

*ST. LOUIS METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT
PROBLEM SOLVING GUIDE*

Techniques For Analyzing The Problem:

- Check court records
- Photograph the problem site
- Survey the persons or groups potentially affected by the problem (written, phone, person to person)
- Run the location or persons involved in the problem through the computer (HSL, criminal histories, FIR's, City Hall records, etc.)
- Interview other agencies who may have some insight to the problem (police officers who ride the area on all three watches, other agencies in City Hall)
- Call a community meeting to gauge public concern about the problem
- Research similar problems in the library (police and public libraries, studies from other jurisdictions or departments, research papers written by universities)
- Call other cities to see if they experienced similar problems; what response they used
- Interview the people suspected of causing the problem (this technique is often overlooked, but can yield some excellent information)
- Interview other professionals who share responsibility for dealing with the problem (judges, prosecutors, juvenile court officers, housing court personnel, social workers, medical personnel, building inspectors, etc.)
- Is anyone doing something about the problem now (not only other city agencies, but private organizations as well)

DO YOU SIMPLY NEED TO USE ONE OF THE EXISTING PROGRAMS OR RESPONSES FOR THE PROBLEM OR DO YOU NEED TO IMPROVE A RESPONSE OR DEVELOP A NEW ONE?

How In Depth Should The Problem Investigation Be:

- Interest of the community to see the problem solved
- Amount of support given by your agency
- Your personal interest in the problem
- Available time
- Willingness of others
- Size and severity of the problem

DO ENOUGH INVESTIGATION TO SATISFY YOURSELF THAT YOU UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM. SOMETIMES VERY LITTLE INVESTIGATION IS NEEDED. OTHER TIMES A LOT IS REQUIRED.

DEVELOPING A RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM

CAUTION: BE SURE YOU UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM BEFORE YOU DEVELOP A RESPONSE. IF YOU DIAGNOSE THE PROBLEM INCORRECTLY, OR DON'T BOTHER TO DIAGNOSE IT AT ALL, YOUR STRATEGY IS LIKELY TO FAIL OR BACKFIRE. YOU COULD END UP MAKING THE PROBLEM WORSE!

Searching For A Response:

- Try to come up with as many ideas as possible before settling on a plan.
- Include input and ideas from other agencies and community groups
- Hold several brainstorming sessions to develop response strategies

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- The more open you are to new ideas, the more likely you will find the best solution
- Don't limit yourself to traditional responses; however, don't rule them out

Divide Your Response Into Three Areas:

Persons or Groups causing or contributing to the problem:

- Repeat offenders
- Special conditions of Probation & Parole
- Aggressive outreach efforts for chronically mentally ill persons
- Chronic alcoholic or panhandlers
- Look for assistance from other agencies and follow-up with them. Support their efforts as well as put pressure on them when they seem unwilling to help
- Mediation or negotiation services
- Informal social control (landlords, other tenants, parents and surrounding residences)
- Drafting new laws and ordinances, or changing existing laws to better address the problem

Altering the physical environment of the problem area:

- Improve lighting
- Boarding-up or tearing down buildings
- Trimming trees
- Removing graffiti
- Installing anti-theft devices
- Blocking off streets or re-opening streets
- Changing traffic patterns
- Erecting fences
- Regulating business

Victim(s) or group(s) affected by the problem:

- Mobilizing the community
- Heighten awareness of the problem
- Education in crime deterrence
- Educate the communities of their role in problem solving
- Develop empowerment strategies for the community
- Identify other agencies for the community to call upon

THE MOST EFFECTIVE RESPONSE STRATEGIES USE A COMBINATION OF TACTICS!

Selecting A Response:

When you were brainstorming for ideas on how to address the problem, you should not have concerned yourself with reasons why you couldn't do something. However, when choosing response strategies, you should consider some of the following:

- Cost - your time, others time, new expenses
- Available resources - equipment, expertise
- Legality - if you are unsure, seek legal advice
- Authority - is there anything in department policy that prohibits the idea? Can the policy be changed or can special permission be obtained?

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- Support - community, supervisors, elected officials
- Potential impact on the problem - reduction, displacement, increasing the problem

WHEN YOU IMPLEMENT YOUR STRATEGY, KEEP A COUPLE OF THINGS IN MIND:

- GIVE YOUR IDEAS TIME TO WORK. SOME OF THE BEST IDEAS JUST TAKE SOME PATIENCE AND PERSISTENCE.
- IF PART OR ALL OF YOUR STRATEGY JUST ISN'T WORKING, GO BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD AND MODIFY YOUR RESPONSE. DON'T ABANDON THE PROJECT AND DON'T GET LOCKED INTO A STRATEGY JUST BECAUSE YOU STARTED IT.

MONITORING THE IMPACT

WHEN MEASURING YOUR EFFECTIVENESS, IT IS CRITICAL THAT YOU REMEMBER WHAT YOUR ORIGINAL OBJECTIVES WERE. EXAMPLE: IF YOU WERE TRYING TO RID THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF A DRUG HOUSE, YOU SHOULDN'T EVALUATE YOUR EFFECTIVENESS BY WHETHER THE DRUG TRADE OF THE ENTIRE NEIGHBORHOOD WAS STOPPED.

Five Successful Outcomes:

- Eliminate the problem completely (rare, but possible)
- Reduce the size of the problem (fewer calls or complaints, fewer crimes, fewer people involved, etc.)
- Reduce the harm caused by the problem (less serious injuries, more tolerable nuisance, less costly to victims and taxpayers, etc.)
- Improve the efficiency or personalization of the response
- Shift responsibility for dealing with the those who can more effectively or efficiently do so

VERY OFTEN THE SAME TECHNIQUES YOU USED TO IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM INITIALLY ARE GOOD WAYS TO MONITOR IT.

MEASURING THE IMPACT

- Re-interview persons affected by the problem (residents, merchants, police officers, supervisors, alderpersons, etc.)
- Calls for service data
- P.I.R.S. reports
- Surveys
- Personal observations

REMEMBER, IN THE REAL WORLD IT'S HARD TO PROVE SUCCESS PERFECTLY. DON'T EXPECT IT. YOUR PROOF SHOULD BE GOOD ENOUGH TO SATISFY YOURSELF, YOUR SUPERVISOR, AND THE CITIZENS MOST DIRECTLY AFFECTED BY THE PROBLEM. IF YOUR EFFORTS DIDN'T HAVE THE DESIRED IMPACT, START OVER, YOU MAY HAVE MISSED SOMETHING IN YOUR ANALYSIS.

YOU CAN ONLY FAIL BY FAILING TO LEARN WHAT DIDN'T WORK!