



**COPS**

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

2nd Edition

# Problem-Solving Tips

A Guide to Reducing  
Crime and Disorder  
Through Problem-Solving  
Partnerships







# **Problem-Solving Tips: A Guide to Reducing Crime and Disorder Through Problem-Solving Partnerships**

*2nd Edition*

The following guide will assist readers in their efforts to reduce crime and disorder through problem-solving partnerships. It may be reproduced and distributed.

This guide was compiled by former COPS Office staff members Karin Schmerler, Matt Perkins, Scott Philips, Tammy Rinehart, and Meg Townsend. It draws heavily on previous work by Herman Goldstein, Rana Sampson, Darrel Stephens, John Eck, William Spelman, the Police Executive Research Forum, and the Home Office. Debra Cohen, Ph.D. oversaw the second edition printing for the COPS Office.

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## About the COPS Office

**The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services** (the COPS Office) is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources. The community policing philosophy promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime. In its simplest form, community policing is about building relationships and solving problems.

The COPS Office awards grants to state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies to hire and train community policing professionals, acquire and deploy cutting-edge crime-fighting technologies, and develop and test innovative policing strategies. The COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders and all levels of law enforcement.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has invested more than \$16 billion to add community policing officers to the nation's streets, enhance crime fighting technology, support crime prevention initiatives, and provide training and technical assistance to help advance community policing. More than 500,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office-funded training organizations.

The COPS Office has produced more than 1,000 information products—and distributed more than 2 million publications—including Problem Oriented Policing Guides, Grant Owners Manuals, fact sheets, best practices, and curricula. And in 2010, the COPS Office participated in 45 law enforcement and public-safety conferences in 25 states in order to maximize the exposure and distribution of these knowledge products. More than 500 of those products, along with other products covering a wide area of community policing topics—from school and campus safety to gang violence—are currently available, at no cost, through its online Resource Information Center at [www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov). More than 2 million copies have been downloaded in FY2010 alone. The easy to navigate and up to date website is also the grant application portal, providing access to online application forms.



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## Introduction

Traditionally, police have handled each incident or call for service as a separate and unique occurrence. For example, most commercial burglaries have been addressed individually: an officer has taken a report from the victim and attempted to identify the offender and recover stolen property. The responding officer might have also counseled the victim in general crime-prevention techniques and attempted to link a series of commercial burglaries to one offender. But typically the incidents have not been analyzed as a group to learn why and how the crimes have occurred repeatedly, and how they could have been prevented.

The COPS Office seeks to build on the problem-solving approaches used by many communities. These approaches involve analyzing groups of related incidents that comprise a specific crime problem so that comprehensive, tailored strategies to prevent future crime can be developed. These problem-solving strategies rely less on arresting offenders and more on developing long-term ways to deflect offenders, protect likely victims, and make crime locations less conducive to problem behaviors.

Intended as a reference for those who are interested in implementing a problem-solving approach, *Problem-Solving Tips: A Guide to Reducing Crime and Disorder Through Problem-Solving Partnerships* contains information and insights into the process. It will take you step by step through solving problems, offer examples of problem solving from the field, and provide additional resources.



## The Problem-Solving Approach

The emphasis on problem solving as an effective policing strategy stems from pioneering work on problem-oriented policing done by Herman Goldstein in the late 1970s and from experiments in the early 1980s in Madison, Wisconsin; Baltimore County, Maryland; and Newport News, Virginia. In Newport News, police practitioners, working in concert with researchers and community members, demonstrated that crime and disorder problems could be significantly reduced by implementing tailored responses directly linked to the findings of comprehensive problem analyses. Police and community members in Newport News were able to reduce burglaries in a targeted apartment complex by 34 percent, reduce prostitution-related robberies in the target district by 39 percent, and reduce thefts from vehicles in two downtown areas by more than 50 percent.<sup>1</sup> From this effort and other early work on problem-oriented policing, community policing advocates recognized the effectiveness of the problem-solving approach and incorporated it into the community policing philosophy.

Since the mid-1980s, communities of all sizes and police agencies of all types—including sheriffs' departments, state police, highway patrols, and transit police—have successfully used the problem-solving approach to address an endless variety of problems. From these efforts, it has become clear that problem solving is critical to the success of community policing efforts. Initiatives that lack an analytical component often improve police-community relations but frequently have little impact on specific crime and disorder problems.

### Repeat Problems

Taking a problem-solving approach to addressing a specific crime problem calls for a broad inquiry into the nature of the particular problem. As part of that inquiry, many police-community problem-solving teams have found it useful to analyze the patterns of repeat calls relating to specific victims, locations, and offenders. Research has shown that a relatively small number of locations and offenders are involved in a relatively large amount of crime. Similarly, a small number of victims accounts for a relatively large amount of

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Research shows that a small number of victims accounts for a relatively large amount of victimization.

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victimization. For example, researchers have found that more than 60 percent of calls for service in some areas come from only 10 percent of the locations.<sup>2</sup> According to one study, approximately 50 percent of crime victims in England had experienced repeat victimization, and 4 percent of victims, the “chronically victimized,” accounted for 44 percent of all reported crime.<sup>3</sup> A large city in the southwest United States also found that repeat victims—in this case commercial establishments—accounted for a disproportionate number of burglaries in the jurisdiction. In this city, 8 percent of businesses were burglarized two or more times during the course of 1 year and accounted for at least 22 percent of all business burglaries. In Gainesville, Florida, this pattern was repeated. Going back 5 years, police found that 45 of the 47 convenience stores in the city had been robbed at least once between 1981 and 1986, but that half had been robbed five or more times, and several had been robbed at least 10 times.<sup>4</sup>

## Community Involvement in Problem-Solving Efforts

*Engaging the community without problem solving provides no meaningful service to the public. Problem solving without [partnerships] risks overlooking the most pressing community concerns. Thus, the partnership between police departments and the communities they service is essential for implementing a successful program in community policing.<sup>5</sup>*

Community leaders, researchers, and police officials recognize the need for a strong, well-articulated role for community members in community policing efforts. They know that the police alone cannot have a substantial impact on crime and advocate for the community as a full partner in preventing and responding to problems. Community involvement is an integral part of any long-term, problem-solving strategy. At the most basic level, the community provides police with invaluable information on both the problems of concern to them and the nature of those problems. Community involvement also helps ensure that police concentrate on the appropriate issues in a manner that will create support.

