



City of Seattle
Office of City Auditor

**Evidence-Based Assessment
Of the City of Seattle's Crime
Prevention Programs:**
*What Have We Learned, and What
Should We Do Next?*

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September 5, 2012

City of Seattle

Office of City Auditor



Our Mission:

To help the City of Seattle achieve honest, efficient management and full accountability throughout City government. We serve the public interest by providing the City Council, Mayor and City department heads with accurate information, unbiased analysis, and objective recommendations on how best to use public resources in support of the well-being of the citizens of Seattle.

Background:

Seattle voters established our office by a 1991 amendment to the City Charter. The office is an independent department within the legislative branch of City government. The City Auditor reports to the City Council and has a four-year term to ensure her/his independence in deciding what work the office should perform and reporting the results of this work. The Office of City Auditor conducts performance audits and non-audit projects covering City of Seattle programs, departments, grantees, and contracts. The City Auditor's goal is to ensure that the City of Seattle is run as effectively and efficiently as possible in compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

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City of Seattle
Office of City Auditor



September 5, 2012

City Councilmember Tim Burgess
City Councilmember Sally Clark
City Councilmember Sally Bagshaw
City Councilmember Bruce Harrell
City of Seattle
Seattle, Washington 98104

Dear Councilmembers:

In September 2011, the then-members of the City Council's Public Safety and Education Committee asked the Office of City Auditor to work with George Mason University's Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy (CEBCP) to produce a comprehensive report on the evidence concerning the effectiveness of the City of Seattle's crime prevention programs. This brief companion document to the CEBCP report summarizes its results, and offers a set of potential next steps that the City could take to begin to improve the performance of its crime prevention efforts.

If you have any questions regarding this body of work, please contact Claudia Gross Shader at (206) 684-8038, claudia.gross-shader@seattle.gov or me at (206) 233-1095, davidg.jones@seattle.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David G. Jones".

David G. Jones
City Auditor

Attachment

Evidence-Based Assessment of the City of Seattle's Crime Prevention Programs:

What have we learned, and what should we do next?



"People have to recognize that they can't jump to the top of the performance mountain right away. They have to ratchet-up performance."

- Robert D. Behn, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University



Background: In approving the 2011 budgets for the Human Services Department, Department of Neighborhoods, and Seattle Police Department, the Seattle City Council expressed its intent to review the City of Seattle's (City) crime prevention efforts. A November 10, 2010 City Council Statement of Legislative Intent stated: "The Council's long term goal is to determine the best possible ways to implement crime prevention strategies that improve safety and the quality of life for citizens. How should these efforts be organized? Who should lead them? What are the specific outcomes we will seek? How will those outcomes be measured?"

A [May 2011 inventory of City crime prevention programs performed by the City Budget Office](#) (CBO) found 72 programs with crime prevention as either a primary, secondary, or indirect purpose. There were approximately 137 City employee positions and over \$13.2 million in contract dollars annually associated with those programs. The [CBO report concluded](#) that "a vast majority of the programs...do not measure outcomes, meaning they do not provide evidence of what difference those activities make."

The City Council's Statement of Legislative Intent envisioned that a subsequent phase would examine the effectiveness of the crime prevention programs, and [Council Central Staff produced a preliminary report](#) on the evidence base for the effectiveness of some of the programs. In September 2011, the City Council's Public Safety and Education Committee asked the Office of City Auditor to work with George Mason University's Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy (CEBCP) to conduct a follow-up study that would include a comprehensive review of the crime prevention mechanisms, theoretical bases, and existing evaluative literature on the effectiveness of the 63¹ programs in the CBO inventory. CEBCP's assessment is attached. This brief companion document summarizes their findings and offers a set of potential next steps that the City could take to begin to improve the performance of its crime prevention efforts.

¹ This review did not include the 9 programs from the original CBO inventory that relate to providing security for City facilities.

What have we learned about the effectiveness of the City's crime prevention programs?

The attached report from the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy (CEBCP) describes current research in crime prevention practices and whether it indicates that City crime prevention programs are likely to be effective. The CEBCP findings are based on the information contained in the May 2011 City Budget Office (CBO) report, which provided only high-level descriptions of the programs and did not distinguish whether crime prevention was a primary, secondary, or indirect intended outcome.

This new CEBCP report is intended to initiate a conversation about how the City might better integrate the crime prevention work that it does with the research evidence about what is known to be effective. We encourage those who are intimately familiar with the City's programs to draw comparisons between the evidence-base and the City's efforts.

