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diversity language communication research education leadership
youth include gang involvement action
community belong risk prevention
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Quick Start Guide for Community Action



BRITISH
COLUMBIA

Ministry of
Justice

Introduction

In 2011, there were over 120 criminal gangs operating in British Columbia. While three-quarters of these gangs operate in the Lower Mainland region, gang-related activity has also been reported in other areas of the province. There has been an increase in gang-style murders, shooting, and violence in the past two decades. Gangs in BC are involved in activities that include homicide, extortion, kidnappings, trafficking of weapons, money-laundering, personal robberies, assaults, prostitution, human trafficking and drug dealing.

Enforcement measures have been successful, but enforcement on its own is not enough to curb gang violence. There is a need for community-based preventative measures with a focus on youth — both to protect them and to prevent them from becoming involved in gang activity. Communities with emerging gang issues or those who want to implement preventive measures are looking for ways to expand upon their existing capacity to intervene with youth in positive ways.

Every community in BC has the opportunity to initiate local programs that will empower and engage youth in positive and socially responsible directions.

About This Guide

This Quick Start Guide has been designed to provide you with information to begin planning locally relevant strategies to respond to potential youth gang issues. The planning model recommended here involves five-phases and emphasizes assistance for vulnerable youth.

As the name suggests, this Quick Start Guide is a beginning point only. Individuals and groups wanting additional support for community planning and implementation should consult the full Toolkit for Community Planning. This Toolkit is available at the Ministry of Justice web site:

www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/crimeprevention/gangs/index.htm

The Toolkit contains a range of activities, handouts, and other background and support materials to help you and your supporters within the community plan and deliver an effective, local gang response strategy.

Much of the content of this Quick Start Guide and the Toolkit is based on the work of eight community agencies — Community Action and Assessment Networks, or CAANs — that have previously participated in the BC provincial youth gang prevention strategy. Over the course of four years (from 2006 to 2010), a number of programs and strategies were implemented by the CAANs. Advice, best practices, and case studies from the eight CAANs are integrated throughout the Toolkit. Detailed information about the CAANs and their programs can be found at the GangPrevention.CA web site:

www.gangprevention.ca/partners/about-us.

Phase One: Community Mobilization

WHAT

Community mobilization is a capacity-building process where individuals, groups, and organizations within a community come together to begin to address the issues.

The **Objectives** for the community mobilization phase are to

- identify and engage people and organizations that have a stake in addressing youth gang issues in the community
- create a shared understanding of the issue and a vision for how to address it
- communicate about the issue to the community
- begin to understand the local context — the specific nature and impact of youth gang issues.

By the end of this phase, you will have a dedicated committee or working group to lead your community toward a shared vision for youth gang prevention.

WHY

A grass-roots initiative such as this youth gang prevention plan requires the support of the community for success.

WHEN

This is a first key step in any community plan, although community mobilization can also be an ongoing process. You may also determine that you need additional community mobilization activities at other phases in your process.

WHO

As the initial phase in your community plan, you will want to engage your full working group, as many interested parties as possible. Additional relevant stakeholders may be identified as you continue to work through this phase.

HOW

The steps in the community mobilization phase include

- Identifying Key Allies and Partners
- Creating a Statement of Purpose
- Establishing Terms of Reference

Steps to Community Mobilization

■ *Identifying Key Allies and Partners* ■

A successful plan for dealing with youth gang activity needs the participation and support of as many community stakeholders and interested parties as possible. Including a wide range of partners and perspectives will strengthen your work by giving your team a more complete and accurate picture of the issue and by increasing buy-in from the wider community for your cause. Stakeholders in the community that have an interest in gang prevention could include

- police, youth probation
- victim services
- municipal government
- Aboriginal bands and Aboriginal community organizations
- school and school board representatives
- youth groups — within schools, community organizations
- parent groups (e.g., school Parent Advisory Council)
- frontline Ministry of Children and Family Development workers
- family services agencies
- immigrant services
- local businesses / Chamber of Commerce
- local media
- other community groups and service agencies (e.g., parks and recreation, YMCA/ YWCA, faith-based agencies, Neighbourhood Watch).