In addition, collaborative work involving police and community members provides the community with insight into the police perspective on specific crime and disorder problems.

Traditionally, community involvement in crime-prevention and reduction efforts has been limited to serving as the “eyes and ears” for police or helping implement responses. The collaborative problem-solving approach allows for much greater and more substantive roles for community members. For example, students in a high school where there is a drug-use problem on school grounds might survey their peers to determine the extent of the problem and also help design responses to the problem.

### **The SARA Model: A Useful Tool**

As part of the problem-oriented policing project in Newport News, officers worked with researchers to develop a problem-solving model that could be used to address any crime or disorder problem. The result was the SARA model, which has four stages: Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment. These stages are discussed in greater detail below. Since the mid-1980s, many officers have used the SARA model to guide their problem-solving efforts. Although the SARA model is not the only way to approach problem solving, it can serve as a helpful tool.



## Identifying and Selecting a Problem (Scanning)

A problem can be defined as follows:

- A cluster of similar, related, or recurring incidents rather than a single incident; a substantive community concern; [or] a unit of police business.<sup>6</sup>
- A type of behavior (loitering, theft of autos); a place (Pinecrest Shopping Mall); a person or persons (a repeat perpetrator of domestic violence, repeat burglary victims); or a special event or time (an annual parade, payday robberies). A problem also may be a combination of any of the above.<sup>7</sup>
- Informally, a problem can be thought of as two or more incidents similar in one or more ways that is of concern to the police and a problem for the community.

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### Methods of Identifying Problems

Problems may come to your attention in a variety of ways.

These include the following:

- Routinely analyzing calls for service, crime incident data, and other agency records for patterns and trends involving repeat locations, victims, and offenders (Police agencies may need to look at calls going back 6 months to several years to get an accurate picture of repeat incidents for some types of problems.)
- Mapping specific crimes according to time of day, proximity to certain locations, and other similar factors
- Consulting officers, police supervisors, detectives, midlevel managers, and command staff
- Reviewing police reports
- Surveying community residents, business owners, elected officials, or students
- Reviewing citizen complaints and letters
- Participating in community meetings



It is important that both citizens and police help prioritize problems once they have been identified.

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- Reviewing information from neighborhood associations and nonprofit organizations (local and national)
- Consulting social service and governmental agencies
- Following media coverage and editorials

## Selecting a Problem

It is important that both community members and police have input into prioritizing problems once they have been identified. Sometimes the problems of concern to community members are different from what the police expect. Consulting community members about their priorities not only ensures that community concerns are addressed but enhances the problem-solving effort at every step of the process. Citizen input can be solicited in a number of ways, including surveys, community meetings, and focus groups (e.g., a group of students or a cross-section of neighborhood residents). Police input into the selection of a problem is also very important because the police have expertise and information about problems that citizens do not typically possess.

In selecting a problem on which to focus from among the many problems your community faces, you may want to consider the following factors:<sup>8</sup>

- The impact of the problem on the community including the police—its size and costs
- The presence of life-threatening conditions
- Community interest and degree of support likely to exist for both the inquiry and subsequent recommendations
- The potential threat to constitutional rights—as may occur when citizens take steps to limit the use of the public way, limit access to facilities, or curtail freedom of speech and assembly
- The degree to which the problem adversely affects relationships between the police and the community



- The interest of rank-and-file officers in the problem and the degree of support for addressing it
- The concreteness of the problem, given the frustration associated with exploring vague, amorphous complaints
- The potential that exploration is likely to lead to some progress in dealing with the problem

## Redefining the Problem

Once a problem has been selected, it may need to be redefined as more information about the problem comes to light. This is to be expected. As you work through the problem-solving process you may discover that the problem you started with is too broad in scope. Alternatively, you may determine that it is actually a symptom of another problem that should be your focus. It is even possible that what you first perceived as a problem is not really a problem at all once you've taken a closer look. It is common for the problem to need to be redefined as you move through the problem-solving process, and this is one of the reasons why it is best to start implementing responses after the problem has been fully analyzed.

## Identifying Stakeholders for the Selected Problem

Stakeholders are private and public organizations, types or groups of people (e.g., senior citizens, homeowners, merchants) that will benefit if the problem is addressed or may experience negative consequences (e.g., injuries, lack of services, loss of revenue, increased enforcement) if the problem is not addressed. Stakeholders may include the following:

- Local social service and government agencies with jurisdiction over the problem or an interest in an aspect of the problem
- Victims of the problem and/or associations representing victims



- Neighbors, coworkers, friends and relatives of victims, or neighborhood residents affected by the problem
- Agencies or people that have some control over offenders (parents, relatives, friends, school officials, probation and parole, building management)
- Commercial establishments adversely affected by the crime or disorder problem
- National organizations or trade associations with an interest in the problem (Students Against Drunk Driving for an underage drinking problem)

You should identify as many stakeholders as possible for the problem you select. Each stakeholder may bring different knowledge and different leverage to the effort for affecting the problem. The more stakeholders that are identified, the more resources you will have to address the problem.

However, some communities have found that the problem-solving effort progresses most efficiently if only two or three stakeholders—a core group—work on the problem throughout the project. Other, more peripheral, stakeholders often have something to contribute at specific stages of the project, but not throughout the entire effort.

The following is a brief description of a sample problem and a list of potential stakeholders and partners.

