonable suspicion that the individual is involved in criminal activity or enterprise, or promotes the criminal activity of a gang.”

What Is a Gang Incident?

Two general definitions of gang incidents are frequently used: member-based and motive-based. A motive-based incident is generally thought to be one that furthers the ends of the gang; a member-based incident is one that involves a gang member, regardless of what prompted the commission of the crime. Thus, if a member-based definition is used, the assault of a father by his gang-member son in a domestic dispute is considered a gang incident simply because the youth is a gang member. But if a motive-based definition is used for the same incident, it is not considered a gang incident. Each definition has its advocates, and the community must decide how to define a gang incident. Whichever definition is adopted, its consistent use is what is most important when collecting data on gang incidents.

Gang Diversity

As Steering Committee members work through developing gang-related definitions, they must recognize the wide diversity that exists among gangs. It is important to characterize individual gangs accurately. Not all gangs are the same, and not all gangs are involved in the same types of activities. The Steering Committee must clearly understand the nature of local gangs and the particular problems associated with them prior to developing strategies to address gang activity in the community.

To understand the issue of gang diversity, which in turn affects how a gang is defined, it is helpful to discuss how gangs differ in terms of organization, ethnicity, and specialization. Media accounts of gang activities and gang life have led many people to believe that gang membership always involves drive-by shootings and sophisticated drug-trafficking networks. As noted previously, this is generally not the case. There are gangs and gang members for whom violence is a way of life, and a number of gangs are involved in drug trafficking, which presents a host of problems for some communities. However, other types of gangs are not heavily involved in violence or drug trafficking but may still be of concern.

The popular image of youth gangs is that they are becoming more formally organized and more threatening to society and, therefore, should be feared. Large “supergangs” with thousands of members have existed since the 1960s and, like other gangs, grow in times of conflict or crisis and decrease in size at other times. In recent years, youth gangs have been influenced by several trends. In the 1970s and 1980s, many gangs became more dangerous because of increased mobility and access to more lethal weapons. Gangs of the 1980s and 1990s seemed to have extended their reach to both younger and older youth in terms of membership. They also had more members with prison records or ties to prison inmates and used weapons of greater lethality. They were less concerned with territorial affiliations, used alcohol and drugs more extensively, and were more involved in drug trafficking. Some youth gangs appear to have been transformed into entrepreneurial organizations by the crack cocaine epidemic that began in the mid-1980s. But the extent to which they have become drug-trafficking organizations is unclear. Some groups of youth are not seriously involved in illegal activities and provide mainly social opportunities for their membership. Some gangs seldom use drugs and alcohol, and some have close community ties (Howell, 1998).

The average age of youth gang members has increased over the past 20 years. Survey respondents to the 2004 National Youth Gang Survey (Egley and Ritz, 2006) placed youth gang members in the following age groups:

- Under 15 years old—14.5 percent
- 15 to 17 years old—27 percent
- 18 to 24 years old—37 percent
- Over 24 years old—21.5 percent

There is often community concern that racial and ethnic minorities are overidentified as gang members. National surveys of police departments provide strong evidence that racial and ethnic minorities, especially African Americans and Latinos, are the primary members of gangs (Howell, et al., 2001). Although police data are corroborated by the results of field studies and surveys, the data are subject to the charge that they are biased and overrepresent the participation of minorities (Curry and Decker, 2003).

According to the 2006 National Youth Gang Survey of law enforcement agencies, the ethnicity of gang members is approximately as follows:

- Black or African American—35.1 percent
- Hispanic or Latino—49.6 percent
- White—8.9 percent
- Other—6.4 percent

(National Youth Gang Center, unpublished data, 2008.)

In contrast, however, in a self-report survey of 8th grade students, 31 percent of the students who said they were gang members were African American, 25 percent were Hispanic, 25 percent were white, 5 percent were Asian, and 15 percent were of other racial and ethnic groups (Esbensen and Osgood, 1997).

Despite the disproportionate representation of minority group members in gangs, young people of color have no special predisposition to gang membership. Rather, they are more likely to live in poor, socially disorganized communities with many risk factors predictive of gang involvement.

There is also recent evidence that gangs are becoming more interracial. The 1998 National Youth Gang Survey noted that 36 percent of gangs are estimated to be racially “mixed”; i.e., they are a significant mixture of two or more racial/ethnic groups (Moore and Cook, 1999). Curry and Decker (1998) note that gangs tend to draw their members from their neighborhoods and, to the extent that neighborhoods comprise diverse residents, gang membership will represent that diversity.

Numerous ways of classifying gangs have been devised, although gangs’ complexity, variations, and changing structure practically defy static categories. One way of viewing gangs is along a continuum of degree of organization, from groups that hang out in shopping malls; to small clusters of friends who band together to commit crimes; to street gangs composed of groups of adolescents and young adults who form a semistructured operation and engage in delinquent and criminal behavior; to adult criminal organizations that engage in criminal activity for economic reasons.

Exhibit 2.4 Project Director Sample Job Description

SUPERVISION RECEIVED AND EXERCISED:

Receives direction from the Steering Committee; exercises direct supervision over professional and technical/clerical staff.

EXAMPLES OF DUTIES: Duties may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Coordinates meetings and activities of the Steering Committee and the Assessment Work Group and prepares appropriate materials for meetings.
- Coordinates, monitors, and assists with all data collection by the Assessment Work Group and assists with compiling of information required for Assessment Report.
- Coordinates and/or performs the completion and submission of quarterly and annual reports.
- Works as a liaison between the Research Partner, Steering Committee, and Assessment Work Group, updating personnel on progress and challenges and arranging joint meetings as necessary.
- Confers with participating agencies, including schools, juvenile courts, law enforcement officials, probation officers, government agencies, local elected officials, grassroots groups, and others.
- Develops public awareness documents and publicity materials. Provides training on the assessment process.

QUALIFICATIONS:

Desired Knowledge:

- Familiarity with local agencies (schools, social services, law enforcement, courts/corrections), local units of government, and grassroots organizations.
- Knowledge of principles and practices of budget preparation.
- Knowledge of principles and practices of strategic planning.
- Knowledge of principles of supervision, training, and performance evaluation.
- Basic understanding of gang intervention, suppression, and prevention strategies.
- Basic knowledge of youth gang involvement and gang-related activities.
- Basic understanding of statistical principles and data analysis.

Ability to:

- Network effectively with a variety of types of organizations, including government agencies, law enforcement agencies, schools, social service agencies, courts/probation/corrections, and grassroots organizations.
- Demonstrate organization, administration, and personnel management skills.
- Work effectively with key community leaders and residents, diverse population groups, and youth.
- Work with high-risk, gang-involved populations.
- Identify community resources to assist in implementation of the project.
- Interpret and apply federal, state, and local policies, procedures, laws, and regulations.
- Analyze problems, identify alternate solutions, project consequences of proposed actions, and implement recommendations in support of goals of the project.
- Gain cooperation and collaboration through discussion and persuasion.
- Exercise judgment regarding appropriate information sharing, confidentiality requirements, and human relations.
- Assist in selection of project staff and train, supervise, and evaluate those staff.
- Communicate clearly and concisely, both orally and in writing.
- Provide training on the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model.
- Establish and maintain cooperative relationships with those contacted in the course of work.
- Set priorities and work independently in the absence of supervision.
- Demonstrate knowledge of word processing and spreadsheet software.