It is an important first step to understand whether research indicates that a program is likely to be effective in reducing crime. However, as the CBO noted in its May 2011 report, we cannot know whether these City programs are actually effective in reducing crime because many do not measure their outcomes. We hope that this report will also help inform a conversation about how the City might best be able to measure its crime prevention outcomes.

Below, we've summarized CEBCP's findings. In addition, Table 1, at the end of this paper, summarizes each City program by category including funding amounts and staffing.

● **Good Supporting Evidence for Some Programs**

Among the 63 City crime prevention programs,

Summary of Evidence for the 63 City Programs and 2011 funding levels

Strong/Moderate Evidence of Effectiveness:

17 City programs significantly resemble or are replications of programs with strong (5) or moderate (12) potential for effectiveness in reducing crime.

- **Approximately \$2.9 million in contract funding;**
- **and approximately 21 staff positions (FTEs)**

Inconclusive Evidence of Effectiveness:

35 programs are inconclusive in their potential for reducing crime. This includes:

- 9** that resemble programs with weak but positive supporting research evidence.
 - 12** that resemble programs that do not have supporting research but do have supporting theory that indicates that they might be effective in reducing crime.
 - 14** that resemble programs that have some evidence of mixed results on reducing crime.
- **Approximately \$3.8 million in contract funding;**
 - **and approximately 72 FTEs**

Evidence of Potential for Increasing Crime:

3 programs seem to resemble programs that have some research evidence that indicates possible "backfire effects" – i.e., potentially worsening crime rather than reducing crime.

- **Approximately 13 FTEs**

Unable to Match to Research or Theory:

8 programs do not resemble any programs that have existing research evidence or any theory that indicates that they could be effective in reducing crime.

- **Approximately \$4.8 million in contract funding;**
- **and approximately 1.25 FTEs**

17 have at least moderate research evidence that indicates that they could be effective in reducing crime. However, the CEBCP authors caution that even programs using evidence-based approaches should measure their actual performance outcomes to ensure that the programs are achieving the intended crime reduction benefits.

- **Large City Investment in Programs that are Inconclusive**

This category includes 35 programs totaling approximately \$11 million in annual City expenditures (including contracts and City staff estimated at \$100,000 per FTE). These include City programs that resemble programs with weak research evidence, or that resemble programs shown to have mixed results in reducing crime. This category also includes City programs that do not resemble any programs that have been scientifically researched; however, the program may be able to be linked to a theory that might suggest crime reduction benefits.

- **Three Police Department Programs Have Potential to Increase Rather than Decrease Crime**

Three programs in the Seattle Police Department, with a total of up to 13 officers assigned, appear to be similar, according to their descriptions in the CBO May 2011 report, to programs that research has shown might have the unintended consequence of worsening crime rather than reducing it (i.e., “backfire” effect). These programs include a truancy program, a school emphasis officer program, and a proactive gang prevention program. More detailed information about these City programs will be needed to determine how closely they resemble programs that have had a backfire effect.

What are some next steps that the City might take to improve its crime prevention efforts?

Below is a list of three discrete next steps that the City might consider taking to continue to advance the City Council’s intention of determining the best possible ways to implement crime prevention strategies.

- **1: Address Potential Backfire Effects**

The CEBCP report cites research evidence of backfire effects in programs that may be similar to three City programs involving the Seattle Police Department: **the School Emphasis Truancy and Suspension Reduction Program, the School Emphasis Program, and the Proactive Gang Program**. A rigorous review and systematic comparison of the research with City programs would be a first step in addressing potential backfire effects. City programs should be compared to those studied in the research to examine purpose, methods, procedures and performance measures. The City may also choose to identify possibilities for adjusting these current City programs to incorporate methods that demonstrate stronger positive outcomes.

Currently Underway: The Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative (SYVPI) and the Seattle Police Department (SPD) are currently gathering more information about the activities of SPD’s school officers. This will allow the City to compare its programs with the research showing

potential negative effects. In addition, SYVPI has agreed to partner with CEBCP and a leading researcher on this subject from the University of Maryland to apply for a grant to conduct a rigorous evaluation. This will allow the City to learn about the effectiveness of the School Resource Officers who are deployed from SPD precincts as well as the SYVPI School Emphasis Officers (SEOs) who are assigned to middle schools within the SYVPI catchment areas. The SEOs use a unique strategy (including relationship-building, becoming an integral part of the school community, conflict resolution, service referrals, and home visits) that does not resemble any programs that have been studied to date.