Identifying stakeholders is important to ensure that all voices are heard, that you have community wide buy-in for your strategy. It's also a starting point in identifying existing resources aimed at curbing youth gang activity — see Phase Two: Needs Assessment.

■ *Creating a Statement of Purpose* ■

Whether it's a vision statement, a mission statement, or a set of guiding principles, your group's work will be more focussed when you have an agreed-upon central aim.

A statement of purpose should inspire a broad-based community input. Ultimately, it takes the commitment of the community to ensure success.

Establishing a vision statement can take time, and should incorporate wider community input where possible. Look for ways to communicate a draft statement of purpose to the wider community for feedback and input. Consider a Facebook page, a blog, or a Twitter account to publicize various aspects of your community plan and engage support.

■ *Establishing Terms of Reference* ■

Terms of reference are important for

- setting a framework to avoid inter-agency competition and duplication of resources
- clarifying the expectations for everyone involved
- communicating with the wider community
- evaluating success.

From the CAANs — Lessons Learned

- Make the development and maintenance of strong, positive relationships your first priority. Work on relationship building before even beginning to discuss actual programming or strategies.
- Set expectations for open, honest, and respectful dialogue. This helps keep conflict and disagreement constructive rather than destructive.
- Be inclusive. Include specialists from differing walks of life, representatives of differing ethnic, religious, and language communities, and the voices of both women and men.
- Involve youth at the beginning of the process and throughout all phases.
- Respect differences you may have within the group, but build collaboration by concentrating on common goals and objectives.

Phase Two: Needs Assessment

WHAT

A needs assessment is a way of gathering information about a community's opinions, needs, challenges, and assets. It is a dynamic, ongoing process that can be used to determine priorities and decide which project(s) will best meet the identified needs of the community.

The **Objectives** for the needs assessment phase are to

- identify community risk factors associated with potential youth gang activity
- identify resources in the community that support gang prevention, including
 - resources and programs to assist youth who are at risk of becoming involved in gang-related, violent, or criminal behaviours
 - pro-social resources and programs that will assist the community in developing resilient youth
- identify gaps in existing community resources
- set priorities for meeting community needs.

WHY

A needs assessment is important to make sure your priorities are met as part of your community plan. A needs assessment also increases efficiency by helping you to avoid duplication of other groups doing similar youth gang prevention activities.

WHEN

You or another agency may already have undertaken a needs assessment prior to you starting this community plan. If so, you will likely want to revisit it as part of this phase to ensure that it still fits your vision.

WHO

Needs assessment should begin with your entire working group to ensure you have as much input as possible in identifying existing resources. At some point you may decide to contract a more detailed needs assessment process to an outside agency.

HOW

The steps in the needs assessment phase include

- Identifying Community Resources
- Identifying Gaps in Community Resources
- Setting Community Priorities

Steps to Needs Assessment

■ *Identifying Community Resources* ■

Identifying existing resources in the community is an important first step in needs assessment. By pinpointing current strengths and capacities, you can avoid duplication of services — as well as honour the work already underway in the community. In addition, some community youth gang strategies can be simply a matter of looking for ways to expand on an existing successful initiative (e.g., finding additional resources, offering it to a wider base).

■ *Identifying Gaps in Community Resources* ■

Once you have identified the existing programs that are already in place in your community, you can begin to look at the gaps in services and see where you might best direct your efforts.

This step in your needs assessment phase may involve gathering information from the following sources:

- Police — Local police detachments keep records of reported crimes and gang activity. Their reports can give you a good idea of what crimes have taken place in your community, where they happened, and how frequently they occurred. The police can also provide information about related programs and services, and crime prevention strategies and approaches already in place.
- Ministry of Justice — This ministry's website (www.gov.bc.ca/justice/) provides comprehensive information on BC crime statistics, police resources, and municipal crime rates. The website also provides a number of useful resources (see the Additional Resources section for selected titles).
- Ministry of Children and Family Development and/or Family Services — personnel in these agencies will be able to provide statistics and information about youth-at-risk and programs aimed at those youth.
- Community — it is particularly important to hear from diverse parts of your community, including marginalized and vulnerable individuals. Include:
 - community centres (e.g., parks and recreation, YMCA/YWCA, faith-based centres) — existing programs for youth
 - schools and school district authorities — information about school-based violence and criminal activity
 - youth organizations (school and community based) — critical information about youth needs.

