

TIP SHEET: FOCUSED DETERRENCE STRATEGIES FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES



How Focused Deterrence Helps Address Violent Crime

What is Focused Deterrence?

Also known as “pulling levers” policing, focused deterrence is the practice of using tailored deterrence strategies to address a specific crime problem in a jurisdiction. Focused deterrence identifies the small number of individuals responsible for a disproportionate amount of crime. Law enforcement, as well as social service providers and community leaders, focus on these individuals to deter them from criminal activity and help them transition into law-abiding lifestyles. Around the country, focused deterrence programs have successfully reduced crime.

What are Best Practices for Implementation?

EFFECTIVE PLANNING | *Law enforcement must spend the necessary time and resources to identify a specific crime problem that can be addressed with focused deterrence, as well as the offenders that will respond to deterrence efforts.*

Focused deterrence should address a single, strategic crime problem. Dedicated and purposeful planning that specifies the goals, processes, and partners to be involved are integral to setting up a successful focused deterrence strategy. Selecting the partnering law enforcement agencies, social services providers, and community stakeholders to leverage for the crime problem being addressed requires careful consideration. Further, data-driven analysis should be used to ensure that the selection of targeted offenders is accurate, fair, and justified.

STRATEGIC ENFORCEMENT AND PARTNERING | *Police, prosecution, and probation officials must use every legally available sanction and enforcement to increase deterrence and emphasize the priority of the government’s response to the crime problem. Jurisdictions should ensure that any applicable social service and law enforcement partner or resource is engaged.*

Social service providers should offer each offender ample opportunities to cease participation in criminal activity. In addition, social service providers should be matched to the specific crime problem being targeted. For example, the providers asked to assist with targeting drug dealers may differ from those engaged with targeting larceny offenders. A unique and specific plan should be tailored for each individual depending on the individual’s specific social service resource needs.

CONTINUOUS FOLLOW-UP | *Constant communication should be directed toward targeted individuals to reinforce the heightened law enforcement attention they are receiving.*

Regular follow-up is necessary to ensure each individual receives personalized treatment by both law enforcement and social service providers. However, agencies should avoid overcommitting resources they cannot provide, as it undermines the legitimacy of the deterrence. Follow-up helps guarantee targeted individuals receive the increased efforts of law enforcement and guarantees each individual is provided the resources needed to succeed in their community.

Focused Deterrence Resources

If your jurisdiction is interested in training and technical assistance (TTA) related to developing and implementing a focused deterrence program, there are multiple initiatives that can help:

Smart Policing Initiative Focused Deterrence Problem Oriented Policing Guide
<https://Go.USA.gov/xQTXM>

CrimeSolutions.Gov Practice Profile on Focused Deterrence
<https://Go.USA.gov/xQTXd>

Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Project Safe Neighborhoods
<https://Go.USA.gov/xQTXm>

BJA Strategies for Policing Innovation
<https://Go.USA.gov/xQTXp>

BJA National Training and Technical Assistance Center (NTTAC)
<https://BJATTA.bja.ojp.gov>

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Case Study: Focused Deterrence in Madison, Wisconsin

In 2011, the Madison, Wisconsin Police Department (PD) undertook a focused deterrence program after consulting with experts Professor David Kennedy, John Jay College of Criminal Justice; Professor Mike Scott, Arizona State University; and Professor Herman Goldstein, University of Wisconsin.

Specifying the Problem and Developing a Team

Madison PD determined a small number of people were responsible for a large percentage of violent crime in its jurisdiction. The department decided to focus more resources on this group of individuals and formed the Special Investigations Unit (SIU), which consisted of three detectives and a lieutenant who oversaw the unit.

Identifying and Responding to Chronic Offenders

Madison PD developed a blind selection process, omitting any demographic or personal information, to receive input on candidates with a history of violent crime. The agency narrowed the list of candidates to 20 individuals with a significant criminal history and who were on parole or probation (P&P). Then, they generated summaries of each incident involving the selected individuals, excluding name and race. A selection committee consisting of community members and law enforcement reviewed the summaries and selected 10 individuals for focused deterrence. To establish expectations that were attainable, Madison PD limited its efforts to 10 or fewer individuals per notification cycle, described below.

Communicating and Providing Social and Community Services

The active P&P status provided the legal authority to order the 10 individuals to attend a notification meeting as a condition of their probation/parole. During these meetings, a panel of federal, state, and local law enforcement executives explained why they identified these individuals as frequent criminal offenders. Each executive delivered the strong message that the “revolving door” of the criminal justice system was over and the individuals were at a crossroads of decisions; they could choose to offend again and go to prison for a significant stay as a result, or they could choose to take advantage of the resources offered to them and become productive members of their community.

Individuals were presented with information on available social services related to housing, job training, parenting, high school diploma programs, drivers licensing, alcohol and other drug abuse issues, and more. In providing these resources and opportunities to succeed in the community, the executives eliminated excuses for committing crimes. The SIU unit conducted regular home visits and check-ins with the notified individuals and their designated probation agent. Visits with the individuals and their families reinforced the message of increased supervision, and if a person was facing difficulty obtaining a specific resource, social service providers were notified to assist

Achieving Positive Outcomes

Each year, approximately 20 people are sent through the notification process in Madison, Wisconsin, and regular follow-up with each offender is assigned to the SIU detectives. Through 2015, 99 individuals had attended a notification meeting. These individuals previously were involved in 54 gun-related charges, had a total of 560 felony convictions and 850 misdemeanor convictions, and were responsible for victimizing 880 different people in their communities.

As of 2016, only 24 percent of the post-notification group have been convicted of committing a violent crime, and only 2 individuals have been convicted of gun crimes. Victimization rates have dropped from 880 victims pre-notification to 34 new victims post-notification. Along with the significant decrease in convictions, numerous individuals have led crime-free lives due to the resources provided to them after the notification.

Madison PD detectives have formed long-term relationships with some notified individuals and are making great strides in changing hardened criminals’ attitudes toward law enforcement. Additionally, the notification concept is popular among the citizens of Madison, Wisconsin, leading to increased trust in the police department.

About BJA NTTAC

BJA, a component of the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Justice Programs, disseminates state-of-the-art knowledge and practices across the nation’s justice systems and provides grants at the national, state, local, and tribal level to fund these crimefighting strategies. Through BJA, BJA NTTAC facilitates the delivery of high-quality, strategically focused TTA to achieve safe communities nationwide. BJA NTTAC provides no-cost assistance across a broad spectrum of topic areas ranging from crime prevention to justice information sharing to help communities address their most pressing criminal justice challenges. BJA is committed to ensuring that the resources and services it provides are responsive to the needs of the criminal justice field. To address emerging needs, BJA NTTAC provides TTA resources that can be tailored to meet the most critical issues faced by state, local, and tribal criminal justice agencies.

BJA NTTAC would like thank Captain Cory Nelson of Madison PD for his expertise and assistance in developing this resource for the field.



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