

Strategic Problem Solving and Project Safe Neighborhoods*

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Foreword

Launched in January of 2001 as one of the Department of Justice's major initiatives, Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) is a comprehensive program to reduce gun violence at the local level. It is being implemented in all 94 U.S. Attorney districts nationwide to respond to firearms crime problems in each respective district. More than one billion dollars has been allocated through Fiscal Year 2004 to fund local and Federal prosecutors; provide resources for law enforcement; support research and community outreach partners; fund a national media campaign; and provide training, technical assistance, and research functions for the initiative. Based on the successful approach utilized in the Boston Ceasefire project, the ten-city Strategic Approaches to Community Safety Initiative (SACSI), and Richmond's Project Exile, PSN is a collaborative problem solving initiative utilizing a strategic research-based model to reduce firearms violence through enforcement, deterrence, and prevention.

In each U.S. Attorney District, a local task force is assembled, including law enforcement and criminal justice agencies at all levels of government as well as local schools, social service agencies, and organizations interested in reducing gun violence. This agency collaboration meets with a local research partner who collects data to help identify and understand the precise gun violence problem in the district. Together these partners develop strategies specifically designed to target the problem as defined by the research. The research partner monitors operational agency implementation of the strategies and provides constant feedback to help refine and improve the program. Districts create their own sets of strategies, but these may include offender deterrence meetings, intensive prosecution of violent gun criminals, interruption of the supply of illegal guns to criminals, and support services to encourage alternative behaviors. Finally, the researcher provides an assessment of the impact of the strategies on the gun violence problem targeted. The program also involves outreach to and involvement of the community in these interventions and a media campaign to raise public awareness of the dangers of firearms violence. To date, a number of districts have already reported significant declines in gun crimes and violence in their targeted communities as implementation of the program has moved forward in districts throughout the country. The Bush Administration has indicated its satisfaction with the progress of this central initiative and will continue to expand into the future.

There are five official core components making up the PSN initiative:

1) **Partnerships.** As mentioned above, the PSN initiative in each district is a collaborative program conducted by a multi-agency partnership, involving law enforcement/criminal justice agencies at all levels, city and social service agencies, private sector groups (such as businesses, clergy, hospitals), community organizations, and – very importantly – researchers.

2) **Strategic Plan.** PSN is a problem solving program, based on a strategic planning process in which agencies define the specific components of their gun violence problem with the help of research data and design focused strategies to target these

problem components through enforcement/prosecution, deterrence, and prevention. As the practitioner agencies in the partnership implement the selected strategies, the research partner monitors the process and provides feedback to the collaborative so that strategies can be modified or refined if they are not meeting their objectives.

3) **Training.** A core component of PSN is its provision of extensive training opportunities to local district task forces to assist them in the effective implementation of all aspects of the program. Included are specific training programs in strategic problem solving, in firearms law enforcement, in gun prosecution, and in community outreach, as well as sessions addressing research and other special issues and an annual national training conference. In addition, specialized technical assistance for individual districts is available upon request.

4) **Outreach.** This PSN component involves both local and national outreach efforts. Locally, districts are encouraged to send a deterrent message to would-be criminals stressing “hard time for gun crime”, with simultaneous promotion of educational, recreational, treatment and employment alternatives. At a national level, PSN has partnered with the National Crime Prevention Council and Ad Council to conduct a public service advertising campaign against gun violence, including radio and TV spots, educational and prevention materials, press releases, and news articles.

5) **Accountability.** Each of the districts is required to provide an accounting of their activities through bi-annual reports of their activities, bi-annual reporting of crime, gun violence and related data, and through local monitoring and evaluation by its research partner. Nationally, Michigan State University has been funded to examine the effectiveness of various types of PSN methods and strategies and to assess the overall PSN collaborative strategic problem solving approach to reducing gun violence at the local level.

While all five components are key to the successful implementation of Project Safe Neighborhoods, this monograph will focus primarily on the Strategic Planning/Strategic Problem Solving component. The other elements, and related strategies, will be discussed as they relate to this strategic problem solving model.

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Strategic Problem Solving and Project Safe Neighborhoods

The last decade of the 20th Century witnessed significant declines in the rate of crime in the United States. This was true for most types of crime, including homicide and serious violent crime.¹ Despite these declines, the level of gun crime in the United States remains higher than that experienced in other western democracies and a source of untold tragedy for families and communities.² Given this context, in 2001 the Bush Administration made the reduction of gun crime one of the two major priorities of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), along with defeating terrorism and enhancing homeland security.

The vehicle for translating this goal into action is Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN). PSN represents a **commitment** to gun crime reduction through a **network** of local partnerships coordinated through the nation's 94 United States Attorneys Offices. A key component of the PSN strategy is the increased federal prosecution of gun offenders but with a recognition that increased prosecution is likely to have the greatest impact if coupled with strategic problem solving at a local level and communication strategies targeted at both offenders and the general population. Consequently, PSN also represents a **strategy** based on a comprehensive, coordinated, data-driven, and community-based approach.