## Sample Problem (Robbery, Fear)

A mid-sized eastern city of 35,000, with a relatively low crime rate, had experienced a number of robberies of food delivery people. On average, one delivery person had been robbed per month. A number of pizza and other fast-food stores refused to deliver to a mostly low-income and predominantly black neighborhood where many of the robberies were perceived to be taking place. Restaurant representatives said that stores decided not to deliver food to the area because an increasing number of delivery people had been attacked on the job, and they feared making deliveries in high-crime areas. A resident of the neighborhood where deliveries were not being made complained about the lack of delivery service and started a petition to change the policy. The city council began considering a proposal to require delivery to all residents, regardless of their location, and the story was covered in local and regional newspapers.

### *Stakeholders*

*(In addition to the police)*

- Potential home-delivery customers in “no-delivery” neighborhood
- Signers of the petition
- Fast food delivery people
- Fast food restaurant management (local franchises)
- National pizza delivery chains
- National Association of Pizza Operators
- Local NAACP chapter
- Local legislators
- Local media



## Analyzing the Selected Problem

### Why Analysis Is Important

Comprehensively analyzing a problem is critical to the success of a problem-solving effort. Effective, tailor-made responses cannot be developed unless you know what is causing the problem.

Yet, many people essentially skip the analysis phase of the SARA model. The reasons for this are varied, but include the following: the nature of the problem sometimes falsely appears obvious at first glance; there may be tremendous internal and external pressure to solve the problem immediately; the pressure of responding to calls does not seem to allow time for detailed inquiries into the nature of the problem; investigating or researching the problem does not seem like “real” police work; and supervisors may not value analytical work that takes up time but does not produce arrests, traffic citations, or other similar traditional measures of police work. Also, in many communities, a strong commitment to the old way of viewing and handling problems prevents police and community members from looking at those problems in new and different ways.

Despite these pressures and perceptions, problem solvers must resist the urge to skip the analysis phase, or they risk addressing a problem that doesn’t exist and/or implementing solutions that are ineffective in the long run.

For example, computer-aided dispatch data in one southeastern police department indicated that there was a large auto theft problem at a local shopping mall. Yet, after a sergeant reviewed incident reports and follow-up records on cancellations, it became clear to him that many of the reported auto thefts were actually cases in which shoppers had misplaced their cars and then mistakenly reported them stolen. If he had not analyzed the problem, the first instinct of the sergeant probably would have been to implement an auto theft prevention effort, which would have had little or no impact on the misplaced car problem. After analyzing the problem, it was obvious that the auto theft problem

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was not as large as it had appeared, and what was needed was a combination of a tailored auto theft prevention effort and better marking and distinction of the mall parking lots.

## Asking the Right Questions

The first step in analysis is to determine what information is needed. This should be a broad inquiry, uninhibited by past perspectives. Questions should be asked, whether or not answers can be obtained. The openness and persistent probing associated with such an inquiry is not unlike the approach that a seasoned and highly regarded detective would take to solve a puzzling crime: reaching out in all directions, digging deeply, asking the right questions. Invited to participate in such an exercise, groups of experienced police personnel will pose a wide range of appropriate questions. They also will acknowledge that, except for some hunches, they usually do not have the answers to the questions they pose.<sup>9</sup>

## Crime Triangle

Generally, three elements are required to constitute a crime in the community: an **offender**, a **victim**, and a **place** (crime scene, location, environment).<sup>10</sup> Problem solvers have found it useful in understanding a problem to visualize a link between these three elements by drawing a triangle.



As part of the analysis phase, it is important to find out as much as possible about all three sides of the triangle. One way to start is by asking Who? What? When? Where? How? Why? and Why not? about each side of the triangle.<sup>11</sup>

## *Victims*

It is important to focus on the victim side of the triangle. As mentioned earlier, recent research has shown that a small number of victims account for a large amount of crime incidents. In addition, researchers in England found that victims of residential burglary, domestic violence, and other crimes are likely to be revictimized very soon after the first victimization—often within a month or two.<sup>12, 13</sup> Effective interventions targeted at repeat victims can significantly reduce crime.

According to one study of residential burglary in the Huddersfield Division of the West Yorkshire Police in England, victims were four times more likely than nonvictims to be victimized again, and most repeat burglaries occurred within 6 weeks of the first. Consequently, the Huddersfield Division developed a tailored, three-tiered response to repeat burglary victims, based on the number of times their homes had been burglarized. Initial reports showed a 20 percent reduction in residential burglary and no evidence of displacement.<sup>14</sup> In fact, commercial burglaries in the area also were reduced, even though that problem was not being targeted. The police, however, did experience difficulties identifying repeat victims because their database systems were not designed for this type of inquiry.

## *Offenders*

A fresh look at the offender side of the triangle is critical to a problem-solving effort. In the past, much emphasis has been placed on identifying and apprehending offenders. While this can reduce a specific crime problem, particularly if the apprehended offenders account for a large share of the problem, the reduction is often temporary because new offenders replace the original offenders.

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The problem of replacement offenders is particularly acute in money-making activities such as drug sales, burglary, robbery, and prostitution. For this reason, police have found it helpful to learn more about why offenders are attracted to certain victims and places, what specifically they gain by offending, and what, if anything, could prevent or reduce their rates of offending.

### *Place*

It is equally important to analyze the place side of the triangle. As mentioned earlier, certain locations account for a significant amount of all criminal activity. An analysis of these locations may indicate why they are so conducive to a particular crime and point to ways in which they can be altered to inhibit offenders and protect victims. For example, placing ATMs inside bank lobbies may reduce the amount of information an offender has about victims (that they actually collected money from the bank, that they put their money in their left-front pocket) and reduce the vulnerability of victims who have their backs turned to potential offenders while using ATMs.

