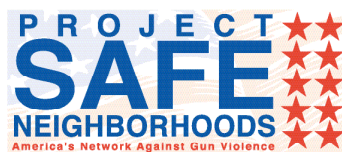


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Engaging the Community

in **Project Safe**
Neighborhoods



Institute for Law and Justice

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Engaging the Community in Project Safe Neighborhoods

Executive Summary

This guide provides information on how to engage the community in the work of Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) task forces, and on the benefits of doing so. The guide is PSN-specific. It addresses questions that PSN task forces often ask about community engagement and includes concrete examples from U. S. Attorneys' districts that already involve community groups in a variety of ways. Key topics covered in the guide are highlighted below.

Why is community engagement important? What are the benefits for PSN?

The community has information and resources that can make PSN more effective. Experienced PSN task forces cite at least a dozen benefits they have realized from their efforts to engage the community. For example, citizens have become more willing to report crimes and cooperate with investigations; task forces have gained new information that has helped them develop investigative and prosecution strategies; new relationships have prevented misunderstandings about the focus on specific neighborhoods or groups by PSN; and gun crime prevention efforts have been strengthened by involving family members, clergy, and others who can be positive influences on youth and ex-offenders.

What is “the community,” and what roles can the community play in PSN?

Community includes all groups with specific roles to play in creating safer neighborhoods by reducing gun crime. It includes criminal justice agencies and organizations that provide services like housing and job training, but also community and faith-based groups, businesses, youth and families, and the offender population itself (including ex-offenders, parolees, and probationers). Although the community is large, community engagement is customized in each district. The guide includes examples of a full range of roles that community groups have been playing in PSN—analyzing gun crime data, promoting PSN messages, serving on planning groups, working with ex-offenders, and others.

Aren't we already engaging the community through our ad campaigns?

Community engagement often begins with outreach through the media, but much more can be done to engage the community in active roles. And more can be done *through* the media

to support higher levels of community involvement in PSN. The guide offers specific ideas for linking community engagement and media outreach.

How do we expand our community’s engagement in PSN?

Community engagement can be broken down into a step-by-step process, drawing on successful strategies seen in PSN and other violence reduction initiatives. It does not have to be overly complicated. The guide includes a self-assessment questionnaire to help with planning and explains nine steps that PSN task forces can take to involve the community effectively. One of the most important recommendations is to start with current partners. For example, most of the PSN task forces that collaborate with the community are closely allied with Weed & Seed.

What are some examples of community engagement in PSN?

The guide provides specific examples from various experienced PSN task forces to bring the “why” and “how” of community engagement to life. Included are examples of

- **Holding effective community forums**, such as town hall-style meetings and problem-solving sessions with community members.
- **Implementing other outreach approaches**, such as knocking on doors, sponsoring events to promote PSN and celebrate its successes, meeting with neighborhood crime watch groups, outreach to businesses, tip lines, and others.
- **Involving criminal justice partners** by tapping into local community policing, community prosecution, or probation/parole efforts.
- **Engaging youth and families** through home visits, community workshops, educational presentations, mentoring and peer support programs for youth, and activities like plays with gun crime prevention themes and PSN rap contests.
- **Collaborating with community and faith-based groups** to address gang violence, conduct pledge against gun violence campaigns in schools, hold rallies and vigils, establish a PSN outreach committee, and bring community members together after a tragedy.
- **Involving businesses and foundations** to establish a non-profit organization to support PSN; and partnering with sports teams, media outreach partners, shooting sports organizations, and firearms industry representatives.
- **Engaging offender populations** by offering assistance from community groups at PSN meetings held with ex-offenders, implementing case management teams, and involving offenders and ex-offenders in analyzing gun crime data.

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Foreword

Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) is a nationwide commitment to reduce gun crime in America. Led by the United States Attorney in each of the 94 federal judicial districts, PSN calls on federal, state, and local agencies to accomplish a common goal: create safer neighborhoods by reducing gun crime and sustaining the reduction over time.

In every district, PSN incorporates five core elements: partnerships, strategic planning, training, outreach, and accountability. Many PSN task forces have focused their outreach efforts on media campaigns, but there is more to outreach than public service advertising. Outreach also includes engaging community groups in PSN—not only as recipients of messages to deter gun crime, but also as active participants in the initiative. The purpose of this monograph is to address questions that PSN task forces have been asking about community engagement: Who should be involved? What roles can community groups play? How can they become involved? And what benefits can we expect to see from community engagement?

Engaging the Community in Project Safe Neighborhoods is one of many resources available through the PSN Technical Assistance Program administered by the U. S. Department of Justice (DOJ), Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). Through this program, BJA works with several DOJ components and many other public and private sector partners. For more information about assistance with community engagement or any other aspect of PSN, see the PSN website (<http://www.projectsafeneighborhoods.gov>).

Engaging the Community in Project Safe Neighborhoods

Although outreach, including “community engagement,” is a key element of Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN), it is not always clear just what is meant by “community”—who comprises it, how it should be engaged, and how the community can benefit United States Attorneys’ Offices in prosecuting and preventing gun crimes. The main objectives of this guide are to:

- Offer working definitions of “community” and “community engagement” that are PSN-specific.
- Provide information on the benefits and potential benefits of community engagement, drawing on concrete examples of strategies that are working for PSN task forces across the country.
- Begin to address the “how” of community engagement by offering examples from PSN task forces that have been involving community organizations, faith-based organizations, Weed & Seed partners, and others in reducing gun crime.
- Suggest a model for community engagement in PSN, along with action steps and a self-assessment guide that task forces can use to assess where they are now and where they want to be.

Why Engage the Community?

Historically, criminal justice agencies did not involve the community in their efforts, and United States Attorneys did not regularly engage community groups in their work. In the early 1990s, however, this began to change with initiatives like Weed & Seed, Operation Ceasefire, and SACSI.¹ In many jurisdictions, success has hinged on community involvement not only in clarifying the extent and nature of the crime problem, but also in developing solutions.

¹ Supported by leadership and resources from United States Attorneys, these initiatives have engaged communities in a variety of ways. For example, 40 percent of Weed and Seed steering committee members are expected to be community representatives. Operation Ceasefire in Boston included extensive analysis of gun homicides, new partnerships with probation and parole, and a substantial role for the TenPoint Coalition, an ecumenical organization. Through SACSI (Strategic Approaches to Community Safety Initiative), the Department of Justice sought to replicate the collaborative process Boston used to achieve a dramatic reduction in youth homicides (from an average of 44 a year between 1991 and 1995 to 15 in 1998).

Community Engagement Trends in Criminal Justice

Shifts toward greater community involvement can be seen across government over the past 60 years. In the 1950s and 1960s, communities began to demand that their needs be considered—for example, during the planning process for urban renewal projects.² Planning that came “solely, or almost solely, from the head of the planner,” who then imparted the vision to the community, gave way to a “more modern view . . . that good plans spring from the community itself.”³ Active citizenship was also vital to social reforms in other areas, including civil rights and equality for women.

Over the last 30 years, the U.S. Department of Justice has invested significant resources in community engagement to prevent and address crime. Community engagement can also be seen with respect to victims of crime. Increasingly, all criminal justice agencies have been called upon to consider what is best for the victim, and to involve crime victims in the justice process. The public expectation today is that criminal justice agencies will continue to shift their thinking, processes, and structures to better support what is best for the community, and to involve the community in determining what that is.

Benefits of Community Engagement for Analyzing Violent Crime

A major lesson learned from the SACSI projects was that official data alone did not provide enough information about the dynamics of violent crime problems. Arrest data suggested that in many of the SACSI cities, gun homicides were similar, in that most were committed by young men in specific inner-city areas. But data from non-traditional sources produced a more complete understanding of the problem. Patrol officers, community groups, detectives, and even offenders “proved much more revealing of the motives and nature of the events.”

For example, about 60 percent of homicides in Indianapolis involved loosely organized gangs, while in Rochester, 40 percent were associated with drug house robberies and about half involved arguments and disputes that were not gang-related. The SACSI projects learned that “it is in the underlying patterns where opportunities for intervention were to be found.”

