

The U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Comprehensive Gang Model

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1. An Overview of the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model

The terms “youth gang” and “street gang” are commonly used interchangeably and refer to neighborhood or street-based youth groups that are substantially made up of individuals under the age of 24. While youth in this age group are most likely to be engaged in or at risk of committing serious or violent gang crimes, the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model focuses primarily on youth gang members less than 22 years of age, which is based on OJJDP’s authorizing legislation. Motorcycle gangs, prison gangs, ideological gangs, and hate groups comprised primarily of adults are excluded from the definition.

The Model holds that the lack of social opportunities available to this population and the degree of social disorganization present in a community largely account for its youth gang problem. The Model also suggests other contributing factors, including poverty, institutional racism, deficiencies in social policies, and a lack of or misdirected social controls. Drawing principally on social disorganization theory to frame the development of the Model, a team from the University of Chicago expected the core strategies of the Model to address gang youth, their families, and the community institutions that purport to promote their transition from adolescence to productive members of society. With this in mind, law enforcement and other agency personnel in 65 cities reporting problems with gangs were surveyed. Analysis of that information, in conjunction with site visits and focus groups, led to a mix of five strategies that address key concerns raised by the theory upon which the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model is based:

Community Mobilization: Involvement of local citizens (including former gang youth and community groups and agencies) and the coordination of programs and staff functions within and across agencies.

Provision of Opportunities: The development of a variety of specific education, training, and employment programs targeted at gang-involved youth.

Social Intervention: Youth-serving agencies, schools, grassroots groups, faith-based organizations, police, and other criminal justice organizations "reaching out" and acting as links between gang-involved youth (and their families) and the conventional world and its needed services.

Suppression: Formal and informal social control procedures, including close supervision or monitoring of gang youth by agencies of the criminal justice system and also by community-based agencies, schools, and grassroots groups.

Organizational Change and Development: Development and implementation of policies and procedures that result in the most effective use of available and potential resources within and across agencies to better address the gang problem.

These strategies were found to be present—to a lesser or greater degree—in the cities with identified gang problems that were having a positive impact on gangs. In addition to data from the surveys, extensive input from expert practitioners and gang researchers made it clear that a community’s gang violence problem required attention be paid to both gang-involved youth and gangs themselves. Long-term change would not be achieved without also addressing the institutions which support and control youth and their families.

The following program development process will facilitate implementation of the five core strategies:

1. **Acknowledgment of the problem.** The presence of a youth gang problem must be recognized before anything meaningful can be done to address it. If denial is present, it must be confronted.
2. **Assessment of the problem.** Those with responsibility for addressing the problem—representatives of police, schools, probation, youth agencies, grassroots organizations, government, and others—participate in identifying its nature and causes and recommending appropriate responses. The assessment results in an understanding of who is involved in gang crime and where in the community it is concentrated. This, in conjunction with other data and information, enables targeting of:
 - Gang-involved youth.
 - The most violent gangs.
 - The area(s) where gang crime most often occurs.
3. **Setting goals and objectives.** Once the problem is described, goals and objectives based on the assessment findings are established. These should emphasize changes the Steering Committee wants to bring about in the target area.
4. **Relevant services and activities.** Rationales for services, tactics, and policies and procedures that involve each of the key agencies are articulated and then implemented for each of the five core strategies. These activities must be closely coordinated or integrated to ensure that the work of collaborating agencies is complementary. Representatives of those organizations that will have the most direct contact with the target youth—police, probation, schools, and youth workers—should form an Intervention Team and have regular meetings to share critical information, plan, and act collaboratively on individual youth and gang activity in the target area. Thus, the resources of collaborating agencies are focused on a group of young people who are involved in gangs and are most likely to be involved in gang-related violence.

It is important to remember that while youth gang members must be held accountable for their criminal acts, they also must be provided with services for their academic, economic, and social needs. Gang members must be encouraged to control their behavior and to participate in legitimate, mainstream activities. At the same time, external controls on gang and gang-member behavior must be exercised. For some gang members, secure confinement will be necessary. For others, graduated degrees of community-based supervision, ranging from continuous sight or electronic supervision to incarceration, will be appropriate. It is important that youth understand that they will face consequences if they do not follow rules, laws, conditions, or reasonable expectations of the program. It

also may be important to develop a set of incentives for compliance with the program. Thus, a range of services and sanctions is required, often in some interactive way. To be effective in this approach, an understanding of how a youth's family, peers, and others are involved is important.

