

Guilford County Gang Assessment: The OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model

Section: Summary and Recommendations



Summary and Recommendations

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.

UNCG/CYFCP, in partnership with the Guilford County Steering Committee (Youth Focus, Inc., One Step Further, and Guilford County Court Alternatives) 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 and both provided feedback and assisted with local data collection efforts.

Guilford has made significant steps to addressing youth gangs across the county. As every county can continually improve, potential steps and recommendations are offered below as Guilford County moves to the next stage of the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model.

Community Recommendations

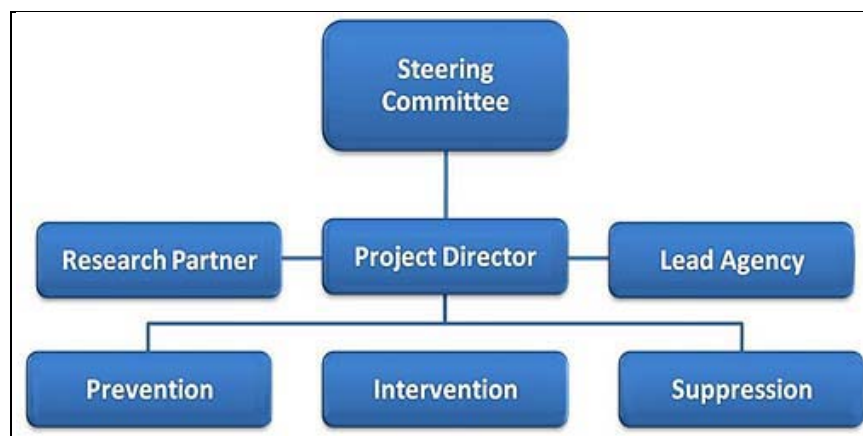
Recommendation: Implement the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model driven by a diverse, multi-disciplinary Steering Committee formalized through use of a memoranda of agreement that focuses on coordinating strategies and policy decisions to reduce youth gang activity.

One agency cannot stop youth gang activity alone. A coordinated approach is essential. As recommended by the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model, Greensboro should consider developing a steering committee that can move this goal forward that includes representatives from:

- Law enforcement
- Education/schools
- Probation and/or parole officers
- Court staff (juvenile and adult)
- Social service agencies
- Youth-serving agencies
- Grassroots community agencies
- Outreach staff
- Local government body representatives
- Local universities

Typically, individuals who serve on the steering committee should have experience in working with high-risk and gang-involved youth, be willing, interested, and able to work within a team setting, are well-respected within their own agencies, are open to new ways of collaborating and interacting with different disciplines to achieve a common mission, and are committed to providing intervention options to youth and to holding youth accountable for negative and/or dangerous behaviors. This body could become a subcommittee of ongoing groups such as the local Juvenile Crime Prevention Council.

The function of the steering committee would be to coordinate the full spectrum of services, including prevention, intervention, and suppression. It is best to identify and fund a project director (an anti-gang coordinator for Guilford County), identify a lead agency, and collaborate with a research partner to track outcomes and impact.



Recommendation: Incorporate all five community-wide elements of the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model.

In addition to comprehensive, anti-gang, evidence-based practices and programs that are part of the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model, there are several additional essential elements of the model that also must be combined in coordination with the delivery of those programs. This is paramount as each strategy plays a role towards a comprehensive effort. These elements include:

1. Community Mobilization: Involvement of local citizens, including former gang-involved youth, community groups, agencies, and coordination of programs and staff functions within and across agencies.
2. Opportunities Provision: Development of a variety of specific education, training, and employment programs targeting gang-involved youth.
3. Social Intervention: Involving youth-serving agencies, schools, grassroots groups, faith-based organizations, police, and other juvenile/criminal justice organizations in “reaching out” to gang-involved youth and their families, and linking them with the conventional world and needed services.

4. Suppression: Formal and informal social control procedures, including close supervision and monitoring of gang-involved youth by agencies of the juvenile/criminal justice system and also 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.