Source: Erin Dalton, Targeted Crime Reduction Efforts in Ten Communities: Lessons for the PSN Initiative

² “Overview of Community Based Planning,” *The Pickett Institute Training Curriculum: Building Capacity for Community Based Strategic Planning* (Module 3), Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, 2004.

³ John M. Levy, *Contemporary Urban Planning*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1991, p. 82.

Perhaps the most notable change in criminal justice has been law enforcement's widespread acceptance of community policing. In the 1970s, police realized that communities needed to share responsibility for preventing crime, but beyond Neighborhood Watch, there were few means through which this could be accomplished. Influential police chiefs, researchers, and community activists began advocating a problem-solving approach that let residents and police work together to address the conditions that allowed crime to take hold.⁴ In addition to problem solving, community policing—an integral component of Weed & Seed—includes patrol officer assignments to specific neighborhoods, school resource officer programs, police advisory committees representing diverse interest groups, and partnerships with community organizations. Although approaches vary, a large majority of police departments report that they participate in some form of community policing.⁵ In many jurisdictions, community policing offers untapped resources for engaging the community in PSN. Local prosecutors involved in community-based prosecution may also be helpful in linking PSN task forces to the community.⁶

Benefits of Community Engagement for PSN

PSN task forces understand community engagement generally, but the advantages of applying the concept to PSN are not necessarily obvious. Because a United States Attorney's Office (USAO) covers many local jurisdictions, it can be hard to define the relevant "community." Many PSN task force members have organizational mandates to investigate and prosecute gun crimes (with success measured primarily by numbers of arrests or prosecutions, not by evidence of community engagement). Often, they have not yet been asked to focus on PSN objectives for sustaining reductions in gun crime over the longer term, or to fully consider

⁴ See H. Goldstein, "Improving Policing: A Problem-Oriented Approach," *Crime and Delinquency*, Vol. 25, 1979. Today, police typically are trained in some variation of the SARA problem solving process—Scanning (problem identification), Analysis, Response, and Assessment—originally developed as part of early research on police problem solving. See J. Eck and W. Spelman, *Problem-Solving: Problem-Oriented Policing in Newport News*. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, 1987.

⁵ By 1999, all police departments serving 1 million or more residents, and 90 percent of departments serving populations of 25,000 to 999,999 reported using community policing officers. See M. J. Hickman and B.A. Reaves, "Community Policing in Local Police Departments, 1997 and 1999," Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001.

⁶ In 2000, forty-six percent of local prosecutors reported they were involved in community prosecution. Strategies include assigning cases based on geographic (neighborhood) areas, opening neighborhood offices, and contributing legal expertise (for example, in applying nuisance abatement or landlord-tenant law) to help community groups solve crime-related problems. See R.V. Wolf and J. L. Worrall, *Lessons from the Field: Ten Community Prosecution Leadership Profiles*, Alexandria, Virginia: American Prosecutors Research Institute, November 2004.

what roles the community should play in PSN. Before investing time and energy in this direction, PSN task forces want to know more about the benefits they can expect to see for their efforts to involve the community.

What PSN Task Forces Are Saying

In December 2004, the U.S. Department of Justice convened a working group of PSN task force representatives⁷ to discuss their community engagement experiences—how they got started, how they achieved success, and the benefits of community engagement in their districts. The consensus of this group was that (1) all PSN task forces that have successfully engaged the community have been backed by the United States Attorney’s strong commitment to the concept, and (2) for that to happen, the results and benefits of community engagement must be clear “up front.” The examples and discussions that follow in this guide address “how to” questions. The benefits are clear. Community engagement:

- Instills greater willingness among citizens to report crimes and cooperate with investigations
- Allows for the collection of data and information that has practical value for developing investigative and prosecution strategies
- Provides an effective means for addressing issues of cultural sensitivity and diversity
- Involves family members, clergy, and community groups who can be positive influences on youth and ex-offenders
- Provides opportunities to prevent misunderstandings about the targeting of specific neighborhoods or groups by PSN
- Creates the capacity to dispel misconceptions about the overall purpose and objectives of PSN, generating wider general support
- Opens the door to corporate and other funding for PSN
- Provides greater understanding by the community of the responsibilities, priorities, resources, and statutory limitations of the USAO
- Increases personal and job satisfaction.

⁷ The working group was convened by DOJ in conjunction with the Institute for Law and Justice (ILJ) and the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC), PSN’s community engagement technical assistance partners.

Why Community Engagement Matters

Community ownership of, and involvement in, PSN's agenda is key to establishing the legitimacy of the initiative.⁸ As earlier discussions suggest, there are several straightforward reasons why:

- As in virtually any other endeavor, people will support what they help create.
- Although public support for PSN is substantial, targeting specific neighborhoods or groups for intervention strategies is not always well understood or accepted.
- The community has information and resources that can make PSN more effective.
- The public wants to be involved with criminal justice agencies to reduce violence and build healthy communities.

Defining Community and the Role of Community Engagement in PSN

At meetings and conferences, various PSN task force members have raised basic questions about community and community engagement that are addressed in this section: What is “the community?” What community groups should get involved? What roles can the community play in PSN? And how does community engagement differ from media outreach campaigns?

What is the community?

The 2,000-page *Encyclopedia of Community*⁹ contains 500 articles, 250 sidebars, and a master bibliography that, together, represent hundreds of years of thinking about the meaning of community. Traditionally, “community” has referred to people living in a specific geographic locale who often have shared values or norms. Assets such as people, institutions like schools and hospitals, businesses, land, etc. are also commonly included in geographic-based definitions of community. Community may also refer to people who share special interests but have no common geographic reference point (e.g., participants in Internet discussion groups). Although there are many ways to define community, this working definition is offered for PSN:

⁸ “Project Safe Neighborhood Technical Assistance Project Focus Group Report: Community Outreach Strategies,” Bureau of Justice Assistance and American University, August 2003.

⁹ K. Christensen and D. Levinson (edtrs), *Encyclopedia of Community: From the Village to the Virtual World*, Sage Publications, Inc., June 2003.

The community is all groups in a United States Attorney’s district that have a specific role to play in creating safer neighborhoods by reducing gun crime and sustaining that reduction.

These groups typically include:

- Youth at high risk of involvement in gun-related crimes
- Family members of offenders and youth
- Neighborhood and citizens’ groups, particularly in areas with high levels of violent crime
- Businesses and business associations
- Religious organizations and ministerial alliances
- Charitable foundations and organizations
- Agencies and organizations providing services, such as substance abuse treatment, employment training, housing, education, and victim advocacy
- Criminal justice system partners in PSN (including agencies focused on law enforcement, probation and parole, and corrections, but also specific initiatives such as Weed & Seed and community policing).
- Offender population (including ex-offenders, parolees, and probationers)

Including offender populations as part of the community may seem counter-intuitive to some groups or individuals whose primary concern is enforcement or prosecution. However, PSN outreach has always focused on offender groups through media campaigns and, in some districts, through meetings with probationers/parolees as part of a “lever pulling” strategy.¹⁰ In addition, a number of PSN partners, including community and faith-based groups, are committed to providing opportunities for offender populations and youth to break the cycle of violence.

Can PSN involve all of these groups?

