

The California Cities Gang Prevention Network

Santa Rosa and San Jose both house their Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force in their respective Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department. In this issue we present the history and rationale behind this placement, as well as suggest best practices for cities considering housing gang prevention initiatives in Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PR&NS). In addition, we will report on how Network cities have benefitted from CalGRIP funding.

Gang Prevention Work and the Recreation and Parks Department

History

San Jose

The Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force of San Jose evolved out of Project Crackdown, a program developed in the 1980s to combat increasing drug and gang activity. At the time of its creation, Project Crackdown, later to be called Project Reclaiming Our Youth, was the city's first inter-departmental effort to address neighborhood safety. From its inception, Project Crackdown was run by staff from PR&NS, the Police Department, and the Code Enforcement Division.

Eventually Project Crackdown strategists noticed that the director of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services, Albert Belagso, had the personality and skills necessary to direct a new program under the mayor's leadership—the Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force (MGPTF). Belagso's experience working in high-risk areas, his people skills, and his patience with youth and community members were acquired as a result of his

work with a department that, more than any other in the city, directly works with the community through programming and activities. Under the direction of Belagso, MGPTF evolved into a program with a continuum of resources to work with at-risk youth, trending away from Project Crackdown's tendency to remove them. PR&NS was also able to capitalize on its ties with community organizations and community leaders to direct them towards MGPTF's resources—making sure that all communities had equal access. PR&NS has continued to utilize its unique capacity for community engagement in its current role as co-leader (along with the Police Department) of the Crisis Intervention Team.

Santa Rosa

In 2003, city council members and other community stakeholders developed the Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force (MGPTF) of Santa Rosa in response to a rise in gang activity throughout the city. The stakeholders decided to place the Task Force in the department of PR&NS primarily because decision makers had seen the success of the San Jose Task Force model.

Politics

Representatives from both cities cite the PR&NS Department's political neutrality as essential to its success as a home for the Gang Task Force. Politically, the PR&NS Department does not face natural competitors or have a controversial reputation as do other departments.

PR&NS is uniquely positioned to have a positive relationship with a wide swath of the community because it is outside the criminal justice system. Agencies like the Police Department and Probation which often interact with community members when something negative has occurred, can meet with distrust from the community about its motives. Representatives from Santa Rosa and San Jose agree that the PR&NS Department's relationship to the community and its close ties to the mayor's office are the strongest argument for its choice as a home for gang prevention initiatives.

Process

San Jose

The traditional model of PR&NS departments does not include an anti-gang programming piece. An improved version of the department could provide traditional services as well as MGPTF programming. To determine the structure of the program, MGPTF staff first asked themselves, "If we had to design something to impact the source of gang violence, what would it look like?"

To answer this question and to help create its strategic plan, MGPTF staff reached out to the community and conducted a listening tour. During this process, the department sent staff that would form a positive rapport with the community in order to create goodwill about the future program and to get information that was as accurate and candid as possible. Out of this process came the new Youth Services of the Division of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services. Support from then Mayor Susan Hammer was crucial to the founding of this new division.

Staff eventually developed a system of managing the city that mirrors the divisions of the police department. Aligning the geographic structure of MGPTF and the Police Department has allowed for collaboration in developing strategic programming. Dividing the Task Force into distinct regions has also allowed staff, volunteers, and inter-agency participants to get to know each other and share ideas in a more personal way. In addition to the structural conduits for cross-agency collaboration in each geographic region, representatives

of San Jose's MGPTF stress that regional leads can do much to improve relationships among participating Task Force members. For example, to facilitate networking and communication, San Jose's MGPTF implemented an hour-long networking session before each Task Force Technical Team meeting. Developing a responsive plan grounded in community realities and blending prevention, intervention, and enforcement has led to significant reductions in youth violence.

Santa Rosa

Santa Rosa's MGPTF ensures effective service delivery to clients by using the California Healthy Kids survey, focus groups with nonprofits, an inter-agency operational team, police statistics, and recommendations from government consultant Peter Ellis, founding partner of Community Crime Prevention Associates.

In transforming their original departmental model to one that can serve as a home for the Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force, Santa Rosa created a new departmental model for PR&NS. Instead of having community members gather at a central location, the Task Force goes out to the neighborhoods. More than ever before, the department requires staff that are open and capable of effectively communicating with different types of people. Staffing has become of paramount importance to program success.

