

SAN BERNARDINO | CALIFORNIA

BCJI 2012 PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION AWARD (\$1,000,000/36 Months)

Lead Agency: Institute for Public Strategies

Faced with challenges that included a municipal bankruptcy and a change in City Hall leadership, the San Bernardino Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation team adjusted its strategy by building new alliances and launching programs that have had long-lasting results.



Before and after: A garbage-strewn lot in Central San Bernardino is cleaned up and a mural added by residents as part of BCJI efforts to revitalize the community.

The partners in San Bernardino who worked together on the city's Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation (BCJI) initiative learned many lessons about how to plan and implement a sustainable public safety initiative. But no lesson was more important than the power of persistency.

Very early in the three-year BCJI grant period, the City of San Bernardino entered bankruptcy and laid off more than a thousand city employees. In addition, due to a massive recall effort, the initiative's original partners—including the mayor and several city council members, as well as officials such as the chief of police—were voted out of office and a new slate of city officials were elected. As important or even more so, decades of disinvestment and municipal neglect of the target community caused residents to feel disengaged from their neighbors and their neighborhood and were skeptical of another new crime reduction effort.

These hurdles forced the BCJI partners to be creative in thinking about how to build support for their carefully constructed plans. To get new city leadership to commit some of its very limited municipal resources, the BCJI partnership coordinator, the Institute for Public Strategies (IPS), focused on getting small wins and getting the community on board, in part through a media campaign to foster residents' understanding about the program. A survey of the community was carefully constructed to signal to residents that this crime program was different

The BCJI Approach

These powerful themes run through all BCJI projects.

DATA-DRIVEN

BCJI targets crime hot spots – often streets, properties or public spaces in communities that have struggled with crime for years. Researchers are engaged in the day-to-day work, helping partners examine problems, assess evidence-based solutions, and monitor progress.

COMMUNITY-ORIENTED

BCJI champions active roles for residents in identifying problems, selecting strategies and creating safe and healthy environments.

SPURS REVITALIZATION

BCJI tackles problem properties, unsafe streets and parks, unemployment, transit barriers and service gaps related to crime.

BUILDS PARTNERSHIPS

BCJI taps the resources of public, nonprofit and community leaders to bring more resources and different approaches to bear on longstanding crime challenges for lasting change.

than those in the past, and the research partner used crime data and research to focus on the link between environmental factors and crime to build momentum behind the BCJI approach from residents and city officials.

This multi-pronged approach achieved success leading to buy-in on the project goals from the new mayor and the city council. In the implementation phase, the BCJI research partner, Dr. Robert Nash Parker of the University of California, Riverside, worked closely with the police department on new initiatives like hot-spot bike patrols. An economic development expert brought in as a consultant to collaborate with business leaders collected data that helped convince the city to dedicate significant resources to support business development. These efforts also attracted investment from outside funders. Residents brought in neighbors to clean up areas where blight had manifested and to work with city agencies to address vacant properties where crime was most prevalent.

Though crime data and results in a before-and-after community efficacy survey were largely unchanged at the conclusion of the BCJI grant period, the team kept working. More than six months after BCJI funds ended, they scored a major victory when the city directed Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to the BCJI target area. As important, relationships, initiatives and ideas that the BCJI program seeded in the city continued. Throughout it all, San Bernardino's BCJI team understood that the challenges in the target area developed over a long period of time and that it would take a persistent and sustained team of residents, local businesses, community organizations and foundations, and city officials to accomplish their goals.

San Bernardino's Target Area

Central San Bernardino has been identified by city officials as one of the most violent areas of the city and one of the most transient.

Located about 60 miles east of Los Angeles, San Bernardino is a highly urbanized and densely populated city with residents primarily of African American and Hispanic/Latino descent. Housing costs are 47 percent lower than the rest of the state, which has made the city a viable destination for those seeking a more affordable cost

of living. Over the past two decades, there has also been a reported influx of gang members from Los Angeles.

The BCJI target area, Central San Bernardino, has been identified by city officials not only as one of the most violent areas the city—it has twice the number of crimes than other comparable high-crime areas surrounding the city—but also as one of the most transient. More than 90 percent of residences are occupied by renters with the average length of occupancy estimated to be one year.

According to interviews with residents and public officials, crime is centered on the area's larger problems of joblessness and poverty: More than 40 percent of the residents have not completed high school. Abandoned properties and absentee landlords provide cover for criminal activity, and several alcohol outlets attract crime. Overall, San Bernardino has twice the concentration of facilities that sell alcohol than what is recommended by the California Alcohol and Beverage Control.

In 2012, the City of San Bernardino filed for bankruptcy, and city services were reduced. Law enforcement, schools, and code enforcement, which were already struggling to address community concerns, now faced even greater resource challenges. Residents grew even more frustrated that many streets within the San Bernardino BCJI target area were not being maintained, and the business community called for more trash bins, trash pick-ups and re-painting curbs.

Planning with Data and Outreach

The survey process was designed to not only get a greater understanding of residents' perceptions, but also to engage them in the BCJI initiative.

