



HOW CITY MANAGERS CAN REDUCE CRIME

A Brief Guide

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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CITY MANAGERS AND CRIME REDUCTION

For over 30 years, numerous police agencies have applied an effective, evidence-based approach¹ to reducing crime: problem-oriented policing². Problem-oriented policing can reduce crime (i.e., property crime and violence) and help address other problems (e.g., pedestrian-vehicle crashes)³. Yet, most police agencies either fail to tackle crime problems or do so haphazardly.

City managers can encourage crime problem solving in two ways: 1) by fostering police problem solving, and 2) by strengthening city agencies' participation in crime problem solving⁴. The capacity of your police department to solve problems depends, in part, on the capacity of city government to solve problems.

To assist city managers, this guide and checklists highlight key elements of problem solving. Use the guide and checklists to assess your city's and police department's capacities to reduce crime. The guide's first six sections explain problem solving. The following four sections examine the foundations of problem solving. The concluding section offers an alternative if your police agency will not tackle crime problems. For more information on topics, click on the links.



A. DOES YOUR CITY AND ITS POLICE SOLVE PROBLEMS, OR DO THEY JUST HANDLE INCIDENTS?

Whether it is burglaries, shootings, traffic crashes, or anything else, the demands on your police follow patterns.⁵ When police understand what produces these patterns, they can help craft solutions⁶: solutions that prevent crime and reduce the need for the public to call the police. That is what problem-oriented policing⁷ does, and this is what is missing from other police strategies.

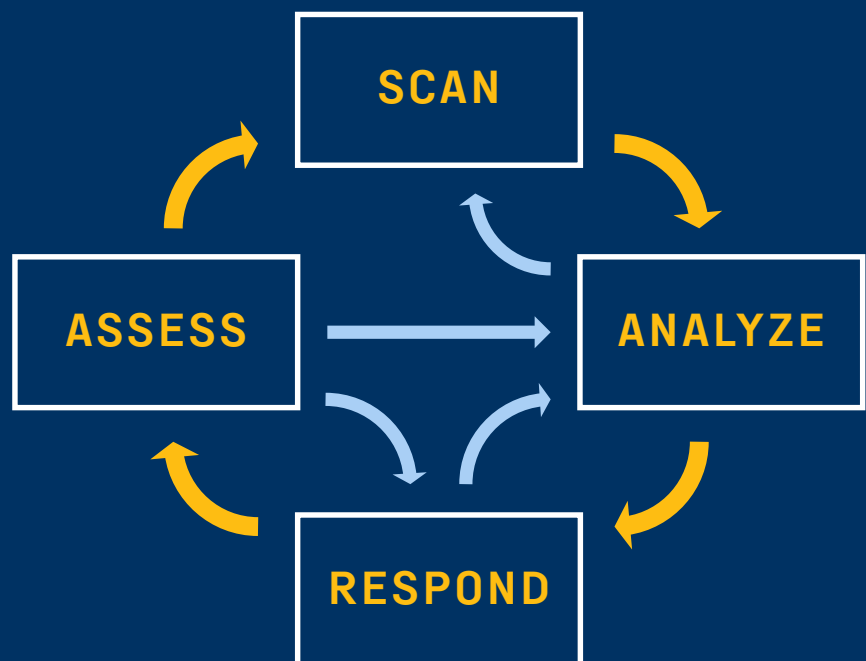
The investigation of problems and the crafting of solutions are vital to sustained and affordable crime reduction. If your police are keen on problem solving, they will need your help. If your police are not keen on problem solving, you will need to find ways to overcome their reluctance. Your efforts to encourage police problem solving in your city or town will make a significant difference in public safety.

- ☒ So, your first task is to discover if your city and police are solving crime problems (checklist items 1 - 6).

PROBLEM SOLVING

The SARA model takes its name from its four stages: scanning, analyzing, responding, and assessing. It is used by police problem-solvers worldwide. *Scanning* is the identification of a problem, from any source, and its verification. Police then *analyze* the problem to understand what creates the problem with an eye toward possible solutions. In the *response* stage police create a solution and put it to work. And in the *assessment* stage, the police evaluate the response to determine if the problem declined. If the solution did not work, then the police go back to an earlier stage to try again. At any stage, with new facts, problem solvers may go back to earlier stages and revise their plans.