PSN Building Blocks

The PSN initiative builds on a number of promising crime reduction programs that emerged during the 1990s. These programs include Richmond's Project Exile, the New York Police Department's COMPSTAT Program, the Boston Ceasefire Program, DOJ's Strategic Approaches to Community Safety Initiative, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) illegal firearm market reduction strategies, Weed and Seed, and similar initiatives. We touch on several of these programs to highlight the key strategic components of PSN.

Project Exile

Richmond, Virginia had long experienced high levels of homicide and gun assault. Much of this violence was perpetrated by chronic offenders with prior felony convictions. In the late 1990s, then Managing Assistant U.S. Attorney James Comey decided that these levels of violence were unacceptable and that the full force of federal prosecution would be brought to bear against prior felons possessing or using firearms. Federal prosecutions of gun crime increased significantly. Additionally, the U.S. Attorney's Office worked with a coalition of local law enforcement, local government, and businesses to launch a high profile media campaign to communicate a message that the illegal possession or illegal use of a gun would result in severe federal sanctions. Following the implementation of Exile, homicide levels in Richmond declined significantly from their peak levels.³

NYPD COMPSTAT

During the early 1990s, the New York Police Department gained the attention of police leaders and scholars through the implementation of a crime analysis and managerial accountability program known as COMPSTAT (“compare statistics”).⁴ Regular meetings of the police command staff, area commanders, special units, and prosecutors were convened to review current crime trends, to develop responses to crime problems, and to hold commanders accountable for the level and trend in crime in their precincts. Although the link between COMPSTAT and crime reduction has been debated, the dramatic decline of crime in New York City throughout the 1990s has led many to a greater acceptance of the value of timely crime analysis and to the idea that the police can influence levels of crime.

Boston’s Ceasefire

Boston’s Ceasefire Program, also referred to as the Boston Gun Project, was a strategic problem solving initiative intended to reduce the high level of youth gun violence in the city. Ceasefire was initiated by a multi-agency working group involving the U.S. Attorney’s Office, local prosecutors, the Boston Police Department, probation, youth service workers, and a team of researchers from Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government. The problem analysis revealed that youth violence was driven by a relatively small number of chronic offenders involved in networks of known offenders. The strategy that emerged was a deterrence-based model whereby the threat of federal prosecution was directly communicated to these groups of known offenders. Following

crack-downs on several of the most violent groups, and ongoing communication through meetings with probationers and parolees connected to these offending networks, youth violence declined dramatically. Indeed, Boston went two and one-half years without a youth homicide and youth gun violence declined by approximately 60 percent.⁵

The Boston Project was characterized by several distinctive features. First, a small working group was convened from multiple agencies and linked to a research team that conducted systematic analysis of the firearms crime problem. Second, the deterrence threat was coupled with attempts to link potential offenders to legitimate services offered by youth service workers, traditional service providers (e.g., jobs, education, drug treatment), and non-traditional providers including the faith community. Third, several distinctive strategies emerged to communicate the deterrence message to potential offenders. These included offender notification meetings and police-probation teams conducting visits to high-risk offenders (Operation Nightlife). Fourth, ATF and the Boston Police Department developed supply-side strategies to disrupt illegal gun markets.⁶ Finally, like Project Exile, the U.S. Attorney's Office played a key leadership role by convening local-state-federal resources and bringing the threat of federal prosecution to the issue of illegal gun possession and use.

Strategic Approaches to Community Safety Initiative (SACSI)

Building on the Richmond, New York City, and particularly the Boston project, DOJ developed the Strategic Approaches to Community Safety Initiative (SACSI) in the late 1990s.⁷ Federal support was provided to five initial cities (Indianapolis, IN, Memphis, TN, New Haven, CT, Portland, OR, and Winston-Salem, NC) and a second set

of cities (Albuquerque, NM, Atlanta, GA, Detroit, MI, St. Louis, MO, and Rochester, NY). The U.S. Attorneys were asked to convene multi-agency working groups. Local research partners were asked to be part of the working groups to assist in problem solving research including problem identification and analysis, development of crime reduction strategies, and assessment of implementation and impact.

SACSI demonstrated the utility of using strategic problem solving to tailor a federal initiative to local contexts that varied considerably across the 10 SACSI sites. It also provided the opportunity for further testing of problem solving approaches and strategies initially developed in Boston's Ceasefire. Thus, for example, a number of SACSI jurisdictions found value in using systematic reviews of homicide incidents and gun assaults to uncover patterns of offenders, victims, locations, and network connections that could then suggest intervention strategies. Many of the SACSI sites implemented offender notification meetings to communicate the deterrence message and offer the opportunity for linkage to legitimate services. The offender notification meetings were coupled with Richmond-style billboards, bus posters, and public service advertisements warning against illegal gun possession and use. Similarly, many of the SACSI sites adapted the Nightlife strategy of pairing police and probation teams to enhance supervision of high-risk offenders and increase the credibility of the deterrence message.