During the planning phase of the San Bernardino BCJI grant, IPS facilitated monthly meetings of the Drug Free San Bernardino Coalition, which brought together government agencies, elected city officials, law enforcement agencies, education, health service, and prevention agencies, members of the faith community, neighborhood associations, and parents from the community.

At the start, residents who had already seen various "new" crime initiatives come and go, were skeptical. Central San Bernardino had previously received federal

resources that did not focus on addressing the underlying issues that created opportunities for criminal activity in the area. To address this skepticism, IPS and Parker made data a central focus in community presentations. Together, they looked for how the information aligned with the public's perception of where crime was taking place, who was committing most criminal offenses, and why crimes were happening at specific hot spot locations.

Initially, there was some impatience about the data collection process. Many project members and residents felt they already knew the community's challenges. However, Parker maintained that it was important to connect environmental factors (about which residents were most concerned) and crime data (which was the primary interest of law enforcement). Addressing both was a critical difference between BCJI and other crime reduction strategies, and that made both sides more interested in working towards a collaborative implementation strategy.

Also important was an inclusive process to survey residents. The goal of the survey was not only to get a greater understanding of the residents' perceptions of crime and safety, but to also engage residents in the BCJI process. Because the research team was made aware that residents had previously been surveyed several times prior during previous crime reduction efforts, they spent extra time to carefully consider how the survey would be presented, including creating an Institutional Review Board of community leaders to review the survey, provide input, and approve the final product.

To administer the survey, the BCJI team worked with an established local church to secure more than 100 volunteers to go door to door. They also identified block leaders to ensure every housing and apartment unit was visited and that at least one of the two survey workers who canvassed in pairs spoke fluent Spanish. Further, through a partnership with a local market, they were able to obtain donations outside of the federal funds to offer residents who opened their doors a bag of groceries and, if they completed the survey, an additional gift card. Residents were also invited to an informal "meet and greet" event that evening, where BCJI staff introduced the project and signed up residents who wanted to be involved long-term.

The survey team visited 800 addresses and garnered 444 responses. According to the survey results, the public

wanted to see a reduction in public drug and alcohol usage, thefts, prostitution, and drug dealing, as well as better maintenance of properties and sidewalks that had fallen into disrepair.

Surveying with Special Care

Before they began to administer their community survey, the BCJI team in San Bernardino addressed the following issues:

- Assessing the relevance of measuring positive and/or negative interactions between community members and law enforcement
- Keeping the survey to a reasonable length
- Deciding if it was acceptable to provide incentives provided by outside sources to encourage participation
- Ensuring the safety of those conducting the survey
- Countering any feeling among local residents that they are simply test subjects or that local change is impossible
- Changing the name of community events from "Block Parties" because of possible negative connotations for long-time residents

Recovering from a Political Challenge

After losing political allies in the city, the BCJI team were forced to use new strategies to build engagement with community residents and other local stakeholders

Using the community survey, crime data analysis, and residential involvement, the BCJI team created a list of addresses with the highest concentrations of Part 1 crime and a map of apartment complexes with the most code violations. These properties were selected for programmatic interventions, including plans for Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), engaging landlords or property managers, and increased law enforcement activities.

As implementation began however, IPS was faced with an unexpected challenge; their initial coalition fell apart due to a political recall effort. City officials who were key in securing the BCJI grant were replaced by new city government leadership, and BCJI strategies involving collaboration with city departments stalled. To regroup, the BCJI team focused on a two-pronged strategy: IPS 1) built relationships with the media to get stories to the public that highlighted BCJI efforts and 2) formed collaborations with large community foundations that could help sustain and even supplement their work.

The IPS media team and program coordinator Sandra Espadas scheduled meetings with city reporters and editors to inform them about the BCJI project and neighborhood goals, and got back in touch when there were community activities, resulting in multiple media outlets covering events such as community clean-ups. Media was also engaged to build momentum for policy changes that addressed issues such as the connection between abandoned properties and crime.

An engaged media became influential in getting the new local government officials to reach out to IPS and the BCJI team. While IPS had provided the new officials information about BCJI efforts, including a large community meeting that had been planned, only one local councilmember attended. But after other council members were unable to respond to media requests for comments on the topic, other elected officials and city leaders quickly called IPS to get more information about the project and how they could be more involved.

Espadas also sought to address one of the major points of skepticism of residents: Once funding ended for prior crime reduction efforts of any type, the programs dissolved and crime rates again went up. IPS actively engaged grant-making agencies such as National Community Renaissance (CORE), Neighborhood Housing Services for the Inland Empire (NHSIE), Habitat for Humanity, NeighborWorks, and Bank of America to support BCJI efforts. Efforts to connect with CORE and NHSIE resulted in those organizations investing critical resources to build in CPTED strategies into local revitalization efforts. These “non-traditional” partners have continued support BCJI project goals past the end of the BCJI grant.

Proactive Policing and Revitalization Efforts

The reconnection to city officials was the beginning of a reinvigorated partnership.

Working from an idea from the police to patrol crime hot spot locations via bike, the BCJI revised their budget to purchase bikes for the police department and to fund several hot