Often, problem solvers shortcut the process. They leap from stating the problem (scanning) to a solution (responding), skipping analysis, ignoring evaluating the solution (assessment). By skipping analysis they do not know if the solution fits the problem and if there are useful alternative solutions. By ignoring assessment, they do not know if the solution worked. All four steps are necessary.



(Source: Step 7 in <http://popcenter.asu.edu/sites/default/files/library/reading/PDFs/60Steps.pdf>)



B. DOES YOUR CITY AND ITS POLICE APPLY THE 80/20 RULE, OR DO THEY VIOLATE THE LAW OF CRIME CONCENTRATION?

Research shows that crime is concentrated.⁸ A tiny number of your city's addresses host most of your city's crime. Most of your city's burglaries occur in a few apartment complexes. Most of the shoplifting in your city occurs at a few stores. Inevitably, crime will concentrate in a few places,⁹ involve a few repeat offenders,¹⁰ and repeatedly harm a few victims.¹¹ This is the 80/20 rule¹²: a few people and places are persistently involved in the most trouble.

Although well known, most police do not routinely apply the 80/20 rule. They should. You should not hear from them, "Crime could be anywhere at any time;" it could, but it seldom is. When the police find the repeating few, they can concentrate prevention efforts where these efforts will do the most good.

 Your second task is to promote the use of the 80/20 rule when addressing crime and other problems (checklist items 7 - 12).

THE 80/20 RULE & CRIME

Studies from around the world show that crime is concentrated. It is concentrated at places. It's concentrated among offenders. And it's concentrated among victims. And all three types of concentration have the same shape.

The figure illustrates the typical distribution of crime across places (addresses). If you list the places, from most to least crime involved (those to the left having more than those to the right), and count the volume of crime at each place, you will always see a graph like this one.

A relatively few places are involved in most of the crime (red area). To the right, most places and people are not crime involved (green). In between are some places that suffer a few crimes (orange).

Concentrating prevention on the most crime-involved places increases prevention effectiveness. The same principle holds for offenders and victims.

Crime at each place



(Source: Step 18 in <http://popcenter.asu.edu/sites/default/files/library/reading/PDFs/60Steps.pdf>)



C. DOES YOUR CITY AND ITS POLICE REMOVE CRIME OPPORTUNITIES, OR DO THEY OVERLOOK THEM?

The few places with a high concentration of crime differ from the many addresses with little or no crime. What is the difference? Those places without crime make crime difficult. Those places with a great deal of crime harbor crime opportunities. Opportunity makes crime easier and more likely. Offenders take advantage of these opportunities. If your city does not address crime opportunities, offenders will keep at it; even when police catch them,¹³ others will take their place. To solve problems, your city must remove crime opportunities.¹⁴

If your police are addressing opportunities for crime, they should be able to describe them and how they foster crime. Further, their problem-solving efforts should involve changing these circumstances to make crime less likely.



Your third task is to focus on crime opportunities (checklist items 13 - 16).

OPPORTUNITIES

There are five ways situations signal offenders there is an opportunity for crime.

Situations can tell offenders that it takes little *effort* to succeed with crime. Making crimes more effortful is a solution.

Situations can signal offenders there is a low *risk* for crime. Raising the risk for committing crime is a solution.

Situations can tell offenders that the *rewards* for crime are high. Reducing rewards is a solution.

Situations can *provoke* people to commit crime. Reducing provocations is a solution.

Finally, situations may give offenders *excuses* for crime. Removing excuses for committing crimes is a solution.

There are multiple techniques to increase effort or risk and to reduce rewards, reduce provocations, or remove excuses. Application of these techniques is called situational crime prevention.



(Source: Step 38 in <http://popcenter.asu.edu/sites/default/files/library/reading/PDFs/60Steps.pdf>)



D. DOES YOUR CITY SUPPORT THE POLICE IN TAKING A WIDE POV, OR ARE THEY MERELY TAKING AN OFFENDER PERSPECTIVE?

Crime requires a **p**lace where **o**ffenders meet **v**ictims. So, to prevent crime, police need to address these elements¹⁵: the *place* (an address, not a neighborhood), the *offender* (the person directly causing the event), and the *victim* (the person harmed by the event). Problem solvers cannot narrow their gaze to a single point of view to craft effective long-term solutions. The offender view is important, but it is not enough to put a dent in crime.¹⁶ Police need to attend to the addresses where crime repeatedly occurs¹⁷ and the people who are repeatedly harmed.¹⁸ Changing risky places and assisting repeat victims results in enduring solutions rather than temporary fixes.

