

## Chapter 2. The OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model

The OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model is a flexible framework that communities can use to plan a comprehensive approach to gangs. For optimum effectiveness, several elements are essential:

1. *Acknowledgment of the problem.* The presence of a youth gang problem must be recognized before anything meaningful can be done to address it. If denial is present, it must be confronted.
2. *Assessment of the problem.* Those with responsibility for addressing the problem—representatives of police, schools, probation, youth agencies, grassroots organizations, government, and others—participate in identifying its nature and causes and in recommending appropriate responses. The assessment results in an understanding of who is involved in gang crime and where in the community it is concentrated. This, in conjunction with other data and information, enables targeting:
  - Gang-involved youth.
  - The most violent gangs.
  - The area(s) where gang crime most often occurs.
3. *Setting goals and objectives.* Once the problem(s) is described, goals and objectives should be consistent with the assessment findings. Goals specify ends, while objectives describe the means to an end. Goals and objectives should be clearly linked to the data and the identified priority issues.
4. *Relevant services and activities.* Rationales for services, tactics, and policies and procedures that involve each of the key agencies should be developed for each objective. Services and activities should be clearly articulated and then implemented for each of the five core strategies. These activities must be closely coordinated and integrated to ensure that the work of collaborating agencies is complementary. Selecting appropriate activities is an important step to ensure that project goals are achieved. Activities fall into four categories: prevention, intervention, suppression, and reentry. Most comprehensive gang projects include a prevention component. Primary prevention focuses on the entire population in the community, while secondary prevention focuses on youth aged 7–14 who are at a high risk of joining gangs. Intervention targets active gang members and close associates. Suppression activities within comprehensive projects go beyond traditional activities. Law enforcement agencies partner with other community agencies that hold youth accountable and enforce community norms for youth behavior. Because many gang-involved individuals are constantly leaving or entering one system or another, often for brief periods, reentry activities are often handled as an overlapping function with intervention.
5. *A multidisciplinary intervention team is the primary service delivery strategy and targets gang-involved youth.* It is important to remember that while youth gang members must be held accountable for their criminal acts, they also must be provided with services for their academic, economic, and social needs. Gang members must be encouraged to control their behavior and to participate in legitimate mainstream activities. At the same time, external controls must be exercised on gang and gang-member behavior. For some gang members, secure confinement will be necessary. For others, graduated degrees of community-based supervision, ranging from continuous sight or electronic supervision to incarceration, will be appropriate. It is important that youth understand that they will face consequences if they do not follow rules, laws, conditions, or reasonable

expectations of the project. Thus, a range of services and sanctions is required, often in some interactive way.

6. *The work of the collaborating agencies is overseen by a Steering Committee of decision makers from agencies and organizations that have an interest in or a responsibility for addressing the community's gang problem.* These representatives should not only set policy and oversee the overall direction of the gang project, but they should take responsibility for spearheading efforts in their own organizations to remove barriers to services and to social and economic opportunities; develop effective criminal justice, school, and social agency procedures; and promote policies that will further the goals of the gang strategy.
7. *Evaluation and sustainability.* Results from the evaluation of the Little Village Gang Violence Reduction Project show that the Model is effective in lowering crime rates among youth gang members. Results from an evaluation of five communities chosen as demonstration sites for the Model show that a combination of intervention, suppression, and prevention strategies, along with a coordinated team approach to delivering services, is effective in having a positive impact on reducing gang crime. For these reasons, the incorporation of a strong evaluation component is critical to assessing the impact of the project. Equally important is a plan for sustaining the project over the long term.

## **The Five Strategies of the Model**

Communities should select appropriate activities within each of the five strategies for local implementation, and these strategies should be planned to address local community conditions and targeted gang members.

The OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model requires that these strategies be delivered in a focused manner, but it allows flexibility for local communities to select activities within each of the strategies that are appropriate to the community's specific concerns. Although early implementation of the Model specifically and principally involved intervention and suppression, more recent demonstration sites have included prevention as a key component of their projects. The inclusion of prevention activities is based on the premise that focused gang prevention efforts must work in conjunction with the other strategies. In fact, it is the combination of the five strategies that ensures both short- and long-term reduction in gang crime and violence, and that the most cost-effective approach, prevention, can have an effect on those most at risk of gang involvement (Wyrick, 2006).

The five strategies will be discussed throughout this manual. They include:

*Community Mobilization:* Involvement of local citizens, including former gang youth, community groups, and agencies; and coordination of programs and staff functions within and across agencies.

*Opportunities Provision:* Development of a variety of specific education, training, and employment programs targeting gang-involved youth.

*Social Intervention:* Youth-serving agencies, schools, grassroots groups, faith-based organizations, law enforcement agencies, and other criminal justice organizations reaching out and acting as links to gang-involved youth, their families, and the conventional world and needed services.

*Suppression:* Formal and informal social control procedures, including close supervision or monitoring of gang youth by agencies of the criminal justice system and also by community-based agencies, schools, and grassroots groups.

*Organizational Change and Development:* Development and implementation of policies and procedures that result in the most effective use of available and potential resources, within and across agencies, to better address the gang problem.

These strategies are equally important, and all should be implemented concurrently. A more lengthy description of each of these strategies, and relevant activities, is found in Chapter 4, page 21.

The following information should be considered by communities that are implementing the Model:

**1. The OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model was designed primarily for use with young adult and teenage gang members.**

Adult crime organizations, such as motorcycle gangs, prison gangs, ideological gangs, and hate groups composed primarily of adults, are not the intended focus of this Model.

**2. The OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model was designed for communities with a serious, violent, and entrenched gang problem.**

Since the Model is resource-intensive, the strategies implemented in the target community should address gang-involved youth or youth who exhibit multiple risk factors for gang involvement and their families, not all the youth in the target area or community. To that end, intervention and suppression activities should focus on immediate threats, real or perceived, to the community.

**3. The plan should incorporate prevention, intervention, and suppression approaches.**

These approaches must be integrated to respond to the interrelated aspects of the gang problem, from root causes to outward threats to public safety. For that reason, the Model calls for a mix of those strategies across the criminal justice system, social service agencies, schools, community groups, and citizens.

Gang members who are already involved in serious and chronic crime should be targeted with suppression and/or intervention activities. Gang members who are likely to become involved in serious crime should be targeted by the Intervention Team with strategies such as social intervention, provision of job training and employment, family counseling, academic tutoring, or anger management classes, as appropriate, based on local conditions and as suggested by the Assessment Report. Prevention strategies should be implemented for youth who exhibit multiple risk factors that may increase the probability of joining a gang.

**4. The Model asks agencies and individuals to go beyond their traditional roles.**

For example, justice agencies such as law enforcement and the courts tend to restrict their roles to suppression approaches. However, over time, their roles can expand to include intervention and community mobilization activities. Gang officers continue to be primarily involved with arrests of gang members and investigations of gang crime, but they also can intervene in a youth gang member's life by referring the youth to a social service program.

## **5. No single agency can solve the gang problem.**

Police officers must be a key part of any anti-crime effort because of their expertise and experience. However, other government and service delivery organizations must participate in project planning. These entities bring different perspectives on problems and solutions, as well as different approaches and resources, to the process. Aside from law enforcement, local agencies that should be involved include housing, health, parks and recreation, economic development, planning, mental health, schools, juvenile and adult probation, corrections, prosecution, judiciary, the faith community, grassroots groups, employment agencies, and social services.