



# Understanding Crime Problems and Building Research Partnerships

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Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) is designed to create and foster safer neighborhoods through a sustained reduction in violent crime. The program's effectiveness depends upon the ongoing coordination, cooperation, and partnerships of local, state, tribal, and federal law enforcement agencies working together with the communities they serve—engaged in a unified approach led by the U.S. Attorney in all 94 districts.

One of the central design features of PSN involves strong partnerships among local, state, federal, and Tribal law enforcement, community, social services, prevention, and for many PSN task forces, a research partner and/or crime analysis. One of the key functions of the research partnership is to systematically analyze the local violent crime problem to provide both strategic and tactical intelligence that can shape targeted enforcement and related intervention and prevention strategies. This analytical function involves systematic analysis of violent crime patterns and trends that is combined with street-level intelligence to identify the key factors driving violent crime in each PSN targeted enforcement area.

Examples of these types of analyses in PSN task forces include:

- **To what extent is gun crime being driven by Chronic Violent Offenders (CVOs)?** In most jurisdictions, CVOs do comprise a large portion of violent crime offenders and victims. Such a finding supports joint federal-local prosecution strategies as well as complementary system accountability strategies such as CVO and Gunstat programs.
- **To what extent do gangs and violent street groups drive our violent crime?** The role of gangs, networks, and violent street groups in violent crime tends to vary across communities. The research partnership can assess this issue through processes including systematic incident reviews of fatal and nonfatal shootings as well as social network analysis. Where gangs and groups do drive violence, the focused deterrence strategy represents an evidence-based violence reduction strategy.
- **To what extent are people returning from prison involved in violent crime?** PSN task forces can partner with the state corrections department and a variety of community partners to include high-risk parolees in robust reentry programs. Several PSN task forces have successfully used parolee forums aimed at parolees with violent crime histories as a violent crime reduction strategy.
- **How much of the local violent crime problem involves intimate partner violence?** Several PSN task forces have discovered that a significant portion of their violent crime involves intimate



partner violence. This often includes repeat victimization and repeat offending. When the crime analysis indicates this is a significant contributor to the violent crime issue, federal-local prosecution coordination and partnerships with victim services (e.g., family justice center) represent important elements of a violent crime reduction strategy.

- **What is the role of drugs and drug markets in violent crime?** The research partner and/or crime analysts can also help the PSN task force assess the role of illegal drugs in violent crime. To what extent are opioids or meth involved in the violent crime problem? Are street drug markets driving violence? If the analysis suggests these are drivers of violence, partnerships with drug task forces, treatment providers, or a strategy such as the Drug Market Intervention (DMI) provide responses to the drug-violence nexus.
- **To what extent do repeat locations drive violence?** Crime analysis and research partners can also assess the extent to which specific geographic locations drive violent crime. Sometimes referred to as crime “micro-places,” these include locations such as problem bars and taverns, gas stations or convenience stores, parks, abandoned homes, and apartment complexes. Based on the nature of the specific micro-place, a wide variety of place-based strategies are available (e.g., nuisance abatement; improved place management; camera surveillance; blight removal; community development).
- **What is the role of ongoing disputes?** In some jurisdictions, research partners and crime analysts have found that many shootings can be tied to ongoing street disputes and retaliatory violence. Creative work is being done to identify these ongoing disputes and assess the level of risk for ongoing violence. When such disputes are identified, strategies such as street outreach and custom notifications demonstrate promise in interrupting these ongoing conflicts before they result in another shooting.

The above represent examples of the types of dynamics that drive violent crime. The research partnership can provide an initial strategic view of the key drivers of violent crime in any given PSN targeted enforcement area. Perhaps more importantly, the research partner working with the full PSN task force, can engage in ongoing assessment to provide tactical insight to support timely violence reduction strategies. This involves ongoing discussion and collaboration and regular meetings of the PSN task force.

This linkage of analysis and strategy suggested above also involves lessons learned from PSN task forces across the U.S.

### **PSN Training and Technical Assistance (TTA)**

PSN is now supported by enhanced training and technical assistance (TTA) resources from leading national organizations—Michigan State University (MSU), the CNA Institute for Public Research (CNA), and the National Center for Victims of Crime (NCVC).



Example TTA for building research partners available to PSN task forces, local and state law enforcement, criminal justice agencies, and communities include:

- Document on [\*Identifying and Working With a Research Partner: Frequently Asked Questions and Answers\*](#)
- **Webinars** related to research partnerships and crime analysis:
  - [Analyzing Violent Crime Problems](#)
  - [Basics of Evaluation for Practitioners](#)
  - [Crime Analysis in the Smart Policing Initiative](#)
  - [Research that Matters: The Role of Research and Research Partners in the Smart Policing Initiative](#)
- Example [\*Research Partner Memorandum of Understanding\*](#)
- **Guidebooks for Researchers and Practitioners** for establishing and sustaining law enforcement-researcher partnerships:
  - [Guide for Researchers](#)
  - [Guide for Law Enforcement Leaders](#)
- **Group Exercise** to conduct with Research Partners:
  - [Data inventory for strategic problem-solving and research partnerships for violence reduction](#)
  - [SWOT Analysis \(Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats\)](#)
- **On-site or remote consultation with a subject matter expert (SME)** to provide customized content and assistance on research partnerships or to assist with facilitating conversations with potential new research partners to discuss collaboration opportunities.
- **In-person or virtual peer exchanges** allow task forces to learn from other PSN districts that have partnered with researchers to address and evaluate similar questions, issues, or challenges.
- Hosting a **workshop with current or potential research partners** to encourage relationship building and guidance on best practices
- Request attendance of the BJA *Innovations Suite Researcher-Practitioner Fellows Academy*. The Fellows Academy is a multi-day experience focusing on the importance of using science and data to: (a) support criminal justice planning and programming; (b) develop capacity to



translate research into practice; (c) support the implementation of evidence-based practice; and (d) enhance public safety and improve the delivery of fair and cost effective justice.

To request PSN TTA related to analysis or research partners, please complete a [TTA Request Form](#).