You can help by asking the police what they know about places, offenders, and potential victims. A solid solution usually involves at least two POV elements and sometimes all three.

 Your fourth task is to have the city and police take a wide POV (checklist items 17 - 19).

PROBLEM ELEMENTS

All crime problems have the structure of the inner triangle. There are one or more *offenders* who come into contact with potential *victims* (people, animals, or things) at a *place*. Absent this convergence, there cannot be a crime. But when offenders, targets, and places come together, the chances of a crime are high. If this convergence happens again and again, we have a problem: repeat offending, repeat victimization, or repeat places.

The outer triangle shows who can prevent crime. Handlers are people to whom offenders are emotionally attached (e.g., parents, friends) and who try to keep potential offenders from committing crimes. *Guardians* are people who protect potential victims or targets. And *managers* are people who own or operate places. If all three of these controllers are ineffective when an offender meets a victim at a place, a crime is likely. Therefore, introducing effective handlers, guardians, or managers can solve problems.



(Source: Step 8 in <http://popcenter.asu.edu/sites/default/files/library/reading/PDFs/60Steps.pdf>)



E. DO YOUR CITY AND POLICE ENLIST OTHERS IN PROBLEM SOLVING, OR DO THE POLICE DO EVERYTHING THEMSELVES?

Addressing opportunities requires the help of others.¹⁹ If an apartment complex is the repeat location of burglaries, the owner and manager need to be involved in the solution. If a street corner is the repeat site of pedestrian-car crashes, the city's traffic engineering department must be part of the solution. If criminals repeatedly attack the unhoused, service agencies must be part of the solution.

You can help by directing the heads of your city's departments²⁰ to collaborate on problems with other departments and private organizations and share credit for solutions. If a department's or a business's activities create crime opportunities, you can help remove those opportunities.

 So, your fifth task is to foster a climate of interagency cooperation in problem solving (checklist items 20 - 24).

F. CAN YOUR CITY AND POLICE IMPROVE THEIR PROBLEM SOLVING, OR DO YOU NEED AN ALTERNATIVE?

Police should be working to solve crime problems in your community. This includes evaluating whether their efforts reduced crime. In cities where city management demands problem solving *and* police leadership understands the importance of problem solving, police have been very successful.²¹ Use the checklist to encourage your police to make problem solving a departmental priority. The checklist will also help you understand what you need to do to support problem-oriented policing. Nevertheless, if you cannot get your police to solve problems, then consider creating, within your city, a stand-alone problem-solving unit²² that solves crime problems and reduces crime.

 So, your overall task is to develop an orientation within your city's government toward solving the public's problems (checklist items 25 - 28).



PROBLEM-SOLVING CAPACITY CHECK LIST

This checklist provides a simple way to assess your police department's capacity to solve crime problems. Although it focuses on police, police cannot excel at solving problems without tangible support from other city agencies.

Though designed to be insightful, a 28-item checklist cannot be comprehensive. Use this checklist as a set of conversation starters with your police, conversations that will help your police and other city agencies address problems and help you provide them with the support they need to solve problems.

This list uses a scale from 0 to 4. Zero indicates *no* and 4 means *yes*. Numbers in between suggest levels of uncertainty: 1-vague but leaning toward no, 2-vague, and 3-vague but leaning toward yes.

Items are grouped to assess different areas of problem solving. Averaging the items' scores provides an overall assessment. Average scores above 3 indicate that your city and police have a strong problem-solving capacity. In contrast, average scores hovering around 0 suggest your city and police have minimal problem-solving capacity.