### *Handlers, Guardians, and Managers*

People or things can exercise control over each side of the triangle so that crime is less likely. Offenders can sometimes be controlled by handlers such as the police and probation and parole officers. Targets and victims can be protected by the presence of guardians. Places can also have guardians or managers influencing both offenders and victims. Successful problem solving relies on understanding not only how all three sides of the triangle interact, but also how offenders, victims, and places are, or are not, effectively controlled by others.<sup>15</sup>



## Sample Questions for Analyzing Problems

Agencies should make a list of questions about the nature of the problem that need to be answered before new and effective responses can be developed.<sup>16</sup> The following are 15 sample questions about the robbery problem example described on page 11.

### *Victims*

1. Who were the victims (age, race, gender)? For whom were they working? What was the nature of the attacks?
2. What time of day were the victims attacked?
3. Have any food delivery people been attacked more than once? Have the food delivery people from certain restaurants been attacked more often than others?
4. How fearful are the delivery people? What areas do they fear? Do they have any suggestions on ways to make their job safer? Are they issued any security devices or provided with safety training?
5. What have other jurisdictions facing similar problems done to increase the safety of food delivery people? What policies have been the most effective and why?

### *Place (Crime Scene, Location, Environment)*

6. Where are the robberies taking place—at the delivery site, en route to the delivery site, or near the fast food establishment? How closely do the places of attack conform to the areas where delivery people will not go?



7. Of the robberies that take place away from the fast food establishment, what is the distribution of places in which the robberies have occurred (apartment buildings, townhouses, detached houses, public or assisted housing, motels, parking lots, office buildings)?
8. Are the delivery people robbed near their vehicle or away from it? What type of vehicle do the delivery people drive? Is it identified as a fast food delivery vehicle?
9. Where is the food store located in relation to the “nondelivery” neighborhood? What routes do delivery people take to deliver the food?
10. Are there any environmental similarities in the specific locations of the robberies (lighting, shrubbery, isolated or blind areas)?

### *Offenders*

11. What is the method of attack? Are any patterns evident? What weapons have been used and in how many attacks?
12. How do the offenders select their victims? What makes some victims more attractive than others? What makes nonvictims less attractive?
13. Are the offenders placing orders to lure delivery people to them or randomly meeting up with their victims? If the offenders are placing orders to rob delivery people, are the orders being placed in the name of real customers or under false names?
14. How much money did offenders steal during a typical incident? Was anything else stolen?
15. Do the offenders live in the neighborhood(s) where the robberies are occurring? If so, are they known to residents who might have some influence over them?

## Resources That Can Help You Analyze Problems

A number of tools can assist you in capturing data and other information about crime and disorder problems.

- **Crime analysts.** Crime analysts can provide a great deal of assistance in collecting and analyzing data and other information about specific crime and disorder problems.
- **Records management system.** Such systems can help police collect, retrieve, and analyze information about problems. In particular, the system should be able to quickly and easily help users identify repeat calls for service relating to specific victims, locations, and offenders.
- **Mapping/geographic information systems.**<sup>17</sup> These systems can illuminate patterns, help identify problem areas, and show potential links between crime hot spots and other types of establishments (ATMs, liquor stores).
- **Technical assistance.** Criminal justice practitioners who specialize in using problem solving to address specific crime problems, such as auto theft, robbery, and street-level drug dealing, can provide valuable assistance to police and community members. In addition, noncriminal justice personnel with backgrounds in a variety of areas can also aid in problem-solving efforts. For example, a mental health expert may be able to assist in assessing a community's current response to people with mental illness and help improve that response.
- **Resident/business surveys.** These surveys can help police and community-based entities identify and analyze problems, gauge fear levels, identify preferred responses, and determine the real and perceived effectiveness of problem-solving efforts. These surveys also can help determine general and repeat victimization rates, particularly for under-reported, low-level crimes.



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Systematic and structured interviews with victims and offenders can provide important insights into the dynamics of a particular crime problem.

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- **Crime environment surveys.** These instruments can help police and community-based entities systematically assess the physical environment of problem locations and the ways in which the specific characteristics of the locations lend themselves to crime and disorder.
- **Interviews with victims and offenders.** Systematic and structured interviews with victims and offenders can provide important insights into the dynamics of a particular crime problem. For example, offender interviews conducted with street robbers in one locality provided police with important information regarding the nature of victim selection and other aspects of the crime that could be used to prevent future victimizations.
- **Training.** Problem-solving training, with an emphasis on analysis, can help police and community members build and enhance problem-solving skills.
- **Laptop computers/mobile data computers.** When housed in patrol cars, the latest generation of laptop computers can provide officers with direct access to useful and timely crime data and the ability to analyze crime problems and produce maps while on patrol.
- **Internet.** Using online legal and business research services, police personnel and community members can quickly learn who owns property that has become a haven for drug sales, identify pending legislation and current laws affecting a particular crime problem, and review news coverage from communities facing similar problems. Similarly, police personnel and community members can use the Internet to exchange information with others who have addressed similar problems and to gain access to networks specifically devoted to community policing and problem solving.

## Responding to a Problem

After a problem has been clearly defined and analyzed, one confronts the ultimate challenge in problem-oriented policing: the search for the most effective way of dealing with it.<sup>18</sup>

The third stage of the SARA model focuses on developing and implementing effective responses to the problem. Before entering this stage, an agency must be sure it has thoroughly analyzed the problem. The temptation to implement a response and “start doing something” before analysis is complete is very strong. But quick fixes are rarely effective in the long term. Problems will likely persist if solutions are not tailored to the specific causes of the problem.<sup>19</sup>

To develop tailored responses to crime problems, problem solvers should review their findings about the three sides of the crime triangle—victims, offenders, and place—and develop creative solutions that will address at least two sides of the triangle.<sup>20</sup> They should approach the development of solutions without any preconceived notions about what should be done. Often, the results of the analysis phase point police and citizens in unexpected directions; for example, suppose the policing agency that faced the fast food robbery problem described earlier found the following:

- Fourteen delivery people were robbed during the past year.
- Nine of the robberies occurred between the hours of 10 PM and 2 AM on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights.
- Four of the fast food delivery stores accounted for 10 of the robberies; staff working at two of these four stores experienced seven of the robberies.
- Staff at the two stores that were victimized the most deliver until 2 AM, while the other two stores stop delivering at 12 AM.
- In seven of the robberies, police were unable to locate the ordering customer, indicating that orders were placed under false names or false addresses.