The SACSI process also allowed for cross-site learning among the 10 jurisdictions. As a result, many of these communities developed "Smart Prosecution" processes whereby federal and local prosecutors, ATF agents and local police, systematically reviewed all gun cases to decide on whether a case could most effectively be prosecuted at the state or federal level. Additionally, the processes helped to identify

and fix system gaps that had previously allowed gun cases to fall through the cracks and avoid prosecution. Many of the jurisdictions developed lists of the most violent offenders to increase officer safety, suggest targets for proactive investigation, and prioritize cases for prosecution.

Several promising findings emerged from SACSI research reports at about the same time that PSN was being developed. For example, Indianapolis experienced significant reductions in homicide and gun violence similar to that witnessed in Boston.⁸ Winston-Salem saw continued reductions in youth violence and declines in youth recidivism and Portland experienced a large reduction in drive-by shootings.⁹ Additionally, Memphis experienced declines in sexual assault, the target of its SACSI program.¹⁰ Roehl and colleagues' comparison of crime trends in the SACSI cities to comparable cities, suggests that declines in homicide and violent crime were more pronounced in the SACSI sites.¹¹ Consequently, the multi-agency, strategic problem-solving model, as well as many of these strategic interventions, became components of the PSN initiative, and were supported by training and technical assistance.

Basic Elements of PSN

The basic elements of PSN arose largely from Project Exile, the Boston Gun Project, SACSI, COMPSTAT, and related crime reduction efforts. These included:

Increased Federal Prosecution of Gun Crime

At a minimum, PSN is built on the belief that the increased federal prosecution of gun offenders will reduce gun crime through the incapacitation of gun criminals and the

deterrence of potential offenders. This working hypothesis is based on the notion that federal sanctions for gun crime are often more severe than those either available at the state level (e.g., for a felon in possession of a firearm) or likely to be imposed at the state level (e.g., due to overcrowding in a state prison system). Further, federal prosecution may include sanctions unavailable at the local level (e.g., no right to bail, service of 85% of imposed sentence, time served in a federal prison that may be far from home). The focus on prohibited persons possessing or using a firearm is built on the finding that a significant portion of gun crime involves offenders and victims with significant criminal histories. Thus, by increasing the certainty that a prohibited person will face strong federal sanctions the hope is to persuade potential offenders not to illegally possess, carry and use a gun.

The commitment to increased federal prosecution appears to be borne out. Fiscal year 2004 witnessed over 13,000 individuals charged with federal gun crimes. That is the highest number ever recorded by DOJ and represents a 76 percent increase in federal firearms prosecutions since the inception of PSN.¹²

Research-Based Problem Solving

Given the success of the Boston Gun Project and SACSI, PSN includes a research component whereby local researchers are linked to the task force and engaged in ongoing problem-solving research. The research partners are to assist the task force through analysis of gun crime patterns and trends that can help the task force focus resources on the most serious people, places, and contexts of gun violence. The research partners can also bring evidence-based practice to the task force discussions of gun crime reduction

strategies.¹³ Additionally, the research partners are to provide continual assessment, feedback to the task force, and evaluation of impact.

Communication Strategy

The architects of PSN within DOJ also recognized that increased sanctions would have the most impact if accompanied with a media campaign to communicate the message of the threat of federal prosecution for illegal possession and use of a gun. Consequently, resources were provided to all PSN task forces to work with a media partner to devise strategies for communicating this message to both potential offenders and to the community at large. As of July 2004, nearly all (94%) PSN coordinators reported having a local mass media effort.¹⁴

“... the genius of Project Safe Neighborhoods is the marketing of our product Our product is fear in the hearts of the criminal.... If gun carrying is a big enough liability we can change the minds of would be gun carrying thugs.” Deputy Attorney General James Comey, PSN National Conference, June 16, 2004.

DOJ’s Core Components of PSN

The basic elements of this aggressive strategy to reduce gun crime were operationalized by DOJ through five core components.

Partnerships

The PSN program is intended to increase partnerships between federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies through the formation of a local gun crime enforcement task force. PSN recognizes the limited role of federal prosecutors in many aspects of local crime control and prevention and thus seeks increased partnerships with many

elements of the local community. Coordinated by the U.S. Attorney's Office, the PSN task force typically includes both federal and local prosecutors, federal law enforcement agencies (particularly ATF and U.S. Marshals), local and state law enforcement agencies, and probation and parole. PSN coordinators have also been encouraged to consider inclusion of local government leaders, social service providers, neighborhood leaders, members of the faith community, business leaders and health care providers.