The simple answer is yes. Some PSN task forces involve all or most of them. The qualified answer is that it may not be possible or desirable for every U.S. Attorney’s district to involve all segments of the community in every PSN initiative. It also may not be possible to

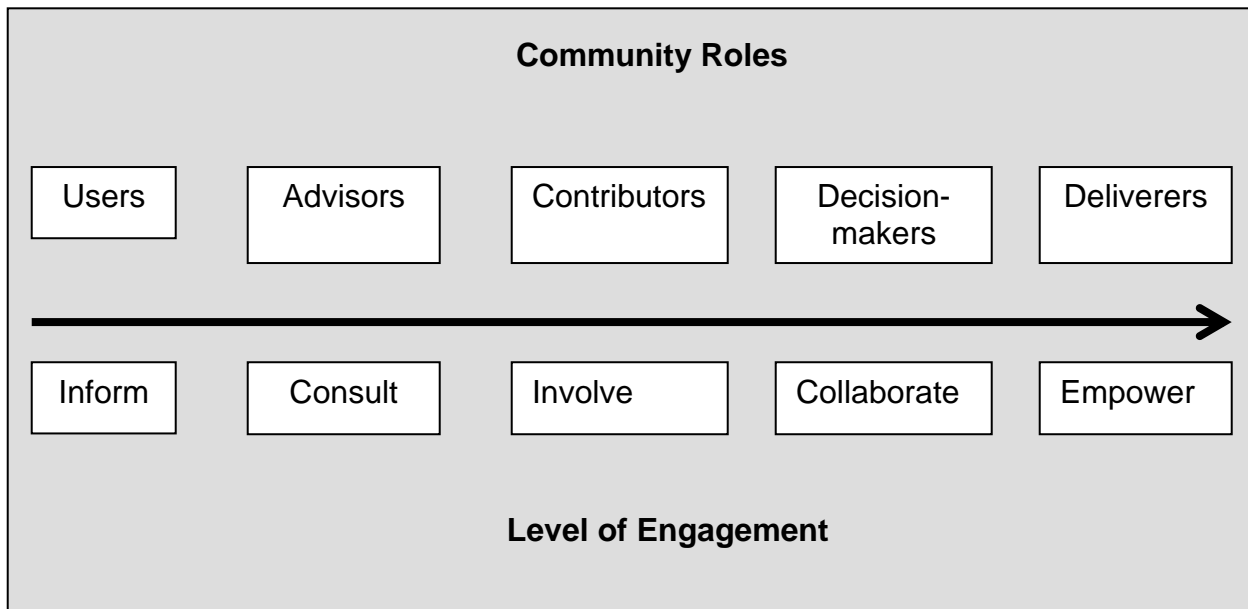
¹⁰ The term “pulling levers” refers to a strategy that includes delivering a strong, consistent message to a specific group of offenders that any violation of the law or condition of release will result in swift and severe consequences. See D. Kennedy, “Pulling Levers: Getting Deterrence Right,” *National Institute of Justice Journal*, Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, July 1998. Also see “Pulling Levers” under “Engaging Offender Populations” in this monograph.

involve all groups at once, or to expect them to play the same roles and have the same level of involvement.

PSN task forces will need to consider their own objectives when thinking about who to involve. Many task forces are focused on reducing gun crime in a particular geographic area—sometimes in conjunction with Weed & Seed or Project Sentry efforts. This approach naturally lends itself to participation by community members living or working in that area. On the other hand, not every task force has a geographic focus. If a priority is to prosecute gun crimes associated with domestic violence, for example, the PSN community would include domestic violence coalitions. Similarly, task forces targeting illegal gun sales may or may not be neighborhood focused and would need to think about “community” in light of their own objectives and strategies.

What roles can the community play in PSN?

The examples in this guide demonstrate that the community can play a full range of roles in PSN at every stage of the initiative—from analyzing gun crime data to working with offenders upon their release from prison. It may be helpful to think of community roles in PSN along a continuum like the one below.



As the graphic above suggests, the actions associated with “level of engagement” (inform, consult, etc.) represent different ways in which PSN engages the community. When a

PSN task force informs the community of its plans or reports on successful prosecutions, the community may be able to use the information, but it is not yet engaged in PSN at a high level. The level of engagement increases as the task force begins to consult with, involve, collaborate with, and empower various segments of the community. The illustration does not prescribe who should do what. It is meant to spark creative thinking about possible community roles. For example:

- Should youth at risk of involvement in gun crime only be potential users of PSN messages, or are there valuable roles they can play as advisors or even deliverers of services?
- If neighborhood or faith based groups were consulted as advisors, would they be more likely to get involved later in working with at-risk youth or offenders? Would they be more likely to provide information useful for investigations or protecting witnesses?
- What about the PSN task force members? Their individual roles may be enforcement and prosecution-based, but there may be others in their agencies who are knowledgeable about community engagement. Are they already working with community groups in a PSN target neighborhood?

Aren't we already engaging the community through our ad campaigns?

Community engagement often begins with outreach through the media, but much more can be done to engage the community in active roles. And more can be done *through* the media to support higher levels of community involvement in PSN.

PSN has invested a great deal in national and local media campaigns to deliver a consistent “gun crime means hard time” message to the general public and to segments of the community—primarily offenders and others at high risk of committing gun crime. The message has been delivered not only on TV, radio, billboards, and posters, but also on headrests in squad cars, clipboards in gun shops, and the paper liners on school lunch trays (to cite just a few examples). These campaigns have been effective in increasing awareness, but they are limited in their ability to inspire action and get the community involved.

To help clarify this distinction, take the example of the “Got Milk?” campaign.¹¹ After millions spent on advertising, a high percentage of the population was aware of the “Got Milk?” ads, but people were not buying any more milk than they had in the past. Although the message

was noticed, it did not translate into action. Unlike the milk campaign, however, PSN ads can be supplemented by other media outreach efforts to help achieve greater community involvement.

To do this, consider:

- Is all or most PSN media coverage about arrests, prosecution, or convictions?
- If conditions in a neighborhood have improved as a result of PSN interventions, does that success story need to be told as well?
- If a community forum on PSN is planned, how can media outreach be targeted to get the right people there and ensure diverse participation?
- How can the media be used to help acknowledge existing community efforts and support?

PSN task forces can leverage the media to increase community buy-in and participation for their local initiative. Each PSN task force works with an outreach partner or other partners who may be able to spearhead the activities.

¹¹ This example is given by The Academy for Educational Development (AED), a non-profit organization that is currently the national media outreach partner for PSN.

Linking Community Engagement and Media Outreach

What is media outreach and how can it benefit your PSN project?

Media outreach is the action of involving the media in a cause, or securing media coverage of an event or issue. Through well-planned media outreach, you can garner news articles, feature stories, and editorials that promote PSN programs in your community. Effective media outreach builds connections between your organization and your region's media outlets: television and radio stations, newspapers, and local magazines. Active promotion (as part of an ongoing public relations plan) to secure print and broadcast coverage—combined with an educational component that informs journalists about PSN and why it's needed in your community—will result in a mutually rewarding relationship.

How do we start our media outreach program?

A PSN task force can begin by monitoring the local newspapers, TV, and radio (including ethnically targeted media outlets) to get a feel for their coverage of PSN-related stories and who reports them. Consider clipping newspaper stories and keeping notes on other types of coverage. Try to respond to every PSN-related article or story with a letter to the editor or op-ed. Finally, keep a running calendar listing PSN-related events that you can use to develop story ideas or tie in to national happenings.

What are the best ways to work with the media?

It's best to be prepared to speak with reporters *before* they call you, so you won't be surprised. Try incorporating the following tips:

- Learn reporters' beats and interests so you can contact the best person to cover your story
- Be prepared and credible: prepare backgrounders, fact sheets, and lists of experts who are available and ready to discuss the issues
- Respect reporters' deadlines. You can pitch a hot story by telephone, but in general it's best to mail information about five days before an event.
- Be courteous, relevant, timely, concise, and objective; if a journalist does not seem interested, be polite and don't burn any bridges.

How can we make sure our story is newsworthy?

Air time and print space is at a premium, so it's important to ask yourself why people should be interested in your story. Consider the following questions:

- Is the story timely, the material and data current? Is the information useful?
- Is the issue, or some aspect of it, new to the public, distinct, or unexpected?
- Does it tie in with a trend or other breaking news?
- Will it affect many people in the community? Does it hit close to home?
- Does the story have emotional appeal or a human interest element?

Some ideas for newsworthy events

- Organize public appearances with PSN officials and community leaders at PSN-related events
- Create mall exhibits. Use the exhibits to showcase innovative programs and sign-up volunteers
- Host a public symposium about the gun crime problem and invite community leaders, journalists, and law enforcement
- Host a community open house to give journalists a realistic view of your PSN efforts. Invite the media to experience a day in the life of a beat cop, violence prevention advocate, etc.
- Invite other community organizations to join you in chronicling your PSN activities on a community Web journal. Urge them to share both successes and failures. Journalists can use this as the start of feature stories.

Source: Academy for Educational Development (AED)

Expanding Your Community's Engagement in PSN

Community engagement in PSN can be broken down into a step-by-step process, drawing on successful strategies seen in PSN and other violence reduction efforts. Experienced PSN task forces suggest that it is the process of engaging a community that's critical, rather than the immediate outcome: get people talking, ask the community what is needed, and be willing to follow up.

