promising approaches to addressing crime

University of Pennsylvania
Jerry Lee Center of Criminology
Forum on Crime & Justice
1015 - 18th St. NW, Wash. DC 20036
Laurie Robinson, Director

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The Indianapolis Weed and Seed Initiative: A Multi-Agency, Problem-Solving Approach to Reducing Violence in the Community

By Gwen A. Holden

In the early 1990's, Indianapolis, a metropolitan area of some 1.2 million inhabitants, began to experience a rise in the number of homicides, an emerging gang problem, and increases in drug-trafficking and gun-related violence. Today, that city is reporting significant reductions in violence at sites participating in the U. S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs' Operation Weed and Seed initiative.

Moreover, Indianapolis' early experiences under the Weed and Seed initiative have provided a platform for further collaboration among public safety officials and the community, such as mobilizing citizen involvement in the implementation of community-oriented policing beginning in 1992 and the creation of the Indianapolis Violence Reduction Partnership in 1997 to respond to a sharp increase in the number of gun homicide victimizations.

Background

Since the early 1990's, Indianapolis has been in the forefront nationally of applying the Weed and Seed community-based approach to crime reduction and neighborhood restoration to addressing violence in crime-ridden inner city neighborhoods. In 1993, Indianapolis secured official recognition for its first site under the U. S. Department of Justice's Operation Weed and Seed initiative.

Indianapolis' Weed and Seed initiative reflects the joint efforts of the U. S. Attorney's Office, the Mayor's Office, and stakeholders within the community to address crime and violence in six targeted areas of the City.

Highlighting Innovation: The Indianapolis "Weed and Seed" Strategy

Each Indianapolis Weed and Seed site must develop a strategy that articulates that site's goals and objectives and sets out a plan of action for achieving desired outcomes. The driving force behind the Indianapolis Weed and Seed initiative at each site is a steering

committee. That committee develops and oversees implementation of the Weed and Seed strategy. The steering committee's membership is comprised of government agency representatives and community stakeholders, including members of the clergy, educators, representatives of the business community, and citizens; at least 51 percent of the members of the steering committee must be residents of the Weed and Seed site.[1]

Other elements of the Weed and Seed organizational structure at each site include:

- a law enforcement/community policing subcommittee to oversee development and implementation of the "weeding" and community policing components of the strategy;
- a housing and economic development subcommittee to oversee the development and implementation of the neighborhood restoration component of the strategy;
- a social services subcommittee to oversee the development and implementation of the prevention, intervention, and treatment components of the strategy; and,
- a part-time staff person to provide support to the site steering committee and subcommittees, and to manage day-to-day activities associated with strategy implementation.

In April 1999, a Citywide Steering Committee was established to assist in the implementation of activities at the six Weed and Seed sites. That Committee's membership includes two representatives from each of the six sites as well as officials from the Mayor's Office; the Indianapolis Police Department; the U. S. Attorney's Office; federal law enforcement agencies; medical and social services providers; a local parks and recreation agency; and the United Way. Staffing for the City of Indianapolis' Weed and Seed initiative also includes a citywide director; the Weed and Seed project manager; and the Weed and Seed administrative coordinator. Coordination of "weeding" activities is provided by the Indianapolis Police Department, while assistance with "seeding" activities is provided by the Mayor's Office.

The State of Play

Indianapolis' Weed and Seed initiative has been in operation for more than nine years. The WESCO Weed and Seed initiative, named for the nonprofit organization – the Westside Cooperative Organization – that assumed responsibility for coordinating implementation of that initiative, received official recognition as Indianapolis' first Weed and Seed site in January 1993.[2]

Impressed with the accomplishments of the City's initial Weed and Seed site, Indianapolis' Mayor encouraged program officials to pursue expansion of that initiative

[1] Indianapolis Police Department. *Weed and Seed Initiative Indianapolis Indiana: Progress Report January - June 2001*. Indianapolis, Ind.: (Undated; Submitted to the U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs' Executive Office for Weed and Seed on or before July 31, 2001), at 2.
[2] *Id*.

to other areas of the City.[3] Accordingly, three additional areas – the Near Eastside (NESCO), the MidNorth, and the United Northwest Area (UNWA) – were selected as Weed and Seed sites by the Justice Department's Executive Office for Weed and Seed (EOWS) in 1997.[4] Two years later, the Southeast Umbrella Organization (SUMO) neighborhood was designated a Weed and Seed site, and in March 2001, the Coalition for Northeast Neighborhoods (C. N. N.) became the sixth Indianapolis Weed and Seed site.