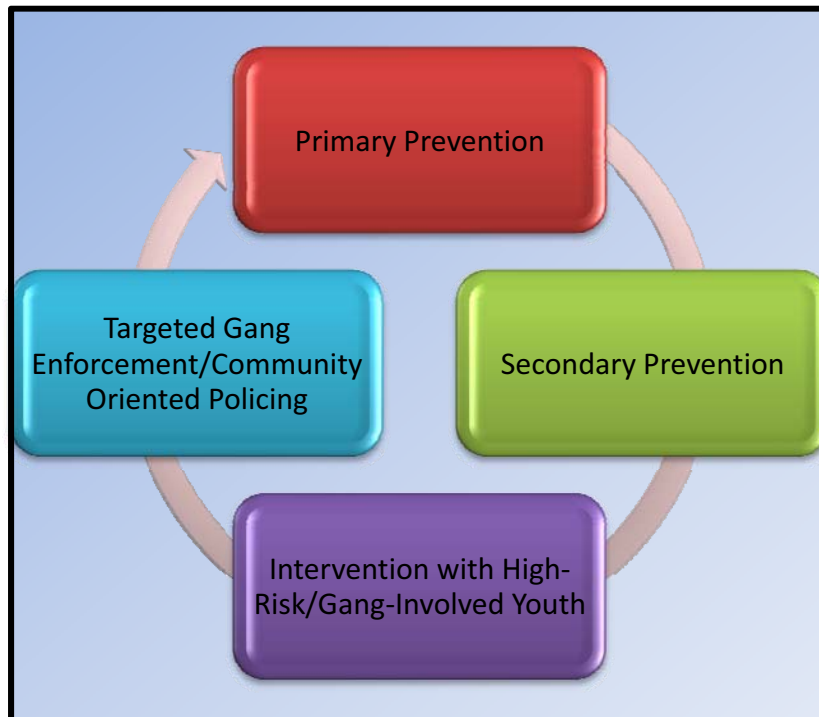
Recommendation: Continue to fund evidence-based programs/practices consistent with OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model components.

The North Carolina Governor’s Crime Commission (GCC) is the state recipient of \$5 million Federal Byrne/JAG funds supplied through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. These funds have been awarded to the Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to fund gang violence prevention programming statewide through local JCPCs. Guilford County is encouraged to continue to support those evidence-based programs/practices that were identified in the comprehensive gang assessment as a needed service in communities for gang prevention and intervention. The current cycle of funding makes funding available for selected programs beginning November 15, 2010, and ending June 30, 2012.

Recommendation: Address the full spectrum of evidence-based practices and programs across the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model.

The evidence-based practices and programs referred to within the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model are inclusive of a full continuum of care for youth gang members. Gang activity is a complex social phenomenon that varies by age, degree of gang involvement, and severity of offending. Risk factors associated with the probability of joining a gang run across family, school, peer, and community lines. Accordingly, no single program or strategy operating independently is likely to have a lasting effect in reducing gang activity.

Therefore, it is important that communities offer programming that covers the spectrum of services needed to prevent and stop youth gang violence. These include:



- Primary prevention: reducing risk factors or increasing protective factors among the entire population to reduce gang activity
- Secondary prevention: decreasing the likelihood of joining a gang among youth who have already displayed early signs of problem behavior or who are exposed to multiple known risk factors for gang activity
- Intervention with high-risk or gang-involved youth: providing coordinated service delivery, including educational and employment opportunities, with supervision and accountability
- Targeted gang enforcement: community-oriented and problem-oriented policing strategies with an emphasis on gangs, and collaborative enforcement strategies involving

probation and prosecution to target high rate gang offenders, gang leaders, and serious violent offenders¹¹²

Consistent with that approach, there are several resources available to agencies who want to implement an evidence-based approach to gang prevention, intervention, and suppression. These resources include the National Youth Gang Center (www.iir.com/nygc/tool), the Community Guide to Helping America's Youth (<http://helpingamericasyouth.gov>), SAMHSA's National Registry on Effective Programs and Practices (<http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/about-evidence.htm>), and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP) Model Programs Guide (http://www.dsgonline.com/mpg2.5/mpg_index.htm). These databases contain a comprehensive set of criteria that together present a consensus on how to best determine whether or not a program is evidence-based and applicable in a community setting.

