

# Planning a crime prevention program

Because successful crime prevention measures must be tailored to specific conditions, it is not possible to recommend measures that fit all situations. There is, however, a planning process which is likely to lead to successful crime prevention programs (Poyner and Webb 1987).

The following steps are recommended for devising an effective crime prevention program, and should be followed in order.

- Search for local crime problems.
- Select specific crime problems.
- Analyse the crime problem you have selected.
- Consider a range of possible measures.
- Identify who will implement the measures.
- Document the implementation process.
- Monitor changes in the crime situation over a long period.
- Evaluate the program before proceeding with another.

## **Search for local crime problems**

Most projects arise out of a spontaneous recognition - or just a 'feeling' - that there is a crime problem, but Poyner and Webb (1987) have shown that more methodical research might reveal a different picture of the real crime problem in an area.

For example, when the distribution of crime was examined for the Hillfields public housing estate in Bristol, it became clear that burglary was more of a problem on one edge of the estate and elsewhere on the police beat than in the body of the estate where preventive measures were actually introduced. The right problem was being attacked, but in the wrong place.

Ideally, a crime survey should be carried out and a statistical crime map prepared. This exercise shows exactly what sorts of crimes are being committed, and where.

American student Francis Stoks demonstrated the value of

crime maps in his PhD dissertation, when he prepared a crime site analysis from a computer model of urban Seattle, and was able to predict with 95 per cent accuracy where rapes in public places would occur (Rosenbaum 1986).

Police already use computer and crime analysis units to help them apprehend criminals; by reworking their data, they could predict crime and take steps to prevent it.

Crime surveys could prove invaluable to many groups besides the police. For example, architectural firms and land developers could avoid or minimise many of the crime-producing features of urban development. (Ideally, all new construction proposals would go through a review panel for crime prevention evaluation and approval.)

Insurance companies involved in theft liability insurance could be made aware of crime prevention strategies and could reduce premiums for those who complied with certain crime prevention measures. Major hotel and motel chains, convenience store chains, banks and other potential targets could commission crime data analysis maps, and with the help of planning authorities and the police, could better plan their construction and development activities to minimise crime.

If a crime survey cannot be done, police data can be used, though it might have to be reworked to give a clear picture of crime in a locality. Other sources of information include housing department records, damage records for buses and trains from transport authorities, or local newspapers.

As well, the Australian Bureau of Statistics prepares crime victim surveys which give demographic details of crime. The first came out in 1975, and the latest contains statistics from 1983-84 (Victims of Crime Australia 1983). The Bureau will do statistical runs for specific geographic locations.

### **Select specific crime problem/s**

Crime prevention initiatives are more likely to be successful if they are directed at specific crime problems.

Poyner and Webb (1987) found in their case studies of situational crime prevention programs that measures had more effect on specific crimes than on crime in general. For example, the installation of entryphones at the main entrances of buildings in

the South Acton housing estate in Great Britain had more impact on vandalism in the communal entrance areas than on the burglary rate in the estate.

Similarly, it is often easier to fight crimes focused on one area. A cluster of burglaries in a small group of streets may, for example, be easier to deal with than a similar number spread across a whole neighbourhood.

### **Analyse the crime problem**

Crime measures are often chosen on insufficient analysis of the problem. At the Hillfields and South Acton Estates, where the results of crime prevention measures were disappointing, no detailed examination of the target crimes was made before crime prevention measures were activated (Poyner and Webb 1986). Thus anti-burglary measures were installed and expected to work even though the burglary problem had not been analysed.

### **Consider a range of possible measures**

Poyner and Webb concluded that a common characteristic of less successful projects was that they adopted stereotyped measures copied from general crime-prevention literature without considering their suitability for a particular problem.

At the Lisson Green Estate in Great Britain, for example, walkways were removed to reduce crime, but an evaluation of the program showed that blocking off the walkways and controlling access to residences would have been just as effective and much less expensive (Poyner and Webb 1987).

### **Identify who will implement the measures**

To succeed, crime prevention programs need an agency with sufficient resources and motivation to implement them. This is most likely to happen where the agency believes the measures will save money. Crime prevention measures can also be sold by showing that they will enhance improvements an agency is already making; for example if doors and windows have to be replaced, the new ones might as well be burglar and vandal-proof. Very often, measures can be successfully implemented at little expense as part of a wider program of improvements.

## **Document the implementation process**

It is often impossible to gauge the effectiveness of crime prevention measures in the absence of records about what sorts of intervention took place immediately before, during and after the measures were introduced. Results attributed to the crime prevention may actually be due to other causes. Poyner and Webb suggest that agencies keep a project diary to record all significant changes from the time the initiative is first considered until its evaluation is completed.

## **Monitor changes over a long period and evaluate the project**

Efforts must be made to evaluate the effectiveness of crime prevention initiatives before claims are made about their success or failure. It is often not easy to discern if crime has decreased. Case studies have sometimes revealed substantial crime reductions that nobody was aware of; and conversely, a number of major claims of crime reduction have evaporated on closer examination.

Poyner and Webb's (1986) evaluation of case studies showed that simple crime reductions rarely occurred. There were, however, some long-term impacts on crime, and these could only be identified by examining crime patterns over several years.

Lurigo and Rosenbaum (1986) found standard evaluations of community crime prevention programs in the United States seriously wanting. Evaluations must, therefore, be professional and long-term; this means using instruments that are sensitive to variations in crime over a long period. Data sources which provide a continuous record of crime or related incidents are preferable to survey instruments which can only record crime at discrete intervals.

It is also worth remembering that it is very difficult to make satisfactory evaluations when the total size of the crime problem is small. Good projects and large crime reductions are much easier to achieve when initial crime levels are high.