RATING SCALE: 0-no; 2-vague; 4=yes

A. DOES YOUR CITY AND ITS POLICE SOLVE PROBLEMS?		RATING
1. Your police chief gives you detailed examples of problems that the police are working on and problems that have been solved.		
2. Your police chief has a system for tracking problem-solving efforts to ensure problems are routinely identified, analyzed, and solved.		
3. Your police department has policies and procedures for how police personnel should identify, analyze, and solve problems.		
4. When you and others nominate problems to the police, the police tackle them, find solutions, and provide evidence that they are solved.		
5. You and your police chief hold people in the police department accountable for solving problems.		
6. The city and the police department consider problem-solving accomplishments when appraising employee performance for promotion and assignments.		

AVERAGE SCORE:

NOTES: What needs to be done by your police to improve routine problem solving?



B. DOES YOUR CITY AND ITS POLICE APPLY THE 80/20 RULE?	RATING
7. Your police department has a crime analysis capacity to detect and apply the 80/20 rule.	
8. The police department has a process for identifying concentrations of crime at a few addresses, and it routinely applies this process.	
9. The police department identifies the most active serious offenders.	
10. The police department looks for the people repeatedly harmed by crime.	
11. Your police chief understands how the 80/20 rule shapes crime in your city.	
12. When you examine city and police solutions to crime problems, the solutions apply the 80/20 rule.	

AVERAGE SCORE:

NOTES: What needs to be done to improve the application of the 80/20 rule?

C. DOES YOUR CITY AND ITS POLICE REMOVE CRIME OPPORTUNITIES?	RATING
13. Your police can explain why a specific problem occurs at some places and not others.	
14. Your police can explain why some people are repeat victims of specific crimes and others are not.	
15. Your police can describe how specific opportunities for trouble arise.	
16. The city and police identify ways to remove opportunities for trouble.	

AVERAGE SCORE:

NOTES: What needs to be done to increase efforts to block crime opportunities?



D. DOES YOUR CITY SUPPORT THE POLICE IN TAKING A WIDE POV?	RATING
17. When solving problems, police target the most troublesome offenders.	
18. When solving problems, the city and police aim to improve conditions at addresses with a great deal of crime.	
19. When solving problems, the city and police develop ways to protect highly vulnerable victims.	

AVERAGE SCORE:

NOTES: What needs to be done to improve the city and police's crime prevention by attending to high-crime addresses and highly vulnerable victims?

E. DO YOUR CITY AND POLICE ENLIST OTHERS TO SOLVE PROBLEMS?	RATING
20. The police ask other city departments for assistance.	
21. When police ask for assistance, they receive help.	
22. When other agencies ask the police for assistance, they receive help.	
23. Your office formally credits city departments that help police solve crime problems.	
24. The city and police ask businesses and other organizations to help solve problems.	

AVERAGE SCORE:

NOTES: What needs to be done to improve the police and the city's abilities to work with other local agencies and private organizations?



F. CAN YOUR CITY AND POLICE IMPROVE THEIR PROBLEM SOLVING?	RATING
25. The city and police have leadership that consistently and strongly fosters problem solving.	
26. The city and police routinely evaluate problem-solving efforts to determine their effectiveness at reducing crime.	
27. The city and police have the education/training, analysis capability, and management systems they need to address problems effectively.	
28. You have strong evidence that the city and police help solve community problems.	

AVERAGE SCORE:

NOTES: What else needs to be done to ensure that crime problems are solved?

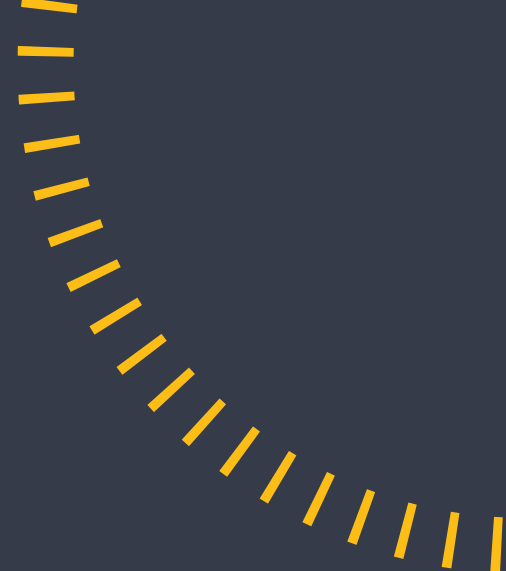


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