- Aboriginal bands and organizations — may offer information particularly related to on-reserve gang and crime activity.
- Small business owners — documented problems they have had with crime and gang activity.
- Local media — media reports on issues of gangs, crime, and violence.

In both this step and the previous, you may decide to engage an outside consultant to assist your needs assessment process.

■ *Setting Community Priorities* ■

This step in needs assessment will help to determine the most urgent of all the problems/needs first. By prioritizing the most pressing needs first, there is a greater chance of success, and of achieving success more quickly. Instead of spreading resources out too thin, a needs assessment will help the community focus on the most pressing challenges.

Your priorities, once established, will be starting point in the next phase of your community plan.

From the CAANs — Lessons Learned

- Define the exact nature and extent of the youth gang problem. Some communities have a perception about youth gangs that does not actually fit with reality.
- Identify what has already been done or is already happening to respond to the youth gang issue. Look at existing programs and initiatives, and how well they are working. Pinpointing strengths and capacities is as important as identifying deficiencies and gaps.
- Consider using an external contracted consultant to conduct your needs assessment. This can be a time-consuming and complex task that may be outside the skill set of your working group members.
- Be realistic when setting goals and priorities. Be aware that there may be some risk factors that are beyond the scope of your group's ability to address (e.g., economic factors).

Phase Three: Action Planning

WHAT

Your action plan is a series of tasks or steps designed to achieve your community goal or vision for addressing youth gang activity.

The **Objectives** for the action planning phase are to

- create concrete goals for action based on needs assessment and defined priorities
- articulate a defined action plan
- identify resources to support the community plans.

WHY

The purpose of action planning is to organize and develop specific programs, services, or initiatives. The action plans will use community assets to strengthen specific areas or address specific needs that have been identified.

WHEN

The action plan builds on the priorities you defined as part of Phase Two. It is recommended that you allow time for wider community feedback on your priorities before finalizing your action plan.

WHO

The whole working group should be part of generating broad project ideas, although the responsibility for creating the actual plan may be undertaken by the steering committee or a sub-committee.

HOW

The steps in the action planning phase include

- Connecting Priorities to Action
- Creating Action Plans
- Identifying Resources

Steps to Action Planning

■ *Connecting Priorities to Action* ■

Determining priorities was part of the previous phase, Needs Assessment. The next step is to start thinking about goals or actions to address those priorities.

There are many ways you can look at priorities for action. One way is to classify your needs by categories such as

- mentorship programs — adult role models working with at-risk youth in a one-on-one or group setting
- recreation programs — provide opportunities for physical outlet, positive socialization, and development of positive interests
- life skills programs — focussing on education, job readiness, and living skills, enabling youth to plan for life without criminal behaviour
- programs that meet physical needs for youth (e.g., food, clothing, shelter).

■ *Creating Action Plans* ■

A community action plan is a well-defined “road map” for creating community change by identifying what will be done, who will do it, and how it will be done.

Action plans are intended to address targeted, short-term gaps, such as gaining access to specific recreational activities for youth. Long-term goals such as creating a strategic plan for the growth of resources and activities for youth can also be addressed through action planning.

Action plans need to be closely tied to your needs assessment and stated priorities. Consider the following questions:

- What needs to happen to effectively address this issue? Is this attainable in the short term or is this a long-term goal?
- What possible barriers are there to success? (e.g., barriers related to finances, time, facilities, education about the issue, human resources)
- What resources are currently available?
- Will these resources address any of the barriers identified?
- What additional resources will be needed?
- Is there a way to get these resources?

■ *Identifying Resources* ■

Many community gang prevention programs can function within existing funding structures — from municipal governments, school boards, police authorities, Aboriginal bands, etc. In those cases, no additional funding resources will be required.

As part of this phase of your plan, you will need to take a look at your existing funds available in relation to your action plan. If there is a gap between finances available and finances required, you will need to either revise your plan or seek additional funding.