WESCO has received federal funding under Operation Weed and Seed for six fiscal years, and in accordance with federal grant office policy, now must reapply for official recognition as a Weed and Seed site in order to be eligible for further grant funding. The initial Weed and Seed sites – NESCO, MidNorth, and UNWA – were awarded fourth year funding by the EOWS in May of 2001. SUMO, the fourth expansion site of the Indianapolis Weed and Seed initiative, received an award for second year funding in June 2001. C. N. N., which was accorded official recognition as a Weed and Seed site in March 2001, recently was awarded its first grant from the EOWS.

Does Weed & Seed make a difference?

The five Indianapolis Weed and Seed sites for which crime statistics currently are available each are reporting decreases in crime.[5] WESCO, which began collecting crime statistics in July 1993, reported a 20 percent reduction in crime through June 2001. The three initial expansion sites have reported decreases in crime from July 1997 through June 2001 as follows: NESCO, 26 percent; MidNorth, 22 percent; and UNWA, 19 percent. SUMO, which began collecting crime statistics in July 1999, reported a 4 percent drop in crime through June 2000. While empirical research has not been conducted to measure the specific impact of the Weed & Seed program on these crime decreases, local participants believe Weed & Seed has been a primary contributor.

Collectively, other accomplishments reported by Indianapolis Weed and Seed sites include:

- enabling, facilitating, and guiding full implementation of community-oriented policing;
- carrying out targeted law enforcement operations, including prostitution sweeps and enhanced police presence in suspected drug-trafficking areas;
- identifying and eliminating crime-prone "hot spots" within neighborhoods, such as abandoned buildings and retail outlets suspected of hosting drug sales;
- rehabilitating and restoring neighborhood properties, such as parks, commercial business facades, and deteriorating public housing projects;
- sponsoring neighborhood "community mobilization" activities, including block parties, street fairs, and sports events;

[3] Telephone conversation with Liz Allison, weed coordinator and grants manager for the Indianapolis Police Department, Jan. 7, 2002.

[4] Indianapolis Police Department. *Indianapolis Weed and Seed Initiative*. [An overview of the background, organization, and activities of the Indianapolis Weed and Seed Initiative]. Indianapolis, Ind.: (Undated), at 1.

[5] *Supra* note 1. See report sections covering activities of individual Indianapolis Weed and Seed sites. C. N. N., the sixth Indianapolis Weed and Seed site, recently began implementation of its strategic plan.

- increasing the availability of affordable housing; and,
- expanding community services, including after school and home rehabilitation programs.

Finally, the weed coordinator for the Indianapolis Police Department observed that citizen partners in the Indianapolis Weed and Seed initiative are an impressively powerful force behind the success of that initiative. Neighborhood residents not only participate in the development and implementation of Weed and Seed strategies, she explained, "they tell us what to do."[6]

Challenges

Sustaining community mobilization and securing long-term funding to continue and expand activities at Weed and Seed sites head the list of challenges that the Indianapolis Weed and Seed initiative will face over the long-term. Citizen participation in the leadership structure at Indianapolis Weed and Seed sites has been instrumental in the accomplishments of the initiative to this point. Retaining and recruiting residents therefore will be critical to the continued success of that initiative into the future.[7]

As federal funding support for Weed and Seed activities in Indianapolis declines, program officials are beginning to explore alternative sources of financing for Weed and Seed activities. Securing adequate support for continued funding of staff at Weed and Seed sites is of particular concern.[8]

To Learn More: Available Resources

- Executive Office for Weed and Seed. *Implementation Manual*. U. S. Dept. of Justice, Office of Justice Programs: Washington, D. C. (Undated). Online Vers.: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/eows/impmanl.htm>
- Indianapolis Police Department. *Indianapolis Weed and Seed Initiative*. [An overview of the background, organization, and activities of the Indianapolis Weed and Seed Initiative]. Indianapolis, Ind.: (Undated).
- Indianapolis Police Department. *Weed and Seed Initiative Indianapolis Indiana: Progress Report January - June 2001*. Indianapolis, Ind.: (Undated; Submitted to the U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs' Executive Office for Weed and Seed on or before July 31, 2001).

Gwen A. Holden is a consultant specializing in legislative, policy, and administrative issues in criminal and juvenile justice. Ms. Holden served as executive vice president of the National Criminal Justice Association (NCJA) a Washington, D. C.-based special interest group that represents states on crime control and public safety issues, from 1984 to 1996.

[6] *Supra* note 3.
[7] *Supra* note 1, at 44.
[8] *Id*.