Research Questions to Guide Neighborhood Crime Prevention Planning

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A common model under the realm of “problem-oriented policing” used to remedy the underlying reasons for crime is the SARA model (Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment; http://www.popcenter.org/about/?p=sara). Scanning refers to identifying the problems in a neighborhood and prioritizing the problems to address. Analysis refers to understanding the conditions underlying and associated with the problem as well as understanding how the problem has been addressed in the past and limitations to past responses. Response refers to developing new approaches to solve the problem, particularly ones that are evidence-based and that have a sound theoretical basis. Response also refers to the development and implementation of the new approach. Assessment refers to determining whether the response was implemented as planned and whether it worked to solve the problem.

The questions and tasks outlined below are designed to scan and analyze (the first two elements of the SARA model) the nature of the crime problem in a neighborhood. Necessarily this is a “working” list of questions because the results of preliminary analyses reveal additional questions to answer.

1) What issues and problems are of greatest concern to neighborhood residents, businesses, and other organizations (and not just crime-related issues)? What is the priority listing of issues?

2) What locations/addresses receive a disproportionate volume of calls for service (residential and commercial)? Are these locations stable over time (i.e., do the same general locations continue to produce high volumes of calls month after month and year after year)? Why are these locations the sites for continual calls for service?

3) Where are the hot spots of reported crime, including specific addresses? Are these locations stable over time? Why are these locations the sites for continual criminal activity? Put differently, why do these sites attract crime?

4) What are the recurring crime problems in the neighborhood?

5) For violent crimes, what is typically the relationship between offenders and victims? What proportion of incidents is gang-related?
6) What proportion of arrestees of crimes committed in the neighborhood reside within the neighborhood? What proportion reside outside of the neighborhood but within 1 mile of the neighborhood?

7) Which offenders account for a disproportionate amount of criminal activity in the neighborhood?

8) Who are the criminal associates of high-volume offenders?

9) To what extent are juvenile offenders driving crime in the neighborhood?

10) How many ex-prisoners return to the neighborhood each month and year? Does the police department know when ex-offenders return to the neighborhood and where they are residing?

11) Do ex-prisoners account for a disproportionate amount of crime in the neighborhood?

12) How much physical and social disorder is present in the neighborhood and how does this compare to other neighborhoods? Where are disorderly conditions concentrated?

13) What is the extent of “collective efficacy” (i.e., cohesion and trust among neighbors and willingness to intervene) in the neighborhood and how does this compare to other neighborhoods?

14) What is the extent of satisfaction with the police in the neighborhood and how does this compare to other neighborhoods? Similarly, to what extent are the police viewed as a legitimate institution in the neighborhood and how does this compare to other neighborhoods?

15) To what extent do residents of the neighborhood feel safe walking around the neighborhood? To what extent do students feel safe walking to and from school?

16) Where are the problem properties in the neighborhood (i.e., code violations, likely sites of criminal nuisances)? What enforcement tools are used to remedy problem properties?