Each database uses a slightly different set of criteria to determine whether a program is "evidenced-based," although there are some commonalities: (1) Positive outcomes - must demonstrate a reduction in problem behaviors or risk factors; (2) Evaluation design - must be experimental and published in peer-reviewed journals; (3) Fidelity - must demonstrate consistency between with the experimental design and the actual intervention; and (4) Conceptual framework and standardization – must include a manual or materials are available to the public. Three of the databases have their own rating system to provide an additional level of information. SAMHSA rates the quality of the research and the readiness for dissemination of each intervention on a scale from zero to four, zero being the lowest. OJJDP and HAY have the same rating system, but the names for the levels are different. The type of experimental design and the strength of the positive results determine each level. The levels are: (1) Exemplary/Level 1 – experimental design and random assignment of subjects, evidence demonstrates prevention and/or reduction; (2) Effective/Level 2 – experimental or quasi-experimental with a comparison group, evidence suggests effectiveness; and (3) Promising/Level 3 – limited research methods, strong theoretical base, evidence is promising but more research is needed.

Recommendation: Provide services and resources to victims of gang violence.

Because of the strong link between victimization and later perpetration of violence, it is important that swift attention and intensive resources be provided to victims of gang violence. These resources need to include both services and resources in a variety of settings. School-based services should include conflict resolution within the school, gang resistance prevention and intervention programming, tutoring, mentoring, training for youth and teachers regarding what to do if either are a victim of gang violence or witness an act of gang violence, and training for school personnel on appropriate referrals to additional services when needed (what resources are available, how to refer, etc.). Community-based services should include, at the very least, medical and psychosocial assessments, mental health trauma treatments, individual and family counseling, and legal services. Given that response times are important in terms of providing services to victims quickly after being victimized, Guilford County should consider the

¹¹²The "Prevention Strategies" information listed above is referenced from the OJJDP FY 2008 Gang Prevention Coordination Assistance Program announcement: <http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/grants/solicitations/FY2008/Gang.pdf>

expansion of the Greensboro Child Response Initiative, which ensures rapid responses to calls for service in which a child is involved in or exposed to violence by a mental health advocate being on the scene with law enforcement officers to reduce the traumatic impact of violence and provide immediate referrals as needed.

Recommendation: Invest resources and support local systems-wide initiatives such as Reclaiming Futures to improve system coordination and collaboration.

Systems initiatives have been identified as essential to changing crime dynamics and providing evidence-based, coordinated services across communities. Guilford County is one of six sites in North Carolina and 26 across the country to be a Reclaiming Futures site. Reclaiming Futures has been identified as an evidence-based model to guide system reform for at-risk youth. Reclaiming Futures works to address the barriers that prevent communities from meeting the needs of juvenile offenders including the fragmentation of systems, lack of incorporation of evidence-based practices, and lack of community investment in addressing these challenges. Given that these elements are essential to addressing the youth gang dynamics in Guilford County, it is recommended that county-wide strategies leverage existing collaborations such as Reclaiming Futures that are working to address youth offending behaviors and systems coordination.

Recommendation: Invest resources in gang prevention programs targeted at decreasing risk factors and increasing protective factors related to gang involvement.

During ethnographic interviews completed in North Carolina, one mother confided that she committed her child to the juvenile justice system so that she could get the appropriate trauma, mental health and substance abuse services for him.¹¹³ Others have noted this “back door” approach to receiving necessary treatment: “In states where mental health services are scarce, youth who need treatment may enter the juvenile justice system because that is the only place they can receive treatment” (Federal Advisory Committee on Juvenile Justice, 2007, p. 10).¹¹⁴ Data from the Pathways to Desistance study conducted through the MacArthur Network on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice have supported this claim, with those who were institutionalized in state-run facilities being more likely to receive services than youth who were based in the community and receiving services from contracted residential providers.¹¹⁵ Clearly, there is a need for greater identification and provision of prevention services, as well as greater system-wide collaboration. Such efforts are in line with recent legislation advocating for cross-system service planning in which juvenile justice personnel can participate in child and family

¹¹³ Frabutt, J. M., MacKinnon-Lewis, C., & Moorefield, B. (2002, April). *The social context of delinquency: An ethnographic perspective of court adjudicated youth*. Poster presented at the 9th Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research on Adolescence, New Orleans, LA.