- Large outdoor parties, mostly attended by youth in their late teens, are held each weekend night in several common areas near residential units. The party areas are in the vicinity of the robberies. Alcohol is served at the parties, and there is some concern among residents about noise and underage drinking at the parties.
- Fast food delivery staff recall that a number of the robberies were committed by teenagers who appeared to have been drinking.
- Several delivery staff also recall seeing or passing a group of teenage parties on foot before they were robbed.
- In 11 of the robberies, the offenders stole less than \$40. In the other three robberies, between \$40 and \$60 was stolen.

A tailored response to this problem might include the following:

- An agreement by the two most victimized stores to stop delivery at midnight and require customers to pick up their take-out between midnight and 2 AM.
- An agreement by the stores to ask customers what bill denomination will be used to pay for the food, so that delivery people could carry the minimum amount of change required for the transaction. Exact change would be requested, but not required.
- An agreement by the stores to use an enhanced Caller ID system to cross-check names with telephone numbers. If the customer's name did not match the number and name of the caller displayed by Caller ID—possibly because the person placing the order was a guest of the residence—food store personnel would look up the resident's address to confirm that the telephone number matched the address. The resident would be called back to confirm the order.
- An agreement by the stores to implement a policy not to deliver an order if it means walking by a large crowd that is loitering in the area. If a delivery person is unable to deliver an order for this reason, the person will return to the store, call the customer, and request that he or she meet the delivery person at the nearest curb past the loitering group.

- An agreement by the resident who started the petition for food delivery service to the neighborhood to communicate the nature and reason for the new delivery policies (with the exception of the Caller ID check) to other residents. The petitioner would convey this information at a neighborhood meeting and through fliers delivered to each resident. At several of the teenage parties, residents would inform the youth in attendance that delivery people would no longer carry more than \$10 in change (and often much less) at all times.

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From the outset, one is constantly battling a natural tendency to revert to traditional responses.

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## Bucking Tradition

From the outset, one is constantly battling a natural tendency to revert to traditional responses.<sup>21</sup>

Having relied on traditional responses (areawide sweeps or arrests, saturation patrol) in the past, it is only natural that police will gravitate toward these same tactics to address problems in the future—even if these tactics have not been especially effective or sustainable over the long term.

In the case of the fast food robberies, it is easy to see how police might have decided to step up car or foot patrols in the problem area on weekend nights between the hours of 10 PM and 2 AM. But this response would have been relatively costly to the police department. Creative responses that go beyond the criminal justice system and focus on preventing future occurrences are generally the most successful.

Citizens and police are often tempted to implement programs or responses used in other communities. Although it can be very useful to learn how other communities have successfully addressed similar problems (and police are encouraged to research other approaches as part of their analysis), caution should be used in adopting off-the-shelf solutions, unless the situation is strikingly similar.<sup>22</sup>



The police facing the fast food robberies might have been inclined to suggest that public works increase lighting in the problem area because this is one of the ways other communities have successfully addressed robbery problems. But unless the robberies have occurred in areas that are dimly lit, this strategy probably would have little effect on the fast food robbery problem.

The key to developing tailored responses is making sure the responses are very focused and directly linked to the findings from the analysis phase of the project.

For specific examples of problem solving, refer to the *Problem-Oriented Guides for Police Series*, developed by the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing ([www.popcenter.org](http://www.popcenter.org)) and funded by the COPS Office. See also, the Additional Resources section, which lists some of the crimes and social disorder problems that can be addressed using a problem-solving approach.



## **Assessing the Impact on the Selected Problem**

During the past 20 years, it has become clear to many in policing that both the traditional approaches to addressing crime, fear, and other problems, and the measures of effectiveness have fallen short of many people's expectations. This has caused a significant number of police departments to seek new approaches to addressing old problems. It has also caused many police departments to ask whether their work really makes a difference beyond dealing with the immediate incident.<sup>23</sup>

### **Traditional Measures**

Traditionally, a number of measures have been used by police and community members to assess effectiveness of approaches to addressing crime, fear and other problems. These include numbers of arrests, levels of reported crime, response times, clearance rates, citizen complaints, and various workload indicators, such as calls for service and the number of field interviews conducted.<sup>24</sup>

Several of these measures may be helpful to you in assessing the impact of a problem-solving effort, including calls for service related to the problem (especially a reduction in repeat calls for service involving specific locations, victims, or offenders); changes in the incidence of reported crime; and changes in levels of citizen complaints. Other traditional measures, such as arrests and number of field interviews conducted, may not be that useful for your problem-solving effort, unless these measures can be directly linked to a long-term reduction in the harm associated with the targeted crime problem.



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Assessing the impact of a problem-solving effort may require using a nontraditional structure for determining effectiveness.

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Even reductions in calls for service and citizen complaints may not be the best indicators of whether you are having a positive impact on a problem because, in some instances, these measures may actually increase as the result of a problem-solving effort. In some cases, such an increase may be a good outcome if it means that residents feel more comfortable filing complaints or believe their calls will be taken seriously. However, when a problem-solving effort does result in increased arrests or increased calls for service, police should look carefully at these and determine whether they were intended or unintended as a result of the initiative.

### A Nontraditional Framework

Assessing the impact of a problem-solving effort may require using a nontraditional structure for determining effectiveness. One such framework developed by Eck and Spelman identifies five different levels or types of positive impact on problems.<sup>25</sup>

1. Total elimination of the problem.
2. Fewer incidents.
3. Less-serious or harmful incidents.
4. Better handling of the incidents/an improved response to the problem.
5. Removing the problem from police consideration (shifting the handling to others more able to address the problem).

