

Guilford County Gang Assessment: The OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model

Section: Overview of the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model



Overview: The OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model

The OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model holds that “neither social disorganization, underclass, nor poverty theory alone explains the scope and nature of youth delinquency or criminal gang association and gang crime. Social disorganization or lack of integration of essential elements of a local community system provides the basic stimulus for the formation of youth gangs. Lack of legitimate opportunity and the presence of alternative criminal opportunities are more likely to explain the character and scope of gang behavior” (Spergel, 1995). While youth in this age group are most likely to be engaged in or at risk of committing serious or violent gang crimes, the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model focuses primarily on youth gang members under 22 years of age, based on OJJDP’s authorizing legislation. Motorcycle gangs, prison gangs, ideological gangs, and hate groups comprising primarily adults are excluded from the definition.

Five Strategies of the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model

OJJDP recommends the implementation of a five-step model that ultimately leads to the understanding of the nature, dynamic, and intervention points to address youth gangs and related crime at a local level. These five strategies include:

1. **Community mobilization:** Involvement of local citizens, including former gang youth, community groups and agencies, and the coordination of programs and staff functions within and across agencies.
2. **Opportunities provision:** The development of a variety of specific education, training, and employment programs targeted at gang-involved youth.
3. **Social intervention:** Youth-serving agencies, schools, grassroots groups, faith-based organizations, police agencies, and other criminal justice organizations reaching out and acting as links to gang-involved youth, their families, and the conventional world and needed services.
4. **Suppression:** Formal and informal social control procedures, including close supervision or monitoring of gang youth by agencies of the criminal justice system and by community-based agencies, schools, and grassroots groups.
5. **Organizational change and development:** Development and implementation of policies and procedures that result in the most effective use of available and potential resources, within and across agencies, to better address the gang problem.

The OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model requires that these strategies be delivered in a focused manner, based on a thorough assessment of the current gang problem in a community, its potential causes, and its contributing factors. A comprehensive assessment of the gang problem incorporates the data, the experience of service providers, and the views of parents, youth, and community residents. The problem of youth gang violence must, in fact exist, be perceived, and be communicated as a problem or a threat to the community. An assessment is the most important step in the design and implementation of the community’s plan to address the youth gang problem. Guided by data, the assessment reliably measures the scope and depth of the gang problem to provide the basic information needed to develop strategic plans.

North Carolina's OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Assessment Efforts

Several counties across North Carolina have either completed or are in the process of completing the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Assessment for their county. Each county implemented the gang assessment in a slightly different way, tailoring the assessment to their local needs. Although an exhaustive list is not applicable here, nearby counties include Durham (<http://www.ci.durham.nc.us/news/NewsDisplay.cfm?vNewsID=1472>), Rockingham (http://cabinvillagellc.com/rh_docs.html), and Forsyth (in progress) Counties.

Guilford County's Approach

In Guilford County, the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Assessment is part of a larger community-wide initiative to reduce youth gang activity. Three central programmatic partners (Youth Focus, Inc., One Step Further, and Guilford County Court Alternatives) comprised a steering committee and selected the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's (UNCG) Center for Youth, Family, and Community Partnerships (CYFCP) to lead the OJJDP Gang Assessment efforts.

UNCG/CYFCP worked closely with the steering committee as well as with the local Juvenile Crime Prevention Council (JCPC) in developing the local strategy. Additional key partners included Guilford County law enforcement offices, Guilford County School students and staff, community leaders and members, parents and youth, current and ex-gang members, as well as an array of youth-serving community organizations and agencies currently addressing gang prevention.

Assessment activities were based on the (OJJDP) Comprehensive Gang Model and Assessment Guide available at <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Comprehensive-Gang-Model/Assessment-Guide>. A summary of each of the completed assessment activities is provided below:

Understanding the Community Composition: UNCG staff collected county-wide demographic information based on race, gender, age, income, poverty rates, employment status, educational attainment, teen birth rates, child abuse and neglect reports, and other categories of interest as suggested by the OJJDP model.