● 2: Review and Respond to the Evidence

We would encourage all stakeholders from the 63 programs included in the CEBCP report to review the research cited in the report to begin a conversation about integrating scientific research with City crime prevention efforts. In addition, we propose that the City examine in-depth the research evidence for at least three of the programs that have crime prevention as their primary intended outcome and that utilize significant City resources. Elements of this examination might include: 1) a more thorough program description than time permitted in the CBO review, 2) a comparison of City program practices with the evidence-based practices, and 3) formulation of program logic models² and performance measures based on those used in effective programs studied in the research.

There are many good places to start; however, three potential programs for such an evaluation include:

Teen Late Night Program – Significant City staff resources are associated with this program including 12.14 FTE's and 1,800 hours of Police and Parks Department annual overtime. The program keeps youth off the street late at night by providing a place for positive activities. The research evidence points to greater crime reduction benefits for programs that are offered in the afternoon and those that focus on social skills, are structured, are linked to school curricula, and provide opportunities for one-on-one training. A comparison between the City's Teen Late Night Program and the evidence-base found in the [Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Model Programs Guide](#) might offer some helpful insights for increasing the program's crime prevention benefits.

Street Outreach/Critical Incident Response – This program, which includes a \$301,721 contract with Metrocenter YMCA, aims to engage youth in the Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative (SYVPI) and to de-escalate hostile situations. The research evidence for similar programs is mixed but includes at least one program that experienced significant backfire effects. In addition, the [National Network for Safe Communities](#) is a new resource that is documenting best practices and developing performance measures for evidence-based programs that include street outreach as a

² "A **logic model** is a diagram of a process or system. Logic models help create a "theory of causation" that can connect work within an organization's direct control (e.g., its processes or outputs) to high-level outcomes of that work, things over which the agency has little influence." Source: Performance Measure Guide, State of Washington Office of Financial Management, August 2009.

component. A comparison of the Seattle program with the research literature might suggest ways to avoid backfire effects as well as increase crime prevention benefits.

Community Police Team Program – Significant Seattle Police Department resources are associated with this program that funds 21 police officers annually. These officers are a resource for precinct commanders to work on chronic crime problems and/or special projects that require longer term assignments. The only rigorous research evidence among similar programs that shows a significant impact on crime is related to the use of the problem-solving methods associated with problem-oriented policing. A review of the Community Police Team program could help to identify the extent to which problem-solving methods are used and to develop potential outcome measures.

In addition, there are already plans underway for evaluations of the following two crime prevention programs.

Currently Underway: The Seattle Neighborhood Group (SNG) has recently launched a pilot project to evaluate its Safe Communities program (2011 contract amount: \$381,330). Current program activities include: Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design surveys, community appearance surveys, education in English (and 12 other languages as needed) on calling 911, landlord education for rental residential properties, community clean-ups, street light surveys, space activation activities, etc. SNG plans to evaluate their program based on crime statistics for 2-3 pilot areas, predictive indicators (such as number of people trained in effective crime reporting), and qualitative data based on community appearance pre and post pilot surveys.

Currently Underway: A process evaluation of the "IF" Project, that connects at-risk youth with current and former inmates to learn about the risks of offending, will be conducted in 2012-2013 by a research team from the Seattle University Criminal Justice Department. The process evaluation will document and analyze the early development and actual implementation of the "IF" Project and will include qualitative analysis, observations, and participant comments. This information is intended to help lay the groundwork for a more rigorous future outcome evaluation.

● 3: Build More City Capacity for Performance Leadership

[Robert Behn, Ph.D.](#), of Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, is a leading researcher in the field of performance management and the Chair of Harvard's executive education program, [Driving Government Performance: Leadership Strategies that Produce Results](#). He advocates a series of incremental steps with small "wins" and opportunities for learning rather than the implementation of an enterprise-wide strategy for improving performance management. The two steps listed above, Addressing Potential Backfire Effects and Reviewing and Responding to the Evidence, would offer some learning opportunities and perhaps some small wins for the City in improving its performance management for crime prevention.

Some additional incremental steps that the City might consider include:

- Forming an interdepartmental performance management work group to oversee the ongoing review of crime prevention programs and outcomes;

- Providing continuing education on performance management/performance leadership for key staff in the Executive branch of City government; and
- Identifying lessons learned in performance leadership from the City's previous experience as well as the experience of other jurisdictions.