This approach is very consistent with community policing, which promotes and supports organizational strategies to address and reduce the fear of crime and social disorder through problem-solving tactics and community/police partnerships. In this Model, gang unit, community policing, or other officers are involved in the problem-solving process at the street level while senior officers work with the policymakers.

The work of the collaborating agencies is overseen by a Steering Committee of policy or decision makers from agencies and organizations that have an interest in or responsibility for addressing the community's gang problem. These representatives should not only set policy and oversee the overall direction of the gang program but should take responsibility for spearheading efforts in their own organizations to remove barriers to services and social and economic opportunities. They must also develop effective criminal justice, school, and social agency procedures and promote policies that will further the goals of the gang strategy.

5. **Evaluation.** Results from the evaluation of the Little Village Gang Violence Reduction Project show that the Model is effective in lowering crime rates among youth gang members (University of Chicago, 1999). Preliminary results from an evaluation of five communities chosen as demonstration sites for the Model show that a combination of intervention, suppression, and prevention strategies, along with a coordinated team approach to delivering services, have a positive impact on reducing gang crime. The incorporation of a strong evaluation component as the initiative is taking form and throughout the life of the program is critical to assessing the impact of the program.

In summary, The OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model espouses a multifaceted, multilayered approach that includes eight critical elements:

1. Initial and continuous problem assessment using qualitative and quantitative data.
2. Targeting of the area and those populations of individuals most closely associated with the problem, as described in the assessment.
3. Mix of the five key strategies: community mobilization, social intervention, opportunities provision, suppression, and organizational change/development.
4. A Steering Committee to oversee and guide the project.
5. Direct contact intervention team that includes police, probation, outreach staff, and others.
6. A plan for coordinating efforts of and sharing appropriate information among those who work with the youth on a daily basis, the Steering Committee, and persons within the partner organizations.
7. Community capacity building to sustain the project and address issues that are long-term in nature.
8. Ongoing data collection and analysis to inform the process and evaluate its impact.

This section provides only a very brief discussion of the Model. For a more in-depth discussion of the Model, please read *The Youth Gang Problem: A Community Approach* by Dr. Irving

Spergel. Chapters 11-17 provide further details on the five Model strategies and roles of specific organizations in implementing the Model.

2. Resources Available

Welcome to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP) site for technical assistance on the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model (Model). The purpose of this site is to assist communities in understanding the local youth gang problem, its origins, potential causes, and contributing factors and to develop a plan to address the problem.

The OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model is a comprehensive, collaborative approach designed to prevent and reduce youth gang violence. The Model calls for five core strategies to be delivered through an integrated approach by a team of community agencies and organizations. The five strategies are as follows: (1) community mobilization, (2) social intervention, (3) opportunities, (4) suppression, and (5) organizational change.

These pages provide assistance to communities in assessing their gang problem and designing a plan to implement the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Comprehensive Gang Model. Two guides are provided: (1) [*A Guide to Assessing Your Community's Youth Gang Problem*](#) provides information and direction about conducting a data-driven assessment, and (2) [*Planning for Implementation*](#) offers assistance in the development of a plan to implement the Model.

Assessment Guide Overview:

Research consistently shows that gang problems differ among and within communities. Prior to implementing program solutions, communities need to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the nature and scope of their gang problem. An assessment of a community's local gang problem provides an understanding of the problem, its origins, potential causes, and contributing factors. A comprehensive, data-driven assessment of the gang problem will:

- Identify the most serious and prevalent gang-related problems.
- Determine factors contributing to gang problems.
- Identify target group(s) for intervention, suppression, and prevention efforts.
- Shape community mobilization efforts and identify community members who should be involved.
- Identify organizational or systems issues that must be addressed in order to have a long-term effect on the problem.
- Identify current efforts to address gangs and gang-involved youth.

This guide was developed to assist policymakers, practitioners, and community leaders in assessing and understanding their youth gang problem. It provides a blueprint for an in-depth assessment, including suggested data to be collected and the development of an Assessment Report that provides an analysis of the data.

Implementation Manual Overview:

Using data in the Assessment Report, the Steering Committee (a group of persons who represent key policy and administrative leaders of agencies and community organizations, as well as other community leaders concerned with youth gang problems) will determine if the community has a significant gang crime problem. If so, the Steering Committee will develop an Implementation Plan with relevant program responses to reduce local gang crime and gang activity. An Implementation Plan will:

- Define goals, objectives, and activities for implementing the Model.
- Identify target group(s) for focus of activities.
- Determine the agency(ies) responsible for carrying out the activities.
- Identify person responsible for each activity.
- Acknowledge potential barriers and a plan to overcome the barriers.
- Determine start and completion dates.