Understanding Law Enforcement Data Collection: UNCG partnered with local law enforcement jurisdictions to understand active gangs in their jurisdictions as well as gang-related crime over a one-year period. Crime data were compiled in an electronic database for analysis and gang-related incidents were mapped using Geographical Information Systems (GIS) mapping software.

School Data Collection: UNCG gathered publically available Guilford County School data and worked with school representatives to ensure its accuracy.

Community Perceptions Data: UNCG developed a series of surveys using OJJDP templates, including:

- 1) Youth Perception Survey;
- 2) Community Resident Survey; and
- 3) School Resource Officer Survey.

Surveys were available in both English and Spanish. In addition, data from Gang Member Interviews were provided by one of our partner agencies (One Step Further).

Community Resources Data Collection: UNCG created and distributed a Community Program Profile survey, based on the OJJDP template, which was disseminated by the Project Team to neighborhood associations, community-service organizations, faith-based organizations, and service providers who are youth-serving throughout Guilford County. UNCG compiled the surveys and will enter them into OJJDP Web-based Community Resource Inventory database (<https://www.iir.com/nygc/tool/default.htm>) on behalf of Guilford County.

Definition of a Gang

UNCG/CYFCP took a participatory action research approach to conducting the OJJDP Gang Assessment for Guilford County. Local partners were involved in each step of the evaluation process, provided feedback, and assisted with local data collection efforts. The first step was deciding on a collective definition of what a “gang” is for purposes of the local assessment.

Several definitions were consulted, including:

National Crime Information Center (NCIC):

An ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons that have a common interest and/or activity characterized by the commission of or involvement in a pattern of criminal or delinquent conduct.

- The NCIC definition has been adopted by the FBI in conjunction with collection of gang crime data through the National Incident Based Reporting Systems, the follow-up to the Uniform Crime Reporting system.

Guilford County Schools Definition:

A gang is any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, having as its primary activities the commission of criminal acts and having a common name, identifying sign, colors or symbols.

North Carolina General Assembly Definition:

General Statute § 14-50.16

- (b) As used in this Article, “criminal street gang” or “street gang” means any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, that:
- (1) Has as one of its primary activities the commission of one of more felony offenses, or delinquent acts that would be felonies if committed by an adult;
 - (2) Has three or more members individually or collectively engaged in, or who have engaged in, criminal street gang activity; and
 - (3) May have a common name, common identifying sign or symbol.

After careful consideration and deliberation, the local steering committee and UNCG/CYFCP team chose to use the North Carolina General Assembly Definition because: (a) the definition is consistent with state law on how crime is coded locally and statewide (which has funding implications locally); (b) it is the definition that the NC Governors Crime Commission has adopted (which has funding implications locally); (c) it is consistent with the recommendation of the OJJDP comprehensive model’s recommendation to connect with the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) definition, which also has been adopted by the FBI in conjunction with collection of gang crime data through the National Incident Based Reporting Systems, the follow-up to the UCR system; (d) it is consistent with other sites in NC who are conducting a OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Assessment of their local counties (e.g., Durham, Forsyth); and (e) it is concrete and measureable, without much ambiguity.

Community Presentations Prior to Implementation

Consistent with a true participatory action framework, the assessment team conducted a series of presentations across the community outlining the proposed approach, including the proposed gang definition. These presentations occurred in May 2010 and June 2010. The first presentation was a community-wide meeting coordinated by Youth Focus, Inc. and included a full presentation of the approach. Members present included community agencies, youth and family residents of Guilford County, local business owners, and representatives from Guilford County Schools, Greensboro Police Department, High Point Police Department, and the Guilford County Sherriff’s Office. The second presentation was delivered to the Guilford County Juvenile Crime Prevention Council. Feedback from those meetings was integrated with the implementation plan prior to the beginning of assessment activities (e.g., one recommendation was that Spanish versions of the survey be available, and thus, surveys were translated into Spanish and available for completion for non-English speaking youth and families). Through this process, the current assessment integrates multiple perspectives across diverse stakeholders.