Table 1: City of Seattle Crime Prevention Programs - Summary of Research Evidence

Program	2011 FTE	2011 Contract \$
Resemble or Replicate Programs with Strong Positive Evidence		
Mentoring (SYVPI)	N/A	130,000
Methadone Voucher Program	N/A	526,073
Multisystemic Treatment Program	N/A	86,100
Nurse Family Partnership	N/A	539,816
Code Compliance Team (Seattle Nightlife Initiative)	1.25	N/A
Total:	1.25	1,281,989
Resemble or Replicate Programs with Moderate Positive Evidence		
Aggression Replacement Training (SYVPI)	N/A	60,000
Gang Resistance Education and Training (SYVPI)	N/A	N/A
Drug Market Initiative	0.1	26,000
Teen Late Night Program	12.14	N/A
Summer High Point Commons Program	0.61	N/A
Business Improvement Area Support	0.3	35,000
Pedestrian Lighting	1	N/A
Case Management (SYVPI)	1.75	700,000
South Park Initiative	N/A	232,763
Chemical Dependence Intervention	0.18	119,020
Power of Place (SYVPI)	3	N/A
Neighborhood Network Coordination/Intake and Referral (SYVPI)	1	513,910
Total:	20.08	1,686,693
Inconclusive: Resemble or Replicate Programs with Weak but Positive Supporting Research Evidence		
Abandoned Buildings Enforcement	1.8	N/A
Graffiti Abatement - Transportation	2	N/A
Graffiti Abatement – Parks	2	2,500
Graffiti Abatement – SPU	6	N/A
Graffiti Hotline – SPU	0.9	N/A
Graffiti Code Enforcement - SPU	1	N/A
Graffiti BIA Program – SPU	N/A	57,000
Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design	1	N/A
Police Explorers	portion of 2 FTEs	N/A
Total:	14.7	59,500
Inconclusive: No Evidence but Grounded in Theory		
Chemical Dependency Intervention – Youth Engagement	N/A	177,863
Fire Stoppers	1	N/A
Neighborhood Matching Fund (SYVPI)	N/A	77,325
Community Matching Grants (SYVPI)	N/A	130,925
Youth Police Academy	portion of 2 FTEs	N/A
SPD Youth Dialogues	portion of 2 FTEs	N/A

SPD IF Project	portion of 2 FTEs	N/A
Vegetation Overgrowth Enforcement	1.0	N/A
Junk Storage Enforcement	2	N/A
Graffiti Outreach and Education (SPU)	1	N/A
Illegal Dumping Hotline	0.3	N/A
Illegal Dumping Inspection and Clean-up	3	284,250
Total	8.3	670,363

Inconclusive: Resemble Programs That Have Evidence of Mixed Results on Reducing Crime		
Indigent Batterers' Treatment	0.5	148,650
Battered Women's Shelters	0.1	785,994
Student Teen Employment Program	1.7	11,000
Lifeguard Training	0.33	N/A
Youth Employment Services (SYVPI)	N/A	549,520
South Park Recreation Teams, Boxing, and ESL	N/A	90,718
SPD Summer Youth Employment	portion of 2 FTEs	N/A
Neighborhood District Coordinators	11	N/A
Seattle Neighborhood Group Safe Communities	N/A	381,330
Only in Seattle	1	800,000
Street Outreach (SYVPI)	N/A	301,721
SPD Crime Prevention Coordinators	7	N/A
SPD Community Police Team Officers	21	N/A
Park Rangers	6	N/A
Total	48.63	3,068,933

Resemble Programs That Have Evidence for Increasing Crime		
School Emphasis Truancy and Suspension Reduction (SYVPI)	portion of 6 FTEs	N/A
School Emphasis Officers (SYVPI)	portion of 6 FTEs	N/A
Proactive Gang Prevention Unit	7	N/A
Total	up to 13 FTE	

Unable to Match to Research or Theory for Crime Prevention		
Prostituted Youth Residential Recovery	0.5	482,113
Prostituted Youth Advocacy	N/A	66,177
Co-STARS	N/A	400,000
CURB	0.5	247,200
GOTS	N/A	317,200
Housing First	0.25	2,332,644
Emergency Services Patrol for Inebriated Patients	N/A	542,116
Needle Exchange	N/A	406,112
Total	1.25	4,793,562