A sixth positive impact also has been suggested:

6. People and institutions affected by the problem are left better-equipped to handle a similar problem in the future.<sup>26</sup>

Some of the measures listed above may be appropriate to your problem-solving effort. Others not listed above may be more appropriate. After you have analyzed the problem, you may wish to change the measures initially selected or revise the measures. The measures you select will depend on the nature of the problem selected, preferences of the police and the community, and the ability of your jurisdiction to collect the necessary data both before the project begins and after it has been in place for some time.

A number of nontraditional measures can shed light on whether a problem has been affected.<sup>27</sup> The key is focusing on measures that demonstrate an impact on the targeted problem.



## Sample Measures That Demonstrate Impact on a Problem

- Four crack houses in the 12-block area were closed and measurements indicated that there was no displacement of drug dealing in the surrounding five-block area. Calls for service relating to street-level drug dealing in the target area were reduced from an average of 45 per month to 8 per month. The number of residents who reported witnessing drug deals during the previous month was reduced from 65 percent before the effort to 10 percent 4 months after the effort.
- Prior to the effort, 40 percent of those victimized twice by burglars were revictimized within a 6-month period. After the effort, only 14 percent were revictimized. Overall, burglaries in the targeted area were reduced from 68 in 1 year to 45 in the next.
- Because the problem-solving effort interrupted juvenile gun markets for more-lethal semiautomatic firearms, the number and seriousness of injuries from drive-by shootings were significantly reduced, even though the number of drive-bys declined only slightly. Prior to the effort, there were 52 drive-by shootings in the city, 21 life-threatening injuries, and five deaths. After the effort, there were 47 drive-by shootings, 8 life-threatening injuries, and no deaths.
- In the year prior to the effort, police received an average of 50 complaints per month relating to disputes between neighbors. An average of 10 of the monthly complaints were resolved by one visit from a police officer, but approximately 40 of the calls were placed by residents at 16 repeat problem locations. Since the effort was implemented, the department receives an average of 15 complaints per month. Two repeat problem locations remain, but they account for less than 25 percent of the complaints received each month.

## Sample Measures That Do Not Demonstrate Impact on a Crime or Disorder Problem

- Five police-community meetings were held during the course of the 1-year project. (Conclusions regarding the impact on the problem can't be drawn from this measure.)
- Officers conducted home security checks for 43 residents in the targeted housing development. (While it would be important to document the number of home security checks, it would be more important to know whether burglaries were reduced as a result of the initiative.)
- Officers and community members participated in a neighborhood cleanup and removed 150 pounds of trash. (This information doesn't necessarily indicate a reduction in levels of targeted crime or disorder problems, and a one-time cleanup may be a temporary improvement. It would be more important to show that the targeted crime and disorder problem was reduced as a result of, or in conjunction with, the cleanup.)
- Police seized more than 10 kilos of cocaine during the initiative, which targeted narcotics activity in the southwest district. (This result doesn't indicate whether street-level drug sales and any associated problems, such as prostitution, loitering, graffiti, trash, and intimidation of residents, were reduced.)

## Adjust Responses Based on Assessment

If the responses implemented are not effective, the information gathered during analysis should be reviewed. New information may need to be collected before new solutions can be developed and tested.<sup>28</sup>



## Sample Problem-Solving Initiatives

The COPS Office seeks to facilitate new, innovative problem-solving efforts tailored to an in-depth analysis of a community's specific problem. To build on the concepts presented in this guide, three examples illustrate the use of the SARA model and the kinds of analytical efforts we hope to foster.

### **Example 1:** **Plano, Texas,<sup>29</sup> Traffic Congestion Near Schools** *Comprehensive Education and Design Changes Ease Traffic Congestion Near Neighborhood School*

#### *Scanning*

Residents of a neighborhood near Barron Elementary School complained to their neighborhood officer about seemingly intractable traffic problems, including congestion, speeding, red light running, illegal parking, and crashes. Traditional law enforcement efforts, including surveillance and citation, had been intermittently attempted over multiple years but did not result in sustained improvement.

#### *Analysis*

In 2000, the neighborhood officer undertook a thorough analysis of empirical data, environmental factors, and behavioral patterns. Barron is located at the corner of a major four-lane thoroughfare and a narrow residential street. The school specializes in preschool-aged children with disabilities, resulting in a majority of parents choosing to drive their children to and from school. The only means of dropping off or picking up a student was to enter and exit the residential neighborhood, and parents reported that instead of attempting to use the inadequate carpool lane, they routinely stopped in the middle of the street and encouraged their children to run across the street.

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These examples illustrate the use of the SARA model and feature responses that are linked to comprehensive problem analyses. The COPS Office is not promoting a particular set of responses to problems and acknowledges that there is room for disagreement regarding the responses selected and their relative impact.

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While traffic-related calls for police service were not unusually high when compared to other neighborhoods with schools, crashes were much more common in the Barron neighborhood. After reviewing the circumstances of each crash in the neighborhood, the officer determined that each was the result of a traffic violation committed in an attempt to circumvent the traffic plan within the neighborhood. Peak times for congestion came in 15-minute increments and occurred during morning and afternoon drop-off and pick-up, amounting to only 1 hour per weekday: 7:45–8:00 AM, 10:45–11:00 AM, 11:15–11:30 AM, and 2:45–3:00 PM. Residents had repeatedly complained to the city traffic engineering department, resulting in temporary changes to traffic signal timing. The officer determined that education and enforcement, combined with permanent traffic design and control changes, were required to address these chronic problems.