Staffing

According to San Jose's Esther Mota, Community Services Supervisor of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services, a primary reason for the success of the Task Force has been its decision to recruit staff from non-traditional sources to work under PR&NS. When hiring staff, Ms. Mota urges cities to keep in mind that communication with at-risk families and youth is a big part of the job. In that vein, it is important to hire a staff that is able to work well with these communities. Specifically, potential staff members should:

- Be willing to enter uncomfortable situations and manage strong emotions from community members.

- Be capable of listening to the concerns of community members.
- Be able to organize communities and spur city government to action.
- Be good communicators who are able to reach out to a wide range of people, including those in the faith-based community, former gang members, community activists, mothers of affected youth, and law enforcement.
- If working directly with youth and families, have experience and a background that youth can relate to (e.g. ex-gang members, people who speak the same language, same nationality, etc.).

Santa Rosa staffing lessons and recommendations:

- Hire from the neighborhood in order to stabilize the program, be culturally competent, establish a diverse staff, and promote positive community role models.
- Recruit from high school and college job fairs—recruit from groups whose members participated in similar programs when they were younger.
- Recruit staff who have a passion for the people that they serve.

Network Cities Receive CalGRIP Grants from the Governor’s Office of Gang and Youth Violence Policy

In 2007, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger initiated the California Gang Reduction, Intervention, and Prevention Program (CalGRIP) in order to direct state funds toward reducing gang violence. CalGRIP is directed by former U.S. Attorney, Paul Seave. CalGRIP began with the intention of implementing education, job training, and violence intervention, prevention, and suppression strategies with the goal of creating, in Gov. Schwarzenegger’s words, “a comprehensive approach to gang violence that provides a statewide framework with long-term solutions.” Each year since the program’s 2007 implementation, the Governor’s Office of Gang and Youth Violence Policy administers the CalGRIP grant which funds anti-gang initiatives in local communities through a competitive process.

Community Based Organizations (CBOs) as well as city governments in 12 of the 13 California Gang Prevention Network cities received CalGRIP grants in 2009. Four Network cities—Oakland, Oxnard, Salinas and Stockton—were also chosen to be part of the Safe Community Partnership, a public-private partnership between the Governor’s Office of Gang and Youth Violence Policy and three foundations who will provide technical assistance to cities as they implement an anti-violence strategy. The partnering foundations are The California Wellness Foundation, The California Endowment, and Kaiser Permanente Northern California Region: Community Benefits Program.

All cities that received CalGRIP grants applauded the Network for its support in the application process. Cities cited the Network’s focus on the idea of a comprehensive strategy as particularly helpful as they structured their grant applications. One city representative commented that, thanks to their participation in the Network, his city’s grantwriters “had a better understanding of the bird’s eye view” of the comprehensive strategy—insight that allowed them to write an application that fit into the CalGRIP vision of effective institutional responses to the gang problem.

City representatives also mentioned that being associated with the Network sent a clear signal to the CalGRIP office that cities with comprehensive action plans are manifestly committed to violence prevention. Being associated with the Network lends credibility to a city’s commitment to violence prevention that would not be easily communicated if cities were applying without affiliation.

Network cities plan to use their CalGrip grants in a variety of creative ways that draw on the principles of prevention, intervention, and suppression.

Two CBOs, Genesis Family Center and Youth Centers of America, received CalGRIP funding in the city of **Fresno** to expand their work with at-risk and gang-involved youth. In the past, Fresno was able to purchase a tattoo removal machine with CalGRIP dollars, which allowed it to stop contracting out this service to a local doctor.

Los Angeles' 08/09 CalGRIP funding is earmarked for Boyle Heights Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD) Zone, which was the original demonstration site for the Mayor's gang reduction strategy. The city's 09/10 allocation will fund the Rampart GRYD Zone, which is geographically LA's largest and most densely populated site. Monies will primarily pay for CBOs to provide gang-prevention and intervention services to clients in the GRYD Zones.

Oakland will combine CalGRIP with Measure Y funding to create a comprehensive homicide and shooting reduction strategy that develops street outreach, institutes call-ins, and targets anti-gang communication to people in areas that are most heavily impacted by gang violence. In addition, Oakland will focus on offering support and employment for those willing to disengage from the gang lifestyle.