A community engagement model for PSN can be envisioned as having four components—assessment, mobilization, planning, and implementation. Steps commonly associated with each component are reviewed briefly below. The boundaries between the four components, however, are not strictly drawn, and the steps do not have to be taken in the order presented to be effective. For example, effective assessments often “mobilize” task force members, researchers, and community members to help analyze problems and identify resources; and initial steps toward implementation—at a minimum, increased awareness through PSN media campaigns—have been taken in all jurisdictions.

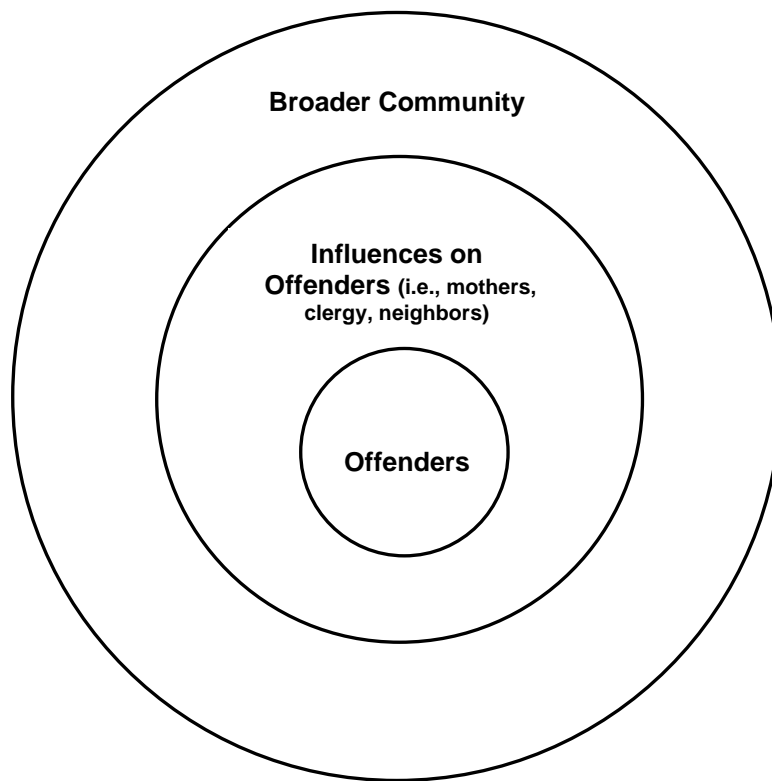
Assessment

(1) Define your community.

Task forces that are actively engaging the community in PSN often recommend the following:

- **Think in terms of which are the most common victims and perpetrators of gun crime.** For example, the Southern District of Indiana used a strategic planning process to determine that its primary audience was African American males ages 16-24 in Marion County (Indianapolis); the secondary audience was the people who have influence over the primary audience (e.g., mothers, clergy, neighbors); and the tertiary audience was the broader community (see diagram below).¹²

¹² A similar conceptualization has five groups or audiences: (1) offender populations, (2) ex-offenders who want to give back to the community, (3) people at risk but not necessarily in the criminal justice system, (4) at risk and high risk families, and (5) the public. See “Project Safe Neighborhoods Technical Assistance Project Focus Group Report: Community Outreach Strategies,” Bureau of Justice Assistance and American University, August 2003.



- **Use data from official and non-traditional sources to better define your community.** The nature of gun crime is not the same in every jurisdiction; community members and researchers have an important role to play in analyzing and interpreting data.

(2) Identify community assets.

Rather than focusing solely on problems and needs, think about the internal strengths of the community. For example, what institutions, associations, and individual leaders are located in the community? What stake do they have in the success of PSN’s gun crime reduction efforts? To facilitate this assessment, some community planners develop “asset maps” as part of identifying a community’s strengths. Essentially, the asset mapping process encourages thinking about several types of resources or building blocks:

- Capacities within the community and under community control (individuals, local organizations, individual businesses)
- Resources located within the community but largely controlled by people outside the community (e.g., schools, hospitals, recreation centers, service agencies, vacant land and buildings)
- Potential building blocks not located in the community and controlled by people outside the community (e.g., business organizations, some government and service agencies, arts organizations, service clubs).

(3) Assess community readiness.

This step is similar to identifying community assets, but it goes further toward determining *how* to engage the community by focusing on where the community is now with regard to reducing gun crime. For example:

- What are the community's existing violence prevention and intervention efforts?
- What is the community's level of knowledge about those efforts?
- What is the status of needed services in the community? Are there long waiting lists for services? Are some programs underused?
- Who are the official and informal leaders of the community?
- What is known about the social climate or culture of the community?

(4) Conduct a community engagement self-assessment.

This step is a systematic way of looking at where the PSN task force is now with respect to community engagement, where it wants to be, and who can help it get there. The Community Engagement Self-Assessment Guide provided in the Appendix can be used to help consider:

- Which sectors of the community (criminal justice partners, offender populations, community- and faith-based groups, service agencies, etc.) are already involved in PSN?
- Which groups should be involved?
- In what ways could various groups become involved (by joining the PSN task force or a subcommittee, delivering PSN messages, co-sponsoring activities, etc.)?

The experiences of the SACSI sites and other PSN forerunners suggest several additional questions to consider in assessing which groups and individuals might get involved:

- Will their participation help design more effective enforcement approaches?
- Can they help address disapproval of or misunderstandings about aggressive law enforcement and prosecution strategies?
- Do they have a unique connection with the offender population? With family members and other community members likely to have a direct influence on offenders' behavior? With at-risk youth?
- Can they provide intelligence or perspectives not available from existing partners?

The Self-Assessment Guide may be most valuable when thinking about specific neighborhood(s) at which to target PSN interventions, but it can also be used when considering an entire jurisdiction or a problem (such as domestic violence) that is not neighborhood-specific.

Mobilization

Mobilization has to do with getting the right people to participate. This can be a challenge for an agency that has not traditionally focused on engaging the community. Typically, outreach to some groups will take considerable planning, but other resources may be just a phone call away.

(5) Start with your current partners.

As discussed earlier, local and state partners like police, prosecutors, and probation/parole have become much more neighborhood-oriented than in the past. Those agencies and other institutions (e.g., schools, recreation department, a ministerial alliance) can be asked for information and contacts. The district's Weed & Seed initiatives are likely to have already engaged community groups that share PSN goals (e.g., through community policing and sometimes community prosecution efforts). The majority of PSN task forces that are currently collaborating with the community are closely allied with Weed & Seed.

(6) Apply principles of effective community engagement.

The Appendix includes selected articles and other resources that discuss community engagement principles from a variety of perspectives. Some of the most important principles for PSN community engagement are these:

Tips for Community Outreach

- Go to the community
- Send the right people
- Encourage diverse participation
- Hold events in the evening
- Extend hospitality (serve food, provide child care)

- Develop community-specific strategies. What are the community's specific concerns? What is already under way? How can those efforts be supported?
- Build credibility with community members and decision makers. Key to this is having diverse participants and a balanced leadership. Involving a neutral meeting facilitator or "broker" is often effective in achieving this goal.

- Ensure diverse participation. This usually requires “active outreach” that goes beyond distributing fliers to include more personalized approaches (e.g., extending invitations through partner organizations working in the community).
- Establish an informed dialogue. Provide detailed background information. Involve experts in the issues at hand.
- Go *to* the community. Hold meetings in the community. Offer hospitality (e.g., food, child care, parking). Send the right representatives—people who know how to listen and can follow up.
- Influence decision-making. Invite decision-makers as participants. Make sure community voices are heard.
- Sustain community engagement. Form ongoing committees or teams. Support community leadership.

Planning and Implementation

(7) Develop a structure for community involvement.

Just as there is no formula for who to involve in PSN, there is no prescription for what type of structure will work best to sustain community involvement. In general, small, homogeneous task forces can make decisions more quickly, but broad-based teams offer significant advantages, including:

- A diversity of perspectives and approaches
- A greater ability to layer the PSN message—deliver it through multiple means and from multiple sources (e.g., law enforcement, service providers, community leaders)
- Broader support in the face of negative media, community, or political reactions

Each PSN task force has the flexibility to start small and expand gradually or begin with a large team. Some community members may be part of the PSN task force; others may lead or serve on a subcommittee; others may be involved only in a particular event or activity. The important point is to plan how you will follow up on expressions of interest and support.