### *Response*

The officer developed strategies within three realms: education, enforcement, and traffic management. She changed her work hours to coincide with the peak problem periods. Working with school staff, parents, and residents, she created and distributed maps of alternative egress routes from the neighborhood. She also created and distributed flyers—translated into Spanish by school staff—to educate parents and explain changes to the traffic plan. School-provided traffic signs were replaced with city-made signs to authorize police enforcement. Once the education period had elapsed, the officer began stopping every observed violation during the peak periods. This occasionally meant stopping as many as seven vehicles at one time. Working with the traffic engineering department, a new traffic plan was developed, including a new carpool lane that dispersed vehicles away from the residential neighborhoods and the most congested intersection. Visual obstructions to signage—like tree limbs—were removed and traffic control devices were installed to re-route traffic. Parking was restricted and enhanced signage



was installed. Four marked crosswalks were created for pedestrian access and school-zone lights were synchronized with dismissal times. Traffic signal cycles were precisely programmed to coincide with peak use times to ease ingress and egress without unnecessarily disrupting the area's traffic flow during nonpeak times. Last, after years of discussion between the city and the area's resident association, a park access road was constructed, facilitating easier access to the neighborhood for residents without inviting school traffic back onto the residential streets.

### *Assessment*

Comparing pre- and post-response survey results showed that resident and parent frustrations were reduced, and a majority of respondents believed that improvements had been realized in terms of both traffic congestion and safety concerns. The neighborhood officer reported that traffic flowed at a reasonable rate during both peak and nonpeak hours and that the historic blockage of residential streets had been virtually eliminated. The purposeful displacement of traffic was carefully planned and was deemed by all parties to have effectively distributed vehicles. Crashes were reduced by 90 percent (from 10 to 1) in just 2 years.



## **Example 2:**

### **Chula Vista, California,<sup>30</sup> Problems at Hotels and Motels**

*Holding Hotel and Motel Managers Accountable Under New City Ordinance Reduces Crime and Disorder by 70 Percent and Calls for Service by 50 Percent*

#### *Scanning*

Throughout the 1990s, the city's approximately two dozen hotels and motels continued to generate unacceptable levels of calls for police service and reported crime despite a variety of efforts by stakeholders, including police, other city agencies, and local business groups. Earlier attempts to curb the crime and disorder, which included enhanced police enforcement and adoption of city ordinances prohibiting hourly room rentals and requiring guests to show identification at check-in, proved unsuccessful.

#### *Analysis*

The Chula Vista Police Department undertook an analysis of calls for service and crime and disorder data, discovering that motels were routinely the most common location for drug arrests in the city. Furthermore, most calls-for-service originated in motel rooms as opposed to the common areas or parking lots. During interviews of motel customers, the police learned that 75 percent of them were San Diego County residents, many who reported being homeless or nearly homeless. In 2002, the Center for Criminal Justice Research from California State University, San Bernardino was brought in to create and implement both a motel management survey and an environmental analysis instrument. The survey identified poor management practices that correlated to high levels of calls-for-service. These motel management practices included catering to local clientele and renting rooms to long-term guests. The environmental analyses reviewed security measures, access control, and visible signs of disorder on the property. Many of the motel rooms throughout Chula Vista lacked basic, industry-accepted security measures like deadbolts, peepholes, and chains or swing-bars on external doors. In 2005, the police department calculated a calls-for-service per room ratio for each

hotel and motel in the city. The initial ratios ranged from 2.77 to 0.11 calls-for-service per room. Plotting these motel-room call-for-service ratios on a map revealed that the size or location of a motel property had little to do with its likelihood for generating calls-for-service and disorder. Analysis of the variation in motel-room prices suggested that, contrary to longstanding local belief, low prices alone did not seem to cause calls-for-service. Ultimately, the stakeholder group developed an array of responses based on the principle that the managers and owners of the hotels and motels were in the best position to control crime and disorder through sound management practices.

### *Response*

Beginning in 2003, the first phase of responses was initiated. A meeting was held with motel owners, police, code enforcement, and the Chamber of Commerce. Property-specific calls-for-service data were provided to owners and were sent on a regular basis. A checklist of best practices designed to reduce problems was distributed to each property owner. Code enforcement officers began an annual inspection program to ensure compliance with state and local codes. Between 2001 and 2005, a 7 percent reduction in calls-for-service to motels was realized, but motels still remained the top drug-arrest location in Chula Vista. In 2005, the second phase of responses was launched. The City Attorney's office and other City agencies were brought in to assist in drafting a motel-management ordinance modeled after several similar laws throughout the country. Under the new law, all motels are required to apply for and obtain an annual operating permit from the City. The granting of the permit was to be based on the condition of the hotel, the use of standard security features for rooms, and the maintenance of an acceptable call-for-service ratio. The standard acceptable ratio was determined to be the 2005 median ratio for all motels in the city. Property owners were required to take preventive measures and develop and implement specific responses to problems at their motels. The City committed to assist motel owners in mitigating their problems but would not mandate specific remedial actions. The ordinance was endorsed by area business groups, including the Chamber of Commerce, and passed the City Council unanimously.



### ***Assessment***

All motels wishing to continue operations came into compliance with the new ordinance within the second year of the law's enactment. Calls-for-service to Chula Vista motels were reduced by 49 percent. Drug arrests at motels decreased 66 percent. All reported crimes decreased 70 percent, with violent crimes and crimes against persons dropping 49 percent. Officers spent 52 percent less time at motels throughout the city, freeing up 1,240 patrol hours during the first year of the ordinance's enactment. Motels' quality, appearance, and management practices improved; several hotels were sold to new owners; and the number of substandard units in the city (i.e., those without deadbolts, peepholes, and door chains or security bars) dropped from 378 to 0. The City reported an increase in the transient occupancy tax (room tax) receipts. No displacement of crime or disorder was reported either at nearby apartment complexes or at motels in neighboring jurisdictions during the first 2 years of the ordinance's enactment.

### **Example 3:**

**Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina,<sup>31</sup>  
Burglaries from Storage Facilities**

***Thorough Analysis Leads to Simple Responses, Resulting in Substantial Reduction in Burglaries at Targeted Storage Facilities***

### ***Scanning***

In 2005, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department saw a 28 percent increase in commercial burglaries, 7 percent of which occurred at mini-warehouse or storage facilities. Most of the incidents involved multiple units within one facility, with an average of 3.5 victims per incident. A sergeant and two detectives were assigned to initiate a problem-solving effort to address the storage-facility burglaries.