As of July 2004, the vast majority of PSN coordinators reported having established partnerships with other criminal justice agencies. Most common were federal and local law enforcement agencies (96%) and state and local prosecutors (95%). Over 80 percent of PSN task forces reported inclusion of probation and parole. Three-fourths involved community leaders and other state and local agencies.

Strategic Planning

Recognizing that crime problems, including gun crime, vary from community to community across the United States, that state laws addressing gun crime vary considerably, and that local and state resources vary across the federal judicial districts covered by U.S. Attorney's Offices, PSN also included a commitment to strategic planning whereby the federal PSN program would be tailored to local context. Specifically, PSN provided resources for the inclusion of a local research partner who would work with the PSN task force to analyze the local gun crime problem and to share the findings with the task force for the development of a proactive plan for gun crime reduction. The inclusion of the research partner was also intended to assist in ongoing assessment in order to provide feedback to the task force.

Training

PSN has involved a significant commitment of resources to support training. This program has included training provided to law enforcement agencies on topics including gun crime investigations, gun crime identification and tracing, and related issues. Training on effective prosecution of gun cases has been provided to state and local prosecutors. Additional training has focused on strategic problem solving and community outreach and engagement. DOJ estimates that by the end of 2004, nearly 15,000 individuals had attended a PSN-related training program.¹⁵

Outreach

The outreach component of PSN relates to the communication strategy as well as to the goal of linking prevention and intervention strategies to the prosecution strategy. As noted above, PSN funding provided for a local media partner to develop a local strategy for communicating the PSN message to both the general public and to potential offenders. It also included a national media campaign program of Public Service Announcements and materials (ads, posters). These materials are direct mailed to media outlets and are also available to local PSN task forces.¹⁶

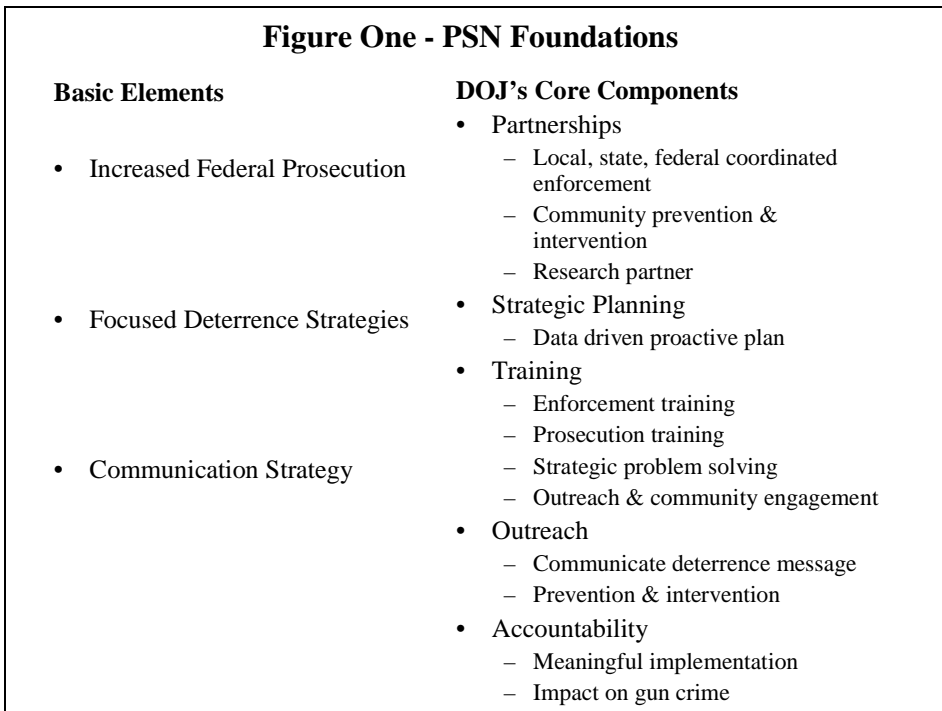
The outreach component is also intended to support the development of prevention and intervention components. PSN provided block grant funding in fiscal years 2003 and 2004 to the local PSN partnerships that could be used to support a variety of initiatives including prevention and intervention. Many were built on existing programs such as school-based prevention, Weed and Seed, or juvenile court intervention programs. PSN coordinators were most likely to report neighborhood development

(77%), school-based and education programs (70%) as their prevention strategies. One-quarter to one-third of the coordinators report faith-based, employment, substance abuse, and youth street worker prevention programs.

Accountability

The leadership of the PSN initiative at DOJ have emphasized that PSN would focus on outcomes – i.e., reduced gun crime -- as opposed to a mere focus on outputs such as arrests and cases prosecuted. That is, PSN would be measured by the reduction in gun crime. This accountability component was linked to strategic planning whereby PSN task forces, working with their local research partner, are asked to report levels of crime over time within targeted problems and/or targeted areas.