(8) Link media outreach with community engagement.

It may be time to supplement existing media campaigns with additional, targeted media outreach that supports your community engagement goals. What PSN success stories need to be told from a human interest point of view? Can media outreach activities be used as a vehicle to engage youth in PSN? How can creative uses of the media help attract diverse audiences to community forums?

(9) Develop an action plan for priority activities.

The groundwork for selecting community engagement priorities is laid by defining community, identifying community assets, and conducting a self-assessment of current and desired levels of community engagement. An action plan can then be developed and implemented over a specified period (e.g., one year). Built into the action plan should be strategies for marketing or publicizing events, acknowledgment of the community's role in successful efforts, and an evaluation process. Evaluation should be ongoing, and it should involve the community, but it does not have to be complex—it may simply be a matter of debriefing after major activities have been completed, or regularly reviewing progress toward reaching milestones. Implementation also involves maintenance of a structure that allows for mid-course adjustments and continued planning, including exploration of funding sources.

Next Steps

Whether your PSN task force already engages the community at many levels or is just getting started, you can begin a dialogue with one or more groups that have not yet been involved in PSN, but that would lend vital support if only they were asked.

- Consult with your existing partners (Weed & Seed, criminal justice agencies, community-based organizations, local research and media outreach partners) about ways to more fully engage the community.
- Use the self assessment guide provided here as part of a PSN task force discussion on community engagement. Consider involving an experienced, neutral facilitator to help keep the discussion on track.
- Learn more about community engagement from the national FEAT/BJA team working with PSN across all districts. Check the PSN website often for news articles and resources on community engagement.
- Take advantage of the PSN technical assistance program, which includes 11 different organizations available to assist with all aspects of PSN, including community engagement.

Examples of Community Engagement in PSN

During the December 2004 PSN working group session mentioned earlier, task forces with experience in community engagement offered several examples of successful community engagement strategies (discussed below).¹³ In addition, several key themes were noted during the discussion:

- Community engagement has been most successful where PSN task forces have worked with their partners—particularly Weed & Seed.
- Community engagement in PSN is a step-by-step process that begins with outreach and dialogue, in order to build trust.
- Community outreach does not have to be overly complex or expensive. There are steps that any task force can take in the short term to increase community involvement in PSN.

“PSN partnership with Weed and Seed is just natural—same target areas, same crimes, same problem solving.”

Norman Wolfinger
State Attorney
Vierra, Florida

Community Forums: Linking PSN with Weed & Seed

Various types of forums and meetings can be held that give the community opportunities to share their ideas and concerns. These meetings let the community deliver messages *to* the PSN task force, not just hear messages *from* it.

Some forums may be town hall-style meetings where a presentation about PSN activities is followed by an open-ended question-and-answer session. Others have a more specific purpose, such as working with community members to address a problem. This was the case in Detroit (Eastern District of Michigan), where partnering with Weed & Seed in the PSN target areas helped the PSN task force hold successful community forums. Results included the formation of 22 new block watches; the assignment of gun cases to the Project Sentry coordinator; and the continuation of efforts to build new partnerships in areas that are not part of Weed & Seed.

¹³ In addition, FEAT team and BJA representatives provided information based on their PSN work across all districts. Other sources included interviews and publications.

Linking PSN and Weed & Seed in Detroit

In Detroit (Eastern District of Michigan), PSN engaged the community by immediately building on the credibility that the Weed & Seed program had already established. The process began in the Highland Park community, where two town hall meetings were held to discuss a critical issue—a drastic reduction in the number of police officers assigned to Highland Park (from 50 to about 7).

Community Meetings. The first meeting was small: a high ranking law enforcement representative, the Weed & Seed steering committee, and representatives of faith and community organizations. This group was asked to spread the word about the second town hall meeting.

The second meeting attracted more than 400 people and included a question and answer session as well as a “call to action.” Community participants were asked to report crimes to the police or Crime Stoppers tip line and to sign up for the existing citizens patrol and block clubs/Neighborhood Watch (22 new block watches started as a result). Distribution of trigger locks and a state police presentation on gun safety were also part of the agenda.

Community Priorities. Similar meetings, all including a call to action, were held in the 9th Precinct on Detroit’s East Side, which had the highest number of gun crimes in the city and in the 5th Precinct (not a Weed & Seed area). At these forums, community members’ priority issues became apparent: prisoner re-entry, youth education, coordination with law enforcement, safety training, and abandoned houses topped the list. As a result of these meetings, and in order to maintain momentum, the Project Sentry coordinator, who originally did not have a caseload, now handles gun cases and is working on building partnerships in areas that are not part of Weed & Seed.

Advice from PSN Task Forces

- Expect questions about how or whether PSN is addressing longer-term goals such as crime prevention and deterrence. Many community members may be under the impression that PSN is a “short-term fix” focused *only* on arrests and convictions.
- Consider making every Weed & Seed site a PSN site.
- Tailor your information to the audience. Use available data and research to speak directly to conditions in the audience’s own neighborhoods.
- Recognize community assets. Be aware that a community may be wary of being “singled out” as crime-ridden or feel discouraged by media reports detailing how dangerous its streets are, how rundown it appears, or how its families are in trouble, especially when community strengths are never mentioned. Some PSN

projects have found real estate associations as well as residents reluctant to have large billboards and posters calling attention to a neighborhood's status as a "target site." In one state, no jurisdiction wanted to be the "kick-off city" (recipient of bad press) for the PSN initiative and the campaign had to be generalized to apply to the state as a whole.

Reaching Out to the Community: Other Targeted Approaches

Many community leaders and segments of the community never attend public forums. Because of this, a range of approaches is needed to identify and engage them. Examples from across the country that various PSN task forces have found promising include:

- **Knocking on doors.** The Indianapolis PSN initiative's Project CARE involved 90 days of intensive police presence in the Northeast side of the city, which had been the site of recent killings. Police officers went door to door talking to residents, distributing a PSN pamphlet, and providing information about a new CARE tip line.
- **Sponsoring community events like barbeques and picnics.** In the Eastern District of Oklahoma, the USAO sponsors a PSN "Summer Kick-Off Picnic" in partnership with local and federal law enforcement, local fire and EMS, parks and recreation, and faith-based and community organizations.
- **Celebrating PSN successes with the community.** After winning a national award for outstanding local police involvement in PSN, police in Clarksdale, Missouri (Eastern District of Missouri) invited the public to a banquet celebrating their PSN successes.
- **Attending neighborhood association and crime watch groups.** The District of Utah used an existing community council structure (composed of neighborhood groups) to promote PSN and distribute outreach materials at meetings.
- **Involving the business community.** In Indianapolis (Southern District of Indiana), a Women's Enrichment Luncheon featured a presentation by Judge Glenda Hatchett (from the "People's Court" television program) to 500 businesswomen to get them involved in PSN. Follow-up includes exploring ways that volunteers can continue supporting PSN—for example, by displaying messages in windows or spreading the PSN message at events like fairs and back to school nights.
- **Involving the community in media outreach.** In Denver (District of Colorado), community members were convened as a focus group to discuss the effectiveness of media messages. The Advertising Council, Inc., holds focus groups on national public service ads (PSAs), but districts can consider focus groups to assist with locally produced PSAs.
- **Establishing an anonymous tip hotline for students.** In the Middle District of Tennessee, the USAO partnered with local law enforcement to establish an anonymous tip line for students to report guns on school property.

