

Problem Solving Partnerships using the SARA model

Background on a Collaborative Problem Solving Approach and SARA

Research shows that a relatively small number of locations and offenders are involved in a relatively large amount of crime; similarly, a small number of victims account for a relatively large amount of victimization. For example, research has found that more than 50% of calls for service in some areas come from only 10% of the locations. According to one study, approximately 50% of crime victims in England had experienced repeat victimization and 4% of victims, the “chronically victimized”, accounted for 44% of all reported crime. For that reason, there is broad agreement that police and community members can more effectively address crime problems by focusing their efforts on analyzing the patterns of repeat calls relating to specific victims, locations and offenders, gathering information about the problems from a wide variety of sources and then working together to address the underlying causes of the more persistent problems.

The emphasis on problem-solving as a key element of community policing stems from pioneering work on problem-oriented policing done by Herman Goldstein in the late 70's and experiments in Newport News, VA in 1984. There, police practitioners, working along with researchers and community members, demonstrated that crime and disorder could be significantly reduced through tailored responses developed as a result of comprehensive analyses of the targeted problems. Police and community members in Newport News were able to reduce burglaries in a targeted apartment complex by 34%, reduce prostitution-related robberies by 39%, and reduce thefts from vehicles by over 50%.

The SARA model is a problem-solving approach to recurring problems. The information provided here is intended to stimulate thinking about creative problem-solving, not to limit you to a standardized process that is appropriate for every problem.

THE PROBLEM SOLVING MODEL

The problem solving process developed to build problem-solving partnerships consists of a 4 step, decision making model, SARA (**S**canning, **A**nalysis, **R**esponse, **A**ssessment).

SCANNING - Individuals determine problems through:

- personal experience with location, activity, or the behavior that has come to the police/community attention; and
- communication with residents, businesses, other public or private agencies, other officers, or other employees

A problem is two or more incidents which are similar in nature, are causing harm or have the potential to cause harm, and the public expects the police agency to handle the problem.

Similarities among incidents include:

- person
- location
- behavior
- time

ANALYSIS - involves learning everything possible about the players, incidents, and actions already used to try to deal with the problem. Analysis should be as thorough, creative, and innovative as the response because the characteristics of each problem vary.

- Comprehensive analysis of 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.

The nature of a problem may seem 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; there may be uncooperative stakeholders; or there may be the assumption that there is nothing that can be done since the problems will occur regardless.

The purpose of analysis is to learn as much as possible about a problem to identify what is causing it. The actions and interactions of offenders, victims and the environment must be understood.

Generally, 3 elements are required to constitute a crime in the community: an offender, a victim, and a crime scene. Visualizing that link has proved useful in understanding a problem.

The analysis phase is an in-depth study of the who, what, why, where, when, and why not.

Victim / Offender / Location Triangle

RESPONSE - Based on the scanning and analysis phases, a goal which can be reached using a custom-made response. Solutions can be designed to:

- Eliminate the problem
- Reduce the problem
- Reduce the harm created by the problem
- Deal with a problem better
- Remove the problem from police consideration

By removing the problem from police consideration, the invested party gives the problem to the individual or agency that can better handle the problem.

ASSESSMENT - evaluating the effectiveness of your response.

It may include:

- Total elimination of the problem
- less serious or harmful incidents
- better handling of the incidents / an improved response to the problem
- Reduced calls for service or reported crime
 - Satisfied residents or businesses
 - A more manageable problem
 - Policy makers (elected representatives, chief, captain) notice a difference in complaints

A number of non-traditional measures will shed light on whether a problem has been impacted. These include

Increased citizen satisfaction regarding the handling of a problem, which can be determined through surveys, interviews, focus groups, etc.

Reduced citizen fear related to the problem

Neighborhood indicators:

Increased profits for local businesses

Increased usage of area/increased or reduced foot and vehicular traffic

Increased property values

Improved neighborhood appearance

Increased occupancy in problem buildings

Less loitering

Fewer abandoned cars

Less truancy

Reduced instances of repeat victimization

Decrease in related crime and incidents

Decreased levels of injuries / accidents associated with the problem

For the purpose of assessing effective problem-solving in regards to apartment complexes and safe, crime-free housing, we should look to non-conventional methods. Neighborhood and delivery driver perceptions, management attitudes and proactive tenant screening, resident involvement, types and number of calls and education of management and residents should all be looked at carefully.

Assessment allows us to look at what effect the response had on a problem. If the response had little or no effect, more analysis can be completed so that a more appropriate response can be applied. If the response resulted in a positive change, it can be determined what, if anything, is needed to maintain the change.