¹¹⁴ Federal Advisory Committee on Juvenile Justice. (2007). *Annual Report 2007*. Washington, DC: Author.

¹¹⁵ Mulvey, E., Steinberg, L., Fagan, J., Cauffman, E., Piquero, A., Chassin, L., Knight, G., Brame, R., Schubert, C., Hecker, T., & Losoya, S. (2004). Theory and research on desistance from antisocial activity among adolescent serious offenders. *Journal of Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 2, 213-236.

team planning, and prevention programming can be housed within juvenile justice and school facilities (President's Freedom Commission).

Recommendation: Develop common tracking mechanisms across programs funded to implement elements of the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model in Guilford County so that unified outcome data can be collected and monitored.

For funding decisions made at a local level, it is recommended that a common set of performance measures are developed across providers as a condition of funding so that commonalities across programs can be tracked. Local funding should prioritize those programs that include regularly tracked performance measures for achieving project goals.

Recommendation: Consider a reexamination of Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) across systems.

The disproportionate minority representation of African Americans in the juvenile justice system as well as in the school suspension and expulsion data deserves specific attention. From 2003-2008, Guilford County had a local steering committee looking specifically at this issue and raising awareness across the county. Given the continuing numbers indicating continued disproportionality, Guilford County should consider revamping that committee to continue its work on understanding and reducing DMC in Guilford County.

Law Enforcement/Juvenile Justice Recommendations

Recommendation: Expand the number of juvenile court counselors.

Guilford is not unique in that there is a significant need for more juvenile court counselors to handle caseloads. However, as identification of youth gang activity increases, so is the workload of juvenile court counselors, at least in the short-run. Therefore, additional funding for hiring court counselors, and retaining well-qualified court counselors, is recommended, coupled with more intensive supervision of court counselors with high need clients.

Recommendation: Consider adopting a uniform gang definition across jurisdictions in Guilford County.

Because Guilford County is a rather large county, and because of the number of jurisdictions across Guilford County, without a common metric of how "gangs" are identified and coded across the county, it will be difficult to measure the impact of the programming that is put into place as part of the next steps of the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model. Thus, it is recommended that Guilford County consider a multi-jurisdiction definition of "gang" and

common coding of “gang incident” across Greensboro Police Department, High Point Police Department, and the Guilford County Sherriff’s Office.

Recommendation: Think about groups, not just gangs.

Consider thinking about “groups” of people that commit crimes together as the focus rather than gangs so as to not limit the focus to only those that are validated, associated, or suspected gang members. The goal is to reduce youth violence; thus, if there are groups of young people who are running together and committing crimes, those groups deserve attention. The term “gang” is used to describe a variety of groups, including youth gangs, drug gangs, prison gangs, crews or posses, and adult criminal organizations. The terms youth gang and street gang are used interchangeably. More generally, however, it is agreed that youth ages 12-24 that are involved in an elevated level of criminal activity with a shared sense of identity are important groups with which to intervene.

School Recommendations

Recommendation: Understand and prioritize specific schools for gang violence and deliver services accordingly.

Because school safety is of paramount importance, and because of the clear link between school and juvenile crime as outlined in the nationally recognized school-to-prison pipeline, it is important that Guilford County Schools and partnering agencies understand and assess which schools in Guilford contain gangs and potential inter-gang conflict. Student surveys should be completed to assess their perspectives on school safety and gangs in their schools. School Resource Officers should work closely with local agencies to develop gang prevention and intervention programming that can be delivered within the school setting. This will lead to each school completing a critical self-evaluation that will allow for the examination of their policies and the effects of those policies within their schools.

Recommendation: Implement programs and strategies that aim to reduce suspensions, drop-outs, and truancy.