The basic elements and DOJ’s five core components of PSN are illustrated in Figure One.



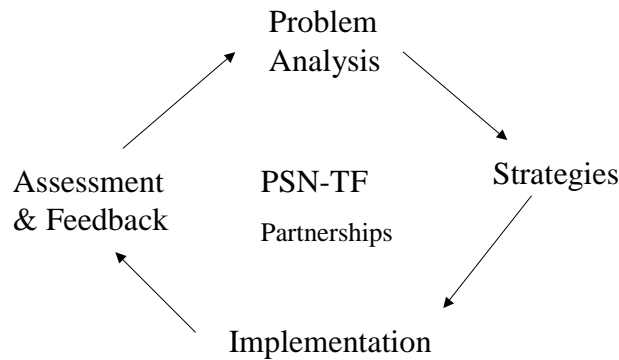
Strategic Problem Solving Model

The Project Exile components of PSN, increased federal prosecution and communication strategy, coupled with the Boston Ceasefire focused deterrence approach, were further developed by the strategic problem-solving model developed in the SACSI program. Specifically, the core components and essential elements of PSN were given structure through a strategic problem solving process and a set of strategic approaches and interventions developed in Boston, the SACSI sites, and similar crime reduction efforts.

The strategic problem-solving model (see Figure Two) is based on systematic analysis of the local gun crime problem. Specifically, crime analysis can identify the geographic patterns of gun crime across a PSN district and within specific jurisdictions of the district. The analysis should also uncover patterns such as linkages to drug sales and distribution, gangs, chronic offenders, domestic violence, illegal gun sales, and related patterns of people, place, and context. On the basis of this analysis, specific strategies can be developed and implemented to address these patterns. As strategies are implemented, the research partner can monitor the level of intervention (dosage) as well as assess evidence of impact. This information can be shared with the task force to allow for revision or modification of strategy. The process is dynamic and ongoing, allowing for continual revision with the ultimate goal of reducing gun crime.

By the end of 2003, 92 of the 93 PSN task forces had received training on strategic problem solving and all task forces were working with a research partner.¹⁷

Figure Two - PSN Strategic Problem Solving Model



Core Themes

The strategic problem-solving model is also based on a set of core themes. These include focusing resources, using research to help guide action, and expanding the boundaries of involvement.

Focusing Resources

Despite the infusion of significant resources to address gun crime, most jurisdictions across the United States still face too many problem locations, gun offenders, probationers and parolees, outstanding warrants, and former inmates returning to the community, to address solely through the PSN program. Thus, a core theme of the strategic problem-solving model is to maximize the impact of interventions (e.g., increased prosecution, media campaign, probation/parole supervision) by focusing on the

most serious elements of the local gun crime problem (people, places and things). Thus, it may be impossible to increase the supervision of all probationers with a background of firearms possession but it may be possible to identify those suspected to be involved in high-risk activities (gang networks, drug sales) and subject this subgroup of probationers to police-probation home visits.

The notion of focusing resources also includes attention to recurring problems that may be lost in the routine processing of cases.¹⁸ Thus, in a jurisdiction where gun cases not involving actual violence are found to be routinely dismissed, revised procedures that ensure that every case involving a firearm receives particular attention from police and prosecutors may be an important “system-fix” that can change the message sent to offenders about illegal gun possession.

Using Research to Guide Action

A core ingredient of focusing resources is to use data to identify the people, places, and things driving gun crime at the local level. Experience has indicated that at a certain level there are common elements of much gun violence. Particularly in the nation’s urban areas, it tends to involve young men, with offenders and victims often sharing extensive prior histories in the justice system, and to be concentrated in particular neighborhoods. These basic patterns, when assessed by the local task force, can help to begin to focus PSN resources. Beyond these patterns, however, there tends to be variation across communities along a number of dimensions such as the link to drug trafficking, the tie to gangs or networks of offenders, the nature of the illegal gun market, and particularly in rural areas, the tie to domestic violence. Thus, by involving a research

partner with the task force, PSN is geared toward identifying these patterns to focus suppression (law enforcement, prosecution), intervention, and prevention resources.

The research partner, as mentioned above, can also monitor implementation of PSN and provide continual feedback to the task force to support ongoing revision of strategies.