Consider sources such as the following for funding your programs:

- municipal government
- school board
- local businesses
- service clubs (e.g., Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions)
- Aboriginal band(s)
- BC Ministry of Justice — Crime Remediation and Crime Prevention Grant Funding Program
- Public Safety Canada — National Crime Prevention Centre

From the CAANs — Lessons Learned

- Involve youth on an ongoing basis in action planning, implementation, and evaluation. Some of the most successful programs involve a youth-leading-youth model.
- Include a focus on elementary aged youth. Working proactively with vulnerable pre-adolescents on skills such as communication and conflict resolution can help fix problems before they become serious.
- Tailor your communication strategies for your audience. Communicating with youth tends to be more successful via social media or dynamic events. Communicating with police and government is often best achieved by emails or letters. One-on-one interpersonal communication is usually extremely effective, but requires time, opportunity, and follow-up.
- Be flexible, rather than trying to find a single “solution” to the problem of youth gang violence.
- Consider starting small. Tackle smaller, short-term issues effectively rather than big problems in a disorganized manner. Small successes will help feed larger ones.

Phase Four: Program Implementation

WHAT

Implementation is the stage where all your planned activities are put into action. Monitoring and reflecting on progress is important in the implementation phase to make sure that activities can be executed as planned — and that you can adapt to challenges as they may arise.

The **Objectives** for the program implementation phase are to

- outline specific tasks that need to be implemented to launch action items
- implement action items
- acknowledge and affirm results.

WHY

Program implementation is the “action phase,” when you put into place the results of your previous steps. This is the stage where the most visible results of your plan can be seen. In addition, program implementation is the most public part of your plan, and allows you to gain wider community support.

WHEN

The timing of your program implementation will depend on the nature of your program, your method of identifying and enrolling at-risk youth, and when various resources (e.g., facilities, guest presenters) are available.

WHO

Although implementation of specific elements may be the responsibility of steering committee or one or more sub-committees, the whole working group should have opportunities to be part of implementation. Indeed, some members may feel that this is the only stage of the process where their involvement is required or valuable. Interested groups and individuals within the wider community who have previously been uninvolved in the working group may also take part in the program at this point.

HOW

The steps in the program implementation phase include

- Planning for Implementation
- Checking In
- Celebrating Your Achievements

Steps to Implementation

► *Planning for Implementation*

This part of your implementation strategy is where your plans become reality.

The steps involved in implementation will vary according to the nature of the project you are undertaking, but will likely include factors such as

- detailed actions and tasks
- person or people responsible for each task
- resource requirements — facilities, materials, technology required, guest presenters, refreshments, etc.
- timeline for each stage
- budget
- communication strategies (e.g., how programs and strategies will be promoted, how youth clients will be identified and invited to participate).

► *Checking In*

Once implementation has begun, it's a good idea to check in with everyone involved — including program facilitators, steering committee, and sub-committees — to see how plans are progressing.

Be sure to include a means for data collection as part of checking in. This will prove valuable when you conduct your evaluation phase.

► *Celebrating Your Achievements*

Getting this far has likely been a time-consuming and challenging journey for your working group, so it's important to take time to celebrate what you have accomplished.

Consider a public element to your celebration, which gives you an opportunity to communicate your successes with the wider community.

From the CAANs — Lessons Learned

- Appoint a facilitator or a facilitation team with responsibility for specific programs. Facilitators should ideally be experienced in working with the target audience (youth, and particularly youth at risk), and able to communicate with young people on their level.
- Establish sub-groups to take on particular tasks or projects. Allow people to contribute in areas in which they are most enthusiastic and energetic.
- Try to reach a balance between flexible and controlled intake/membership. Having a defined membership in your programs helps establish stability for the youth involved, but you also want to be able to accommodate additional at-risk youth as they are identified. Be prepared for increased interest in your program as a result of word-of-mouth, and consider having a second phase/intake begin shortly after the first.
- Involve youth in spreading the word about activities to other youth who may benefit. Contests with a creative focus (video, poster, song, etc.) and featuring prizes or “bragging rights” are particularly effective ways for youth to take a lead in communication.
- Look for ways to incorporate long-term adult-to-youth mentorship into your program. Youth will benefit from having stable relationships with appropriate adults, particularly if they are transitioning out of a criminal or at-risk lifestyle.
- Monitor each step of the program to see whether it has been properly implemented, and to assess whether the program is succeeding. Monitoring tells you how you are doing, and may guide you to make changes if necessary.
- Keep careful records throughout implementation to help in your evaluation process.