- **Setting up “information lines” that refer callers to resources.** In the District of Connecticut, PSN announcements on CTTransit buses in Hartford, New Haven and Bridgeport included the message: "QUESTIONS ABOUT GUNS? CALL 2-1-1." Callers could request information about gun safety issues, gun locks, and programs that discourage illegal gun possession and use. The 2-1-1 Infoline is operated by the United Way.¹⁴

Involving Criminal Justice Partners in Community Outreach

Law Enforcement

Partnerships with local law enforcement and community groups have been vital to the success of PSN initiatives (see sidebar, “Community Involvement in Los Angeles Ceasefire”). PSN coordinators are already working with law enforcement, but they may not be fully aware of the department’s community policing strategies. It may just be a matter of asking the right

Community Involvement in Los Angeles Ceasefire

Ceasefire in Los Angeles (Central District of California) involved months of planning and coordination by 19 public and private agencies throughout the city and county. The Boston Ceasefire project served as a model for developing this working group, which included community and faith-based organizations as well as criminal justice agencies.

By working with researchers and analyzing data from multiple sources, the group identified the area where it believed interventions would be most likely to have an impact (Hollenbeck section of Los Angeles, especially the Boyle Heights neighborhood). Not only did the area have high rates of violent, gun, and gang-related crime, it also had community structures in place that were designed to help gang members pursue alternatives to violent behavior. Enforcement interventions included warrant service, saturation patrols, and enforcement of probation/parole and public housing residency regulations. The project deviated from its original “stick and carrot” design, however, after community representatives urged immediate implementation of the law enforcement component (before programs and services were in a position to meet demand).

The project evaluators noted that “[p]erhaps the most important success of the program was the working group . . . [which] also helped build community support for the intervention that exceeded its expectations.”

Source: G. E. Tita, et al.

Reducing Gun Violence: Operation Ceasefire in Los Angeles

¹⁴ 2-1-1 press release, “Project Safe Neighborhoods,” June 16, 2003. Retrieved at <http://www.infoline.org/media/pr/pr5.asp>

(community engagement) questions, such as: “What is the department already doing with the community in PSN target areas?” and “How else does the department involve the community in addressing gun crime?” Resources may include beat officers involved in problem solving at the neighborhood or precinct levels; bicycle patrols; school resource officers; block watch groups; crime prevention councils; or liaison committees with various racial, ethnic, and cultural groups.

Prosecutors

Community prosecution can be another important resource for community engagement in PSN. One example of coordination among local prosecutors, PSN, and the community can be seen in Phoenix (District of Arizona). Two prosecutors employed by the Phoenix City Prosecutor’s Office work out of the U. S. Attorney’s Office as Special Assistant U. S. Attorneys. They are assigned to handle gun cases that arise in the city of Phoenix and prosecute them federally.¹⁵ In addition, ATF agents ride with patrol officers; authorities meet weekly to discuss strategies; monthly meetings are held with community members to learn more about residents’ problems; and the city health and neighborhood services departments have been brought into the project.

Linking PSN and Neighborhood Prosecutors

The State Attorney in Vierra, Florida (Middle District of Florida) is a PSN partner and has also been a partner in Weed & Seed. He considers PSN/Weed & Seed collaboration vital, because both projects have similar concerns about the same target areas, and because “staff burns out . . . you have to collaborate.”

Neighborhood prosecutors and victim advocates have been in place since the 1990s. Prosecutors go out walking with police and hand out fliers. They also help convene community meetings. Still, the State Attorney notes that “community outreach is by far the most difficult part” and that more needs to be done.

Another example comes from the Eastern District of Missouri. There, PSN funding is being used to open two neighborhood offices where prosecutors and investigators work with community members to identify the offenders who do the most harm.

¹⁵ PHX 11 (Phoenix government access cable channel), transcript, interview with Assistant United States Attorney Fred Battista, aired January 10-23, 2005, retrieved at <http://phoenix.gov/11/trd10105.html>

Probation/Parole

Probation/parole partners on PSN task forces typically are involved in enforcement strategies and in reinforcing the message of accountability at post-release meetings with offenders (see the section on “Engaging Offender Populations”). Like police and prosecutors who work in neighborhoods, probation/parole agencies also have ties to community organizations and groups that PSN may want to involve.

Ideas to Watch ...

Probation/Parole and Neighborhood Watch

One of the oldest and best known crime prevention programs in the U.S. is the Neighborhood Watch program, which was created to unite community organizations and law enforcement agencies to reduce crime in neighborhoods. Neighborhood Watch has not typically included probation and parole, but greater probation/parole involvement has the potential to enhance Neighborhood Watch programs and convey information about PSN.

Probation and parole agencies are tasked with helping reduce crime by monitoring and assisting offenders in the neighborhood. They have traditionally asked for the assistance of community organizations, such as religious institutions, neighborhood groups, and local residents, to monitor the behavior of offenders by providing treatment and services.

The American Probation and Parole Association, in conjunction with PSN, encourages PSN task forces to involve local probation and parole officers in Neighborhood Watch and other community group meetings. Probation/parole officers can

- Speak to the neighborhood about the probation/parole role in the criminal justice system and in PSN
- Inform residents of state and federal firearms laws that apply to felony and domestic violence offenders
- Address questions and concerns residents may have about offenders residing in their neighborhoods.

Including probation and parole in addressing public safety concerns of a neighborhood may lead to the implementation of unique crime prevention, intervention and community outreach programs.

Contact with the watch group is also beneficial public relations for the local probation office; it puts a "face" on probation.

Source: American Probation and Parole Association

Engaging Youth and Families in PSN

The ability to sustain reductions in gun crime depends on reaching families of offenders and youth who are at high risk of using guns as a way to solve problems. In 2003, nearly 10,000 of the nation's 14,400 murder victims died from gunshot wounds.¹⁶ In that same year, nearly one-third of murder victims were between the ages of 13 and 24, although this age group represents only about 17 percent of the country's population.¹⁷

Reaching Out to High Risk Youth and Families

The examples below illustrate ways in which PSN task forces have been providing services to vulnerable youth and families.

- **Making home visits.** Through Operation Homefront in Boston (District of Massachusetts), a team of community leaders and law enforcement officials—clergy, an assistant district attorney, a police officer, a victim-witness coordinator, and sometimes a probation officer—visits families of incarcerated parents. The team endeavors to identify the needs of prisoners' children and other family members and offers help with jobs, food, youth programs, etc.¹⁸
- **Holding community workshops and rallies.** The Detroit area PSN project (Eastern District of Michigan) holds educational workshops for youth and families at 4-H and Boys & Girls Club facilities. Topics include family strengthening, youth development, and how to organize block watch clubs. In addition, gun safety locks are explained and distributed.
- **Educating youth about criminal justice processes.** Project Impact (part of Project Sentry in the Eastern District of Michigan) involves middle school youth recommended by counselors and teachers. The youth experience a (hypothetical) arrest and sentencing process—have fingerprints taken, meet with a judge, receive a sentence, etc.—and also learn about law enforcement careers.
- **Creating an organization to mentor youth.** In the Northern District of Texas, collaboration among law enforcement officials, non-profit organizations, faith and neighborhood groups, and others resulted in the creation of the South Fair Community Development Corporation (CDC). The CDC serves about 120 youth and provides mentoring, literacy programs, parenting education, life skills training, recreation, and other services.

¹⁶ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Report, 2003, Table 2.10: Murder Victims by Age, by Weapon, 2003, retrieved at http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius_03/pdf/03sec2.pdf

¹⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Report, 2003.

¹⁸ "Boston's Operation Homefront Involves Police, Clergy in Helping High Risk Youth," U.S. Mayor Newspaper, The United States Conference of Mayors, February 2005, retrieved at http://www.usmayors.org/uscm/us_mayor_newspaper/documents/02_14_05/Boston_BP1.asp

Engaging Youth to Develop and Deliver PSN Messages

PSN task forces are finding creative ways to engage youth so that they are not only recipients of services, but also creators of PSN messages and “legs” for delivering those messages. Some task forces make presentations in schools or distribute brochures, caps, and T-shirts at community events. These activities can go beyond informing to include opportunities for dialogue with youth. Milwaukee and Kansas City have found creative ways to involve youth in developing and delivering PSN messages. Other examples include:

- In Tulsa (Northern District of Oklahoma), a media contest was held that challenged students to develop ads, posters, and editorials about gun crimes. This led to regular Ceasefire presentations in the schools
- An anti gun-violence skit by high school students in Denver (District of Colorado) was presented at a town hall forum.
- In Milwaukee (Eastern District of Wisconsin), Project Ujima involved youth affected by gun crime—either because they or their family members were victims. The youth, working with local theater professionals, wrote a play to teach other youth about the impact of gun violence. The play was performed at Safe Haven¹⁹ sites, but the project could be replicated in other settings (e.g., a juvenile detention center to reach youth at high risk of gun violence).