## *Analysis*

The detectives began their analysis by reading each of the 99 storage-facility burglary reports from 2005. Of the 99 reports, 71 occurred at one of 28 facilities and accounted for 291 individual victims. The detectives identified a total of 75 storage facilities in the jurisdiction and realized that most facilities did not have significant burglary problems. When the facility locations were mapped in relation to crime data, no correlation was found between the location of a facility, the occurrence of burglary at the facility, and the level of crime in the surrounding neighborhood. Reports were analyzed to determine whether there were any particular kinds of property being targeted, but the detectives found no reliable patterns. In an effort to identify variances in design, policy, and practice that might account for different levels of victimization, the detectives visited each of the 75 facilities. One key finding from these visits was that the use of disc-style locks seemed to be the most effective measure for securing individual storage units. The one facility requiring customers to use disc locks on its units had not suffered a single burglary incident.

## *Response*

In order to test their hypothesis that the use of disc locks would substantially reduce the occurrence of burglary, the police department designed a study involving three locations: two storage facilities that would suggest, but not require, that their customers use the disc locks, and the one facility already requiring the use of the locks. The police department purchased the disc locks for use in the study and launched the initiative on July 1, 2006. Once the test was underway, the detectives collaborated with the mini-storage industry and area owners to develop a “best practices” guide. The recommendations in the guide relate to performing background checks on customers, educating renters on burglary prevention, restricting customer access to the units to times when on-site managers were present, encouraging the use of disc locks, improving lighting, using surveillance cameras, and providing the police the access codes to enter the facilities.



### *Assessment*

Compared to the year prior to the study, the facilities involved in the study realized a 58 percent reduction in the number of reported burglary incidents and a 69 percent reduction in the number of individual burglarized units during the 1-year test. Highlighting the utility of the disc locks is the fact that one incident at one of the test facilities involved entry into 26 separate storage units, none of which was secured by a disc lock. This single burglary incident accounted for 79 percent of that facility's burglaries during the test period. Also during the test period, there was a 39 percent increase in the number of reported burglary incidents and a 45 percent increase in the number of individual burglarized units at facilities not involved in the study.

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31. Submission by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Police Department for the 2007 Center for Problem-Oriented Policing Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing.



## Additional Resources

### The Center for Problem-Oriented Policing

The Center for Problem-Oriented Policing (POP Center) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement of problem-oriented policing. Its mission is to advance the concept and practice of problem-oriented policing. The POP Center has been funded by the COPS Office to produce a variety of knowledge resources, including the Problem-Oriented Guides for Police series (POP Guides), which address a variety of crime and disorder problems. A list of POP Guides, as of the date of this publishing, is provided below. Readers may want to visit [www.popcenter.org](http://www.popcenter.org) for updates and additional problem-oriented policing resources.

### Problem-Specific Guides Series:

1. **Assaults in and Around Bars, 2nd Edition.** Michael S. Scott and Kelly Dedel. 2006. ISBN: 1-932582-00-2
2. **Street Prostitution, 2nd Edition.** Michael S. Scott and Kelly Dedel. 2006. ISBN: 1-932582-01-0
3. **Speeding in Residential Areas, 2nd Edition.** Michael S. Scott with David K. Maddox. 2010. ISBN: 978-1-935676-02-7
4. **Drug Dealing in Privately Owned Apartment Complexes.** Rana Sampson. 2001. ISBN: 1-932582-03-7
5. **False Burglar Alarms, 2nd Edition.** Rana Sampson. 2007. ISBN: 1-932582-04-5
6. **Disorderly Youth in Public Places.** Michael S. Scott. 2001. ISBN: 1-932582-05-3
7. **Loud Car Stereos.** Michael S. Scott. 2001. ISBN: 1-932582-06-1
8. **Robbery at Automated Teller Machines.** Michael S. Scott. 2001. ISBN: 1-932582-07-X
9. **Graffiti.** Deborah Lamm Weisel. 2002. ISBN: 1-932582-08-8
10. **Thefts of and From Cars in Parking Facilities.** Ronald V. Clarke. 2002. ISBN: 1-932582-09-6
11. **Shoplifting.** Ronald V. Clarke. 2002. ISBN: 1-932582-10-X
12. **Bullying in Schools.** Rana Sampson. 2002. ISBN: 1-932582-11-8
13. **Panhandling.** Michael S. Scott. 2002. ISBN: 1-932582-12-6
14. **Rave Parties.** Michael S. Scott. 2002. ISBN: 1-932582-13-4
15. **Burglary of Retail Establishments.** Ronald V. Clarke. 2002. ISBN: 1-932582-14-2
16. **Clandestine Methamphetamine Labs, 2nd Edition.** Michael S. Scott and Kelly Dedel. 2006. ISBN: 1-932582-15-0
17. **Acquaintance Rape of College Students.** Rana Sampson. 2002. ISBN: 1-932582-16-9
18. **Burglary of Single-Family Houses.** Deborah Lamm Weisel. 2002. ISBN: 1-932582-17-7
19. **Misuse and Abuse of 911.** Rana Sampson. 2002. ISBN: 1-932582-18-5
20. **Financial Crimes Against the Elderly.** Kelly Dedel Johnson. 2003. ISBN: 1-932582-22-3
21. **Check and Card Fraud.** Graeme R. Newman. 2003. ISBN: 1-932582-27-4

22. **Stalking.** The National Center for Victims of Crime. 2004. ISBN: 1-932582-30-4
23. **Gun Violence Among Serious Young Offenders.** Anthony A. Braga. 2004.  
ISBN: 1-932582-31-2
24. **Prescription Fraud.** Julie Wartell and Nancy G. La Vigne. 2004. ISBN: 1-932582-33-9
25. **Identity Theft.** Graeme R. Newman. 2004. ISBN: 1-932582-35-3
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