Crime statistics show that the highest level of criminal activity occurs when youth are not in school. Thus, with this trend, it is imperative that students are in school as much as possible. By examining potential programs and strategies that can reduce suspensions, drop-outs, and truancy, Guilford County will not only enhance learning (as students are in school), but also decrease the likelihood of youth criminal activity.

North Carolina has one of the highest suspension rates across the county.¹¹⁶ Given this finding, several recommendations have been made to address this, including a reexamination of zero tolerance policies and outcomes. Specifically, national experts have recommended that zero tolerance policies are reserved for the most serious and severe behaviors, such as weapons offenses, and that schools define these behaviors specifically. Recent national reports have documented that while zero tolerance policies were well-intended, they actually increase the strength of the school-to-prison pipeline and reduce the success of youth overall.¹¹⁷ Specific negative effects include a 15% increase in expulsions nationwide from 2002 to 2006, with disparate rates of disciplinary recourse for minority students. Removal from school is associated with higher rates of future misbehavior, negative academic performance, higher dropout rates, and higher likelihood of entering the justice system. Since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, the nationwide graduation rate was 69% in 2006—the lowest since before NCLB. Graduation rates for Black and Latino students were 51% and 55% respectively. The graduation rates in the 100 largest US school districts were climbing prior to NCLB, but have begun dropping significantly in most since NCLB. The 100 largest districts also serve a large proportion of the minority student population in the US.

When looking at NC specifically, there were 16,499 referrals to the juvenile justice system directly from schools in 2008-2009. Following the introduction of high-stakes testing, there was a 53% increase in students retained from moving onto the next grade level. After NCLB, short-term suspensions increased 41%, long-term suspensions increased 153%, and the number of SROs present in schools has increased, thereby reinforcing the punitive image of the schools they serve. Black students are three and a half times more likely to receive a suspension than White students and ½ of teachers are leaving the profession before they make it to their fifth year. The graduation rate in 2006 was 63%, the ninth worst in the country. Graduation rates for Black students and Latino students were 45% and 50% respectively.

Based on the negative impact of zero tolerance disciplinary policies and high-stakes testing, several recommendations were made to alleviate these practices along with their resulting consequences. Four action items were stated:

- “(1) Create more caring and supportive learning environments for students by eliminating policies and practices that unnecessarily push students out of school through the use of suspensions, expulsions, referrals to alternative schools, referrals to law enforcement, and school-based arrests;
- (2) Limit the involvement of law enforcement and security personnel in schools to conduct that poses a serious, ongoing threat to the safety of students or staff;
- (3) Replace high-stakes testing with policies that will encourage schools to keep students in the learning environment and develop enriched curricula that are engaging and intellectually challenging, ensure deep understanding of content, and are focused on authentic achievement; and

¹¹⁶ Action for Children, 2007

¹¹⁷ Advancement Project (2010, March). Test, punish, and push out: How zero-tolerance and high-stakes testing funnel youth into the school-to-prison pipeline. Washington, DC.

(4) Ensure that every student is provided a high-quality pre-K-12 education that includes a full and equal opportunity to fulfill their potential, achieve their goals, improve the quality of their lives, become thoughtful and engaged democratic citizens, and become life-long learners.”

Other more specific recommendations were to:

- create working groups in school districts to address the issues of zero tolerance policies and high-stakes testing
- limit the use of suspensions and use a graduated disciplinary approach instead
- provide academics during suspensions
- hold schools officials accountable for reducing the use of zero tolerance disciplinary policies and high-stakes testing
- provide more funding for school counselors and psychologists to get at the root of problematic student behavior
- expand teacher training to include conflict management and resolution

Recommendation: Expand gang awareness training through multiple outlets (community, youth, parents, SROs, schools).

Activities and workshops that raise awareness and educate children, parents, and teachers about gang prevention are needed. Guilford County has been conducting such workshops through its recent Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) component coordinated through Guilford County Court Alternatives. Continued trainings such as these are recommended, particularly in light of SRO survey respondents indicated that 55% of parents and 35% of school personnel are not aware of these trainings. In fact, awareness and intervention programs were the most commonly indicated resources that are lacking in Guilford County for gang prevention according to Guilford County Schools SROs.