Expanding the Boundaries of Involvement

As demonstrated in Figure Two, the partnership component of PSN is also a core component of the strategic problem-solving model. At a minimal level, the U.S. Attorney's Office is dependent on local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies to bring gun cases for federal prosecution. The strategic problem-solving model also suggests that the inclusion of other criminal justice system partners can further maximize the impact of interventions. Thus, inclusion of the U.S. Marshal and federal-local fugitive task forces may provide a vehicle for strategic warrant service on offenders thought to be at high-risk for gun crime. Similarly, the inclusion of probation and parole officers may yield police-probation-parole home visits to high-risk probationers and parolees to discourage the illegal possession of firearms. In both examples, the notion is that increased federal prosecution of gun crime offenders may have greater impact if part of a proactive, comprehensive strategy focused on the people and places driving gun crime at the local level. Specifically, increased prosecution coupled with multiple strategies to communicate to potential offenders the increased certainty and severity for illegal possession and use of guns is central to a focused deterrence strategy.

Similarly, inclusion of community partners, service providers, the faith community, and other local partners can provide additional resources for the development of prevention and intervention programs geared toward reducing gun crime. Community based prevention programs aimed at the children or younger siblings of gun offenders may yield long-term prevention benefits. Faith-based or victim advocate intervention with shooting victims may prevent retaliation. Ex-offender mentoring and job placement programs may provide important resources for offenders returning to the community from prison. The value of the strategic model is that limited resources may be targeted to the critical components of gun violence in the community.

Finally, the inclusion of community members and community leaders is crucial to establishing legitimacy and support for PSN. Aggressive prosecution of gun crime offenders is likely to have a differential impact on particular communities. This is particularly true of urban, minority neighborhoods that have been most victimized by gun crime. Focusing resources on the key people and places driving gun crime will disproportionately affect these neighborhoods. Demonstrating that the focus is data-driven based on levels of gun crime victimization, that prevention and intervention strategies will accompany aggressive prosecution, and that community leaders will be included in PSN, can be critical steps in building community support.

Strategic Interventions

Building on the core components of PSN, as well as the strategic problem-solving model, a series of strategic practices and interventions have emerged in PSN sites across the country (see Figure Three). Not all will be utilized in all PSN sites, and those that are

implemented will be adapted to fit local context. Yet, these strategic interventions and practices are being utilized by a number of PSN task forces with promising results. The initial set of PSN working papers focuses on four of these practices.

Figure Three – Strategic Problem Solving	
<p>Core Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Maximizing the impact of interventions – Targeting the most serious gun crime problems (people, places, context) – Addressing recurring problems – Fixing system gaps • Using Research to Help Guide Action <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Unpacking the local gun crime problem – Continually adjusting strategies • Expanding Boundaries of Involvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Criminal justice system partners (local, state, federal) – Community partners (expand resources, build legitimacy) 	<p>Strategic Practices & Interventions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incident Reviews • Chronic Violent Offender Lists • Gun Case Screening Processes • Offender Notification Meetings <p>Additional Strategic Interventions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illegal Gun Markets/Supply side strategies • Re-entry • Police-Probation-Parole Teams • Directed Patrol (gun crime hotspots) • Problem Properties/Nuisance Abatement • Prevention (street workers, school-based, juvenile gun courts, etc.)

Incident Reviews

Incident reviews draw on the extraordinarily detailed understanding that police officers, investigators, prosecutors, probation and parole officers, have of crime incidents and the associated people and places. Case-by-case reviews of homicides and gun assaults are conducted with research partners systematically recording, and later analyzing, the knowledge shared by criminal justice officials. The reviews lead to “unpacking” the patterns of gun crime that can then suggest strategic interventions.

As will be discussed in further detail in the report on incident reviews, two types of reviews have developed. The historic review involves the review of a large number of cases over a given period (e.g., six-months or a year). This is often a useful starting point for discerning linkage of gun crime to drug sales and distribution networks, to gangs or known groups of offenders, and to local contexts (e.g., drug houses). The second type of incident review, the ongoing or regular review, involves incident reviews conducted weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly to examine offenses occurring during a recent period. These reviews can identify current patterns of offending that may be subject to timely intervention (e.g., directed patrol in a particular neighborhood, a gang called in to an offender notification meeting, warrant service on a particular individual or group). Thus, for example, during the summer of 2004 an Indianapolis review identified a small group of individuals suspected of being involved in a series of shootings and homicides. These individuals were then the subject of an intensive undercover investigation that resulted in a number of arrests, drug and weapon seizures, and federal prosecution.