Gangs and Guns: Involving Youth in POSSE in Kansas City

Kansas City (Western District of Missouri) has had an aggressive Weed & Seed effort, and under PSN, the POSSE program (Peers Organized to Support Student Excellence) is working in the same target area. Directed by a former gang member, POSSE targets youth who have been expelled from regular high schools. It involves a core group of youth—two schools have posses of 50-60 students—who encourage other youth (800 so far) to sign pledges not to solve problems through firearm violence. Activities include

- Making school presentations. The backdrop for these presentations is a quilted banner made up of squares created by Ceasefire supporters.
- Distributing PSN information at community festivals.
- Going door to door in the Weed and Seed neighborhood and leaving PSN door hangers (youth do this under police supervision).

¹⁹ A Safe Haven is a neighborhood facility where youth and community residents can participate in after school and weekend programs, such as mentoring, tutoring, various human services programs, recreational activities, and educational workshops. Many districts have established Safe Havens as part of Weed & Seed initiatives.

Milwaukee “Speak Your Peace” Competition

PSN in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, worked with its media outreach partner to come up with a way to “give youth a creative outlet for their emotions.” As a first step, teachers and community leaders were consulted to develop a better understanding of the targeted youth. Findings included:

- Many had no hope and did not see themselves living past the age of 21.
- Their lives tended to “revolve around electronics.”
- Their mothers and siblings were the only stable things in their lives.
- They often thought of sports and rapping as the only ways out of the neighborhood.

The Speak Your Peace Competition encouraged 15- to 24-year-olds to record their own rap songs. Swearing was not permitted, and youth were required to incorporate “gun crime means hard time” into the rap. More than 100 youth entered; finalists would receive awards of professionally produced recordings, air time, and other media exposure. The community was engaged in the following ways:

- Donation of recording equipment at two community centers where youth could go to record their entries
- Involvement of community members (not professional DJs) as an expert panel of judges
- Distribution by police officers of 1,500 “Speak Your Peace” CDs (a compilation of winning entries).

Collaborating with Community and Faith-Based Organizations

The Indianapolis PSN project (Southern District of Indiana) is one of the most experienced in working with faith-based and other community organizations. At the December 2004 meeting on community engagement in PSN, the Indianapolis PSN coordinator discussed the benefits of working with these organizations. For example, they

- Help prosecutors and law enforcement build a “link of trust” with the community.
- Can be a force to resolve conflicts that might otherwise result in protests.

- Represent “a voice that is listened to by young people.”
- Are typically the first to interact with families and loved ones of those who have been shot and killed.

Collaborating with Faith-Based and Community Groups in Indianapolis

The Indianapolis (Southern District of Indiana) PSN initiative’s Community Outreach Committee is headed by Dr. Melvin Jackson, whose community activism has included working with Dr. Martin Luther King and who has long been part of the city’s Weed & Seed efforts.

Developing relationships. The groundwork was laid for PSN’s community engagement in Indianapolis through several earlier initiatives, including Weed & Seed and the Front Porch Alliance, which was established under former Mayor Stephen Goldsmith to encourage partnerships between city government and faith institutions, neighborhoods, and community members to address local problems. PSN partner agencies are encouraged to take a hands-on approach and “make PSN part of your front porch” by getting out of the office, going to neighborhood meetings, convening town hall meetings, and supporting an inclusive PSN community outreach committee.

Putting the strategy into action. There are many events in Indianapolis at which PSN has a presence, all of which are notable as examples of criminal justice agencies and community organizations addressing problems together:

- **Offender notification meetings.** These include law enforcement, probation and parole, community based organizations, and faith organizations (ministers offer hope but also state they will call police if offenders violate the law).
- **Interventions with gangs.** The “Peace in the Streets” Rally and Dinner is a gang mediation event held in a neutral environment. Participants include members of various gangs, and talks are given by former gang members. There is also a youth street ministry led by a former gang member that reaches out to youth on the streets, in malls, etc.
- **Events to bring community members together after a tragedy.** “Light the Night for Life” is a gathering to mourn victims of gun crime. Held within one week of the event, it is focused on the community rather than the victim’s family, serving as a reminder of the need to stop the violence. More than 20 Light the Night gatherings were held in the last six months of 2004. Typically, 50-80 people attend, but the event has attracted as many as 1,000. Participants may include grief counselors and high level police and prosecution officials, as well as community members. Other events include prayer vigils and weekly “faith walks.”

Engaging Businesses and Foundations

Several districts have received substantial support from organizations formed to help fund their media campaigns and educational efforts to combat gun crime. For example, the Project Exile²⁰ Citizen Support Foundation in Virginia, formed in July 1997, raised more than \$140,000 in less than two years for advertising and for disseminating Project Exile's media messages.²¹ To support PSN, Colorado Exile raised \$1.2 million.

Business and Foundation Support for Colorado Exile

Colorado Exile began after the Columbine High School shootings to serve as the public awareness component of Colorado's PSN initiative. The board of directors formed a non-profit organization and raised \$1.2 million in donations, half of which came from foundations. The initial 16 board members each contributed \$10,000, and large corporations made in-kind as well as cash contributions.

Colorado Exile supported advertisements, posters, and other public awareness efforts, including bumper stickers, hats and t-shirts, a community video, and public presentations. The media matched the organization's advertising expenditures nearly dollar for dollar to create an ad campaign seen by 97 percent of the available market. In addition, the non-profit worked with the United States Attorney's Office and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to develop a law enforcement training video, which was sent to every law enforcement agency and district attorney's office in the state.

The Southern District of Ohio takes another approach. There, the Cincinnati-area Chamber of Commerce and police partner to operate a "Drug Elimination Detail" safety program. The program pays police officers overtime to focus on the drug dealing problem. In a four-month period in 2004, officers reportedly made nearly 700 arrests and seized 21 guns.²²

²⁰ In 1997, the United States Attorney's office in Richmond, Virginia developed the Project Exile approach, which included coordination among federal, state, and local law enforcement to promptly arrest and prosecute armed criminals in federal court. The approach also involves educating front-line law enforcement officers with respect to federal firearm laws and search and seizure issues; and involving community groups and local media in promoting the message that an illegal gun can result in hard time in a federal prison.

²¹ *Strategies to Reduce Gun Violence* (n.d.), U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. Summary available at http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/pubs/gun_violence/profile38.html

²² Jane Pendergrast, "Drug Detail: Necessary Step for Chamber," *The Enquirer*, September 3, 2004.

A number of PSN task forces have found other ways to elicit private-sector support of PSN. For example:

- **Sports teams.** In the District of Connecticut, the U.S. Attorney’s Office partnered with the New Britain Rock Cats baseball team in the summer 2004 for the “Campaign to End Gun Violence.” Youth attended sports clinics and games, and they helped create and deliver PSN messages. The campaign also included PSN scoreboard displays and live radio promotions.
- **Media outreach partners.** In Indianapolis (Southern District of Indiana), a celebrity basketball game—held as part of the Indiana Black Expo summer celebration—attracted 3,000 youth, major hip-hop stars, and NBA players and coaches. Gun crime reduction messages were featured throughout the game and in game promotions (a local radio station offered game tickets as prizes for answering questions on gun laws correctly).
- **Firearms industry representatives and federal firearms licensees.** PSN in the Northern District of Georgia met with firearms industry representatives and federally licensed firearms dealers to discuss how to reduce the incidence of straw purchases. Strategies incorporated the ATF/National Shooting Sports Foundation’s (NSSF) “Don’t Lie for the Other Guy” campaign and included sending letters to targeted gun dealers.

PSN task forces in Louisiana and Utah have also coordinated their PSN initiatives with the “Don’t Lie for the Other Guy” campaign. In Louisiana, this involves visits to all federally licensed firearms dealers to distribute information kits (including a video) and point of purchase displays. In Utah, oversized clipboards with a sticker explaining the consequences of straw purchases, used when filling-out forms required to purchase a firearm, are distributed to pawn shops as well as gun dealers.