This manual is intended for use by the Steering Committee and project staff as they develop the plan. It provides the following: (1) information to guide the Steering Committee through the development of an Implementation Plan and (2) the structure and staff composition by which the plan and the Model strategies can be carried out.

3. Suggested Books

Curry, G. David, and Scott H. Decker. *Confronting Gangs: Crime and Community*. Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company, 1998.

Emphasizing community and neighborhood, *Confronting Gangs* weaves contemporary research and policy findings around classic and emerging theories of gangs. The book provides readers with links between the gang literature and traditional criminological, criminal justice, and sociological approaches to gangs. The book integrates gang perspectives on many issues through the use of quotes from gang members themselves. These views from inside the gangs bring the book to life. *Confronting Gangs* offers a specific focus on each of the following topics:

- The number and nature of gangs.
- The link between gangs and delinquency.
- The role of drugs in contemporary gangs.
- Female gangs.

Decker, Scott H., and Barrik Van Winkle. *Life in the Gang: Family, Friends, and Violence*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

This study is based on three years of field work with 99 active gang members and 24 family members. The book describes the attractiveness of gangs, the process of joining, their chaotic and loose organization, and their members' predominant activities—mostly hanging out, drinking, and using drugs—and their rather slapdash involvement in major property crime and drug traffic. Extensive interviews with family members provide groundbreaking insights into the gang members' lives, and the story is told largely in the gang members' own words.

Huff, Ronald C., editor. *Gangs in America*, 3rd edition. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 2002.

This edition brings together 18 contributions, discussing the changing boundaries of gangs; joining and leaving gangs; economic, neighborhood, and school contexts of gang behavior; gang, gun, and drug relationships; ethnic diversity of gangs; insights into female gangs; and evaluations of approaches to the prevention of violence and the role of gangs in violence.

Klein, Malcolm W. *The American Street Gang*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

The American Street Gang provides a detailed account of what street gangs are, how they have changed, their involvement in drug sales, and why we have not been able to stop them. Street gangs, Klein makes clear, are quite distinct from drug gangs, though they may share individual members. In a drug-selling operation, tight discipline is required—the members are more like employees—whereas street gangs are held together by affiliation and common rivalries, with far less discipline. Street gangs are a real and growing problem in America, but there are many misleading ideas about what they are and what they do. In *The American Street Gang*, Malcolm Klein challenges these assumptions.

Miller, Jody, Cheryl L. Maxson, and Malcolm W. Klein, editors. *The Modern Gang Reader*, 2nd edition. Los Angeles: Roxbury Press, 2001.

The Second Edition of *The Modern Gang Reader* is a comprehensive anthology of recently published articles on gangs. The Second Edition provides a highly readable, accessible introduction to the most salient contemporary issues in the study of gangs—with an emphasis on defining and understanding gangs, their prevalence, structures, and behaviors, and society's responses to them.

The Modern Gang Reader defines gangs as a social and legal problem, reviews various ways of examining them, reveals the extent and nature of the current gang problem, and explains how society has responded to it. Jody Miller, Cheryl L. Maxson, and Malcolm W. Klein are recognized as among the leading researchers on the subject of gangs. Selections are drawn primarily from professional books and journals, including entries from a host of the best-known gang scholars and practitioners.

This anthology's coverage includes theories about gangs, research on gender and ethnicity, and recent developments such as gang proliferation and gangs outside of the United States. The volume reviews the relationship between gangs, violence, and drugs. It also provides a comprehensive overview of contemporary programs and policies for dealing with gangs.

Spergel, Irving A. *The Youth Gang Problem: A Community Approach*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

In *The Youth Gang Problem: A Community Approach*, Irving Spergel provides a systematic analysis of youth gangs in the United States. Based on research, historical and comparative analysis, agency documents, and the author's extensive first-hand experience, the work explores the gang problem from the perspective of community disorganization, especially population movement, and the plight of the underclass. It examines the factors of gang member personality, gang dynamics, criminal organization, and the influence of family, school, prisons, and politics, as well as the response of criminal justice agencies and community groups. Spergel describes techniques used by social agencies, schools, employment programs, criminal justice agencies,

and grassroots organizations for dealing with gangs and recommends strategies that emphasize the use of local resources, planning, and collaborative procedures.

There is no single strategy and no easy solution to the youth gang problem in the United States.

There are, however, substantial steps we can take, and they must be honestly and systematically tested. Offering a practical and alternative approach to a serious social problem, *The Youth Gang Problem: A Community Approach* is a major and long-awaited contribution to this dilemma.