Incident reviews are particularly useful for understanding local patterns of gun crime. Thus, for example, PSN officials in Lowell, Massachusetts found that one component of its local gun crime was youthful Asian gangs.¹⁹ In Winston-Salem, North Carolina PSN officials found that adult offenders were involving youths in offending. In High Point, North Carolina gun crime was tied to active drug markets in a focused geographic area. In Detroit, gun violence was largely the product of disputes among gun carrying offenders, many of whom had prior arrests for carrying a concealed weapon. Based on this understanding, strategic interventions to complement gun prosecution were developed.²⁰

Chronic Violent Offender Lists

Another relatively common PSN intervention is the development of a chronic violent offender list.²¹ Referred to by a variety of names including “ELIMI-CON” in the Middle District of Georgia and “WOW” (“worst of the worst”) in the Eastern District of Missouri, these lists are intended to identify, based on prior violence, the individuals in the community believed to be most at risk for involvement in gun crime. The lists are based on the finding that gun violence typically involves offenders and victims with extensive history in the criminal justice system. The lists can be used reactively and proactively. Reactively the lists are intended to alert police, pretrial release officials, and prosecutors that these individuals should receive particular attention given their prior history in gun violence. As a reactive tool, the lists are intended to increase the certainty of punishment for the “worst of the worst” gun offenders in a community. Proactively, these lists may suggest the appropriate subjects for warrant service, heightened probation and parole supervision, and undercover investigations.

Joint Prosecution Case Screening – Finding the Best Venue for Prosecution

Nearly all PSN task forces have implemented some form of a joint federal-local gun case screening process to decide whether the case should be prosecuted federally or locally.²² The structure of the screening process varies significantly across PSN task forces but typically includes an Assistant U.S. Attorney, a local prosecutor, ATF, and local law enforcement. Cases are screened to assess eligibility for federal prosecution and to compare whether federal or local prosecution would yield more severe sanctions. In some jurisdictions, for example Alabama, where severe prison overcrowding has

resulted in very weak sanctions for gun offenders, the screening is primarily to decide whether the case is eligible for federal prosecution. Most eligible gun cases will be prosecuted federally. In other jurisdictions, such as Massachusetts where state gun laws are more stringent, the meeting is more focused on deciding which cases should be prioritized for federal prosecution. Also known as “Smart Prosecution,” joint screening is considered a key step towards focusing resources and tailoring PSN to local context.

Offender Notification Meetings

A fourth strategic intervention, based on focused or targeted deterrence, involves offender notification meetings.²³ Also referred to as call-in meetings, ceasefire meetings, and lever pulling meetings, these involve bringing in high-risk probationers and parolees for a meeting with criminal justice officials, service providers, and community members. The focus of the meeting is on the commitment to reduced gun violence and a two-pronged message is delivered. On the one hand, the message is to convey the sanctions that will be applied to individuals believed to be involved in gun violence. On the other hand, the meeting includes an attempt to link the probationers and parolees to services and support.

The offender notification meetings represent an attempt to extend PSN’s communication strategy to direct communication with the individuals believed most at risk for being involved in gun crime as either offenders or victims. They often also include a group deterrence-based focus whereby individuals and groups believed to be involved in gun crime are told they will be held accountable for the continued violence of the group they “hang with.” This group accountability component builds on the Boston

Ceasefire Model later adopted by Indianapolis, High Point, North Carolina, and other SACSI and PSN sites.

“... gun carrying by drug dealers, by felons, by thugs can be deterred because it is discretionary.... Because it’s a choice it is a choice that can be influenced if we make that gun a big enough liability in the mind of the criminal.” Deputy Attorney General James Comey, PSN National Conference, June 16, 2004.²⁴

Comprehensive Strategies Linked Through the Strategic Problem-Solving Model

By its very nature, the strategic problem-solving model suggests that the four strategies discussed above be linked to an overall strategic approach. Incident reviews may suggest active groups of offenders who may then be ordered into an offender notification meeting. The joint gun case screening team should have access to the chronic violent offender list so that appropriate prioritization can occur when a case involving a chronic violent offender enters the screening process. Similarly, the case screening team may wish to prioritize cases involving individuals that have been through an offender notification meeting. In a comprehensive strategy task force, the joint screening team may overlap with the regular incident review team so that incidents involving chronic offenders or associates whose names keep recurring in cases may be identified for participation in offender notification meetings or for further investigation.

Similarly, the strategic problem-solving model suggests that the individual strategies should be tailored to local context. For example, in some jurisdictions concerns have been raised about incident review meetings involving issues of discovery, intrusion on active investigations, or the perception that investigations are being reviewed by outsiders. Although effectively resolved in many PSN task forces, if these concerns

cannot be addressed then other mechanisms should be utilized for assessment of the gun crime problem. A number of jurisdictions have decided that members of the most violent chronic offender list should not be part of an offender notification meeting. Yet, they may permit inclusion of younger siblings or associates of chronic offenders in these meetings.

As another example, in PSN sites where the incident review suggests a group structure to gun offending, a comprehensive “pulling levers” approach may bring together multiple components of these strategic interventions. Groups identified in the incident reviews as being currently active in shootings would be called into an offender notification meeting, warned of the consequences for being involved in continued violence and informed of legitimate services and opportunities. Should subsequent incident reviews or case screening identify group members involved in violence then all potential “levers” or sanctions would be imposed on the group.