Phase Five Evaluation and Sustainability

WHAT

Evaluation is a process that determines whether your project's activities are meeting your project's goals and objectives in the manner expected. The evaluation results can help you revamp your project or plan a new one — sustaining your plan for the future.

The **Objectives** for the evaluation and sustainability phase are to

- develop clear goals for evaluation
- determine a method for evaluation
- determine evidence required for evaluation
- develop an evaluation plan to gather information to
 - determine the success of the program
 - build for the future
- reflect on the community plan and set goals for sustainability.

WHY

Evaluation processes feed sustainability, allowing you to continue your programs with maximum efficiency and effectiveness. A defined evaluation process may also help you secure support for additional future program implementation.

WHEN

A formal evaluation should take place at the end of your planning process, although ongoing formative assessment can and should take place throughout. Indeed, successful evaluation depends on gathering timely data at key stages of the process.

WHO

Depending on the nature of your evaluation processes, evaluation can be undertaken by your entire working group, your steering committee, or an outside contracted evaluator. Determining who conducts the evaluation will be a part of this phase of the plan.

HOW

The steps in the evaluation & sustainability phase include

- Conducting an Evaluation
- Looking Back and Moving Forward

Steps to Evaluation and Sustainability

► *Conducting an Evaluation*

Evaluation is a process that determines whether a project's activities are meeting the project's goals and objectives in the manner expected. The evaluation results can help you revamp your project or plan a new one. A defined evaluation process may also be a requirement to ensure continued funding and resources, or may help you secure funding for additional program implementation.

Evaluating your program and your process serves many purposes. Evaluation processes feed **sustainability**, allowing you to continue your programs with maximum efficiency and effectiveness. Without an effective, evidence-based evaluation, a program's sustainability is threatened because needs/gaps go unidentified, youth's voices go unheard, and potential growth areas become missed opportunities.

The basic steps in project evaluation are:

- identify the goals and objectives
- describe the project activities
- identify what you want to know —the results or outcomes you want to assess
- identify data sources and data collection tools that will give you actual results and outcomes
- collect, organize and analyze the data and conclusions
- report the results and identify next steps.

You may or may not need the services of an expert outsider to help you conduct your evaluation. This will depend on the purpose of your evaluation, the complexity of your program, and the skills and time of the people in your working group.

► *Looking Back and Moving Forward*

Although evidence-based evaluation is an important task in any community development project, personal reflection is equally important for sustainability. It's an opportunity for everyone involved in the process to think about the project and their role in it, and how future work should proceed.

While much of a reflection or process evaluation exercise will be personal and affective in nature, it should include a reference to the group's vision and goals (as identified earlier in the plan).

From the CAANs — Lessons Learned

- Start planning your evaluation process **before** implementation begins. “Before and after” data is essential for evaluating success.
- When developing evaluation criteria, consider both
 - visible and measurable indicators such as criminal activity, incarceration rates, and school achievement
 - less visible but equally valuable considerations such as youth’s perceptions of their own skills, capacities, and identity.
- Consider using an expert outsider to conduct your evaluation. This decision will depend on the purpose of your evaluation, the complexity of your program, and the skills and time of the people in your working group. Your local college/ university may be able to help in identifying a suitable evaluator.
- When getting evaluation feedback from youth, be sure to select mechanisms appropriate for that audience — focus groups and online forms are more likely to be successful with young people than pen-and-paper forms.
- Share your experiences. Use social media, blogs, and other strategies to connect with other communities, to talk about your successes and challenges, and to learn from each other’s experiences.
- Be prepared to adapt to changing circumstances. Expect factors such as funding models, organizational structures, key players, and “on-the-ground” priorities to evolve over time.
- Remember that change takes time, and try not be discouraged if you don’t see immediate, tangible results. The process of working toward change is a success in itself, and should be celebrated.