The City of **Oxnard** plans to use its grant to fund *Operation PeaceWorks*, an initiative that supports 1) CBOs that work with at-risk youth and 2) employment opportunities for gang-involved youth through Oxnard's City Corps program. Specifically, the grant will fund two CBOs, the Oxnard Police Department Clergy Council and the Ventura County Chapter of Parents of Murdered Children (POMC). These organizations coordinate volunteers and faith-based groups to conduct street outreach and to provide support and assistance to the relatives of homicide victims.

Richmond intends to improve the city's case management capacity for individuals that commit and are victims of violence. The city will also develop and implement a Community Based Workforce Development Alternative that will focus on the population currently targeted by the city's street outreach workers.

Sacramento plans to fund job-training and employment opportunities for former gang members. The city will partner with SacCity Unified School District to use CalGRIP money to channel youth from juvenile justice facilities back into schools. They will also hire an individual to work in the school district to connect youth to services

The city of **Salinas** will use its CalGRIP funding to replicate the Boston Ceasefire Model. The city will also offer job training to high-risk gang members.

The city of **San Bernardino's** CalGRIP award will support the county's gang prevention work by providing access to work-experience, mentoring, job placement, educational/vocational assistance, referrals to agencies based on individual needs, and supportive services for youth between the ages of 14 and 24 who are currently involved in gang activity or deemed at-risk of gang involvement. Workforce services will enhance and assist city and county agencies in providing a collaborative approach to comprehensive services.

San Diego will use its CalGRIP grant to fund CBOs, city agencies, and the Police Department to implement a comprehensive response to violence in areas that are heavily impacted by gang activity. Specifically, San Diego's strategy will fund later hours for recreation facilities as well as a referral system that links the Police Department and CBOs to more effectively address the needs of at-risk youth. Prior to receiving CalGRIP funding, the SDPD did not have a means of referring at-risk youth to alternative programs, but instead were mandated to focus on suppression. With CalGRIP, police will be able to refer at-risk youth to contracted CBOs (e.g., the United Urban Ministries) to do an assessment of their needs.

CalGRIP funding also allowed the city of San Diego to hire an intelligence analyst whose job is to pinpoint the city's most dangerous areas and to determine the background of each criminal incident. By having one person review and look at all gang crimes, the police are better able to understand patterns underlying criminal activity.

San Francisco will use its CalGRIP funding to support the "Intensive Community Based Supervision for High Risk Probationers" program, which is a partnership among the Mayor's Office of Community Investment, the San Francisco Police Department, the Adult Probation Department, and the Sheriff's Department's No Violence Alliance (NoVA). The program will target

30 violent, young adult probationers ages 18-25 who reside in violence-impacted areas of the city. These probationers will receive specialized supervision and in-depth wrap around case management and auxiliary services. Adult Probation will create a specialized caseload for these probation referrals and work closely with NoVA to monitor probationer compliance, progress, and success. A collaborative, intensive supervision team made up of Adult Probation and the San Francisco Police Department will conduct routine compliance checks on participating probationers.

CalGRIP funding will support **Santa Rosa's** Community Action Partnership, which is a project that supports programming for high-risk, gang-involved, ex-offender and out-of-school youth in the Roseland area of Santa Rosa. The program aims to provide academic skills, employment opportunities, and self-sufficiency by providing a safe, structured, environment and intensive case management.

The city of **Stockton** will use its CalGRIP funding to expand outreach work by creating an additional Youth Outreach Worker position and provide overtime and training for already-hired outreach workers. The city will also fund Youth Outreach and Crime Prevention Community Fairs. On the suppression side, Stockton will provide overtime for special enforcement missions, purchase additional equipment, implement more training and hire a part-time crime analyst. The city also plans to create a reentry approach through training with local faith-based and community-based organizations.

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The California Endowment is a private, statewide health foundation created in 1996 with a mission to expand access to affordable, quality health care for underserved individuals and communities, and to promote fundamental improvements in the health status of all Californians.

Created in 1992 as an independent, private foundation, TCWF's mission is to improve the health of the people of California by making grants for health promotion, wellness education, and disease prevention.

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