PSN Case Study Reports

The Michigan State University research team is preparing a series of PSN case study reports. The initial study focuses on joint prosecution screening processes. Additional reports in the series will include incident reviews, offender notification meetings, chronic violent offender lists as well as several of the emerging PSN strategies noted in Figure Three. Although described individually, the experience of cities such as Boston, Indianapolis, and St. Louis suggests that combinations of the strategies, adapted to local problems and resources, may have the most powerful impact on gun crime. All of which, of course, are premised on the basic elements of PSN, aggressive prosecution

of gun crime offenders, communication of a focused deterrence message, and outreach to the community, and implemented through DOJ's core components of partnerships, strategic planning, training, outreach, and accountability.

In addition to the studies of PSN strategies, the Michigan State University's PSN research team, working with local PSN research partners, will be generating a series of studies focused on specific PSN task forces. These studies will describe how national PSN has been tailored to local contexts, the strategic problem-solving model utilized at the task force level, implementation of strategies, and impact on gun crime.

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- ¹ Bureau of Justice Statistics: www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjc/cvict_c.htm (as of 12/28/04).
- ² Levels of property crime and violent crime not involving a gun are lower in the U.S. than many other western democracies but gun crime remains exceptionally high in the U.S. See Zimring and Hawkins, 1999; Bureau of Justice Statistics: www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/ijs.htm (as of 12/28/04).
- ³ National District Attorneys Association (2001). Raphael and Ludwig (2003) analyzed the Richmond homicide data and found that the decline in homicide was consistent with national declines in homicide and could not be clearly attributed to the impact of Project Exile. A more recent analysis, that benefited from a longer post-intervention time period, did find evidence that Project Exile had an impact on the homicide rate (Rosenfeld, Fornango, and Baumer, 2005). The authors argue that the evidence for impact of Project Exile is stronger than the case for the impact of COMPSTAT or Boston's Ceasefire.
- ⁴ Silverman, E. 1999.
- ⁵ Braga, Kennedy, Waring, and Piehl, 2001; Braga, Kennedy, Piehl and Waring, 2001; Kennedy, Braga, and Piehl. 2001.
- ⁶ Kennedy, Piehl, and Braga, 1996; Braga, Cook, Kennedy, and Moore, 2002.
- ⁷ Coleman et al., 1999. See also, Roehl et al. 2004; Dalton, 2003.
- ⁸ McGarrell and Chermak, 2003; McGarrell et al., forthcoming.
- ⁹ Kapsch and Lyman, 2002. Easterling et al., 2002.
- ¹⁰ Betts et al., 2003.
- ¹¹ Roehl et al. 2004: 54-57.
- ¹² These data were reported by DOJ at a PSN Specialized Workshop for PSN Coordinators and Research Partners, San Diego, CA (2/26/04).
- ¹³ Reviews of promising gun crime reduction strategies that can assist research partners and task forces include Braga, 2004; National Research Council, 2005; Ludwig and Cook, 2003; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1999. See also Dalton, 2003; Decker, 2003.
- ¹⁴ PSN coordinator reports are based on semi-annual reports provided by the coordinators to the Department of Justice. Unless noted otherwise, the data reported in this paper are from the July 2004 reports. It should be noted that phone contacts with PSN coordinators conducted by the Michigan State University PSN research team suggest significant variation in the scope and intensity of these various strategies across the PSN task forces.
- ¹⁵ Data compiled by Professor Joe Trotter and colleagues as part of American University's PSN Technical Assistance Program.
- ¹⁶ U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2004. See also, www.psn.gov.
- ¹⁷ There are 94 U.S. Attorneys Offices but Guam and the Marianas Islands have been treated as a single PSN task force thus resulting in 93 PSN task forces. For an excellent discussion of researcher-practitioner collaboration, see Lane, Turner, and Flores, 2004.
- ¹⁸ For example, PSN officials in many jurisdictions report that for years illegal possession of a firearm by a felon or concealed carrying offenses, and even crimes committed with a firearm present but no shooting, were routinely treated as non-violent offenses with high rates of dropped charges, dismissed cases, and suspended sentences.
- ¹⁹ Braga, McDevitt, and Pierce, 2004.
- ²⁰ Over half (57%) of the PSN coordinators reported using incident reviews. Higher proportions use police data (80%) and crime mapping (74%) and a significant number of sites report using other sources of data such as ATF tracing data and corrections data.
- ²¹ Just under three-fifths of the PSN coordinators report the task force uses some type of chronic violent offender list.
- ²² Nearly all (95%) the PSN coordinators report some mechanism for screening gun cases with most (89%) reporting joint federal-local screening.
- ²³ Forty percent of PSN coordinators report employing offender notification meetings.
- ²⁴ The notion of making illegal gun carrying a liability is also a cornerstone of the policy recommendations offered by Cook and Ludwig, 2004. There additional recommendations relate to reducing gun availability to youth and offenders, key elements of PSN.