- **Shooting sports organizations.** In the District of Maine, the Sportsmen’s Alliance of Maine has published information on PSN in its newsletter.

Engaging Offender Populations

Because gun-crime reduction efforts, at least over the shorter term, are often focused on prosecuting gun offenders, it can be hard to envision how offender populations might be engaged in PSN except as potential “users” of warning messages. Many PSN task forces, however, are taking a broader view and are engaging the community to address questions like these:

- Because the large majority of offenders will return from prison to the community, how can the community work with PSN to hold them accountable for future behavior? How can the community provide resources and support?
- How can the community help reach the subset of offenders that are in their teens?

- What about ex-offenders who have succeeded in becoming productive members of the community? How can they be engaged in PSN?

Pulling Levers

Increasingly, PSN task forces are adapting the “lever pulling” strategy that was a cornerstone of the successful Operation Ceasefire initiative in Boston. A critical part of this strategy is a “layering” of messages from all criminal justice agencies, emphasizing that any violation of the law or condition of release will result in swift and severe consequences. At the same time, the strategy recognizes offenders’ needs for access to resources like housing, substance abuse treatment, education, and job training. Criminal justice agencies alone cannot possibly meet these needs, but they can work to bring community resources to bear on the problem.

Engaging the Community in Meetings with Offenders: District of Connecticut

The District of Connecticut reports that one of its most important outreach initiatives is monthly offender meetings held in Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport. At these meetings, PSN partners, in coordination with the Connecticut Board of Parole, the Connecticut Probation Office, and the Connecticut Department of Corrections, speak to 35-50 violent felons who are on some form of supervision. Each task force explains PSN’s team approach to gun crime, discusses recent federal and state cases, and attempts to discourage attendees from possessing a firearm.

In addition, community resource partners discuss the availability of services to assist with continuing education, fatherhood issues (such as custody, visitation and support), obtaining identification, and job seeking skills and career resources. It is during this second half of the meeting that the attendees see that law enforcement is trying to assist them in making the right decisions.

Source: United States Attorney’s Office, District of Connecticut, <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/ct/psn.html>

Community Action Teams

The District of Utah involves trained community action teams in PSN. The teams, composed of law enforcement and many other city and community agencies, conduct weekly reviews of cases involving multiple issues or complaints from a single address. The team provides case management and focused interventions, including home visits to juveniles and adult offenders.

Other Examples of Engaging Offender Populations

PSN research partners may be able to assist a district in involving offenders in data analysis (see sidebar, “Involving Offenders in Analyzing Gun Crime”). Examples of this approach include:

- The PSN research partner in the Eastern District of Missouri conducted a survey of inmates. Results were used to develop ad messages emphasizing that a federal prison sentence often means living in an isolated area far from home.
- PSN in the Southern District of West Virginia held a focus group with offenders, who later assisted with a gun-violence reduction project in schools.
- When the Western District of New York (Rochester area) wanted to know more about the dynamics of drug-related homicides, researchers conducted lengthy focus groups with inmates at the Monroe County correctional facility. These produced valuable insights on gun carrying and suppliers; drug house operations and drug house robberies; the effects of law enforcement, prosecution, and probation/parole strategies.

PSN Technical Assistance Providers

The Department of Justice has partnered with several agencies that provide integral support to the PSN initiative through training and technical assistance. These national partners include the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), the National District Attorneys Association (NDAA), Michigan State University (MSU), the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), the Institute for Law and Justice (ILJ), the Academy for Educational Development (AED), the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA), and the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC). It is through these national partnerships that PSN offers its expansive network of training and technical assistance opportunities.

If you would like to pursue training or technical assistance for your agency or your PSN Task Force, please contact your district PSN Coordinator in the local United States Attorney's Office. A listing of United States Attorneys' Offices can be found at <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/offices/index.html>.

Appendix A

Community Engagement Self-Assessment Guide

Community Engagement Self-Assessment Guide

Think about your PSN project. What is the main goal you want to accomplish over the next year? What is your long-term goal? Who is already involved, and on what level? Who else should be involved, and on what level?

Sector of the Community	Agencies or Groups	Participate on PSN Task Force	Promote PSN Messages	Participate in PSN Events	Co-Sponsor PSN Events
Community-based, Faith-based, and Business Related Neighborhood/citizen groups, faith groups and ministerial alliances, racial/ethnic organizations, businesses, foundations, elected officials	Already Involved:				
Agencies and Service Organizations Job training, substance abuse treatment, housing, mental health, victim services, schools	Already Involved:				
Offender Related Youth at-risk for gun violence, family members of offenders, adult or juvenile offenders under supervision, adult or juvenile ex-offenders	Already Involved:				

Sector of the Community	Agencies or Groups	Participate on PSN Task Force	Promote PSN Messages	Participate in PSN Events	Co-Sponsor PSN Events
Criminal Justice Groups Weed and Seed, Project Sentry, law enforcement, prosecution, probation and parole, corrections	Already Involved:				
Other Groups or Individuals	Already Involved:				

Circle at least one group in each sector that you can include in your PSN efforts right now. How will you do this?

What do you notice about the level of involvement of groups who are already involved in your PSN efforts? Is there anything you'd like to change about this?

Which groups are under-involved? Are any overly-involved? What steps could you take next to achieve a better balance?

Appendix B:

Selected Community Engagement Resources for PSN

PSN-Related Websites

Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) website: <http://www.projectsafeneighborhoods.gov>.

Weed and Seed and other community engagement resources, U. S. Department of Justice, Community Capacity Development Office website: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ccdo>

United States Attorneys Offices (listing of offices and links):
<http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/offices/index.html>

Community Engagement in Planning

Berman, G. & Anderson, D. (1997). *Engaging the community, a guide for community justice planners*. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance.

Community-based planning: promoting a neighborhood response to crime. (1998). In *Policy and Practice*. Washington DC: National Criminal Justice Association (NCJA).

Helping Communities Mobilize Against Crime, Drugs, and Other Problems. (1992). Washington, D.C.: National Crime Prevention Council.

Kretzmann, J. P., & McKnight, J.L. (1993). *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*. Chicago, IL: Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University

Overview of community based planning (module 3). (2004). *The Pickett Institute Training Curriculum: Building Capacity for Community Based Strategic Planning*. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice.

Targeted Community Action Planning Toolkit. (2003). Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Retrieved July 2005 at <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/tcap/203300.pdf>

Research and Evaluation

Braga, A. A. (2001). *Measuring the impact of operation ceasefire, reducing gun violence*. U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice.

Dalton, E. (n.d.). *Targeted crime reduction efforts in ten communities: lessons for the PSN initiative*. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. Retrieved December 2004 at <http://www.projectsafeneighborhoods.gov/Safer.asp?section=110>

- Kennedy, D. (1998). Pulling levers: getting deterrence right. *National Institute of Justice Journal*. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. July.
- Kennedy, D.M., et al. (2001). Developing and implementing operation ceasefire, reducing gun violence.” Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. September.
- Tita, G. E., Riley, K. J., Ridgeway, G. & Greenwood, P.W. (2005, February). Reducing gun violence: Operation Ceasefire in Los Angeles. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice.

Gun Crime Prevention

- Strategies to reduce gun violence (n.d.). Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. Available June 2005 at http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/pubs/gun_violence
- Developmental Research and Programs, Inc. & National Council on Crime and Delinquency. (2000). *Comprehensive Strategy Curriculum: The Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violence, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders*. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. April.

Community Policing and Community Prosecution Approaches

- Braga, A. A. Gun violence among serious young offenders. (2004). U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. Retrieved June 2005 at <http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/mime/open.pdf?Item=1078>
- Center for Problem Oriented Policing website: <http://www.popcenter.org/default.htm>
- Community Policing Consortium website: <http://www.communitypolicing.org>
- Skogan, W. G., et al. (2000). Public involvement: community policing in Chicago. (2000). Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. Retrieved July 2005 at <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/nij/179557.pdf>
- Skogan, W. G., et al. (2002). Community policing and the “new immigrants”: Latinos in Chicago. (2002). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice and Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. Retrieved July 2005 at <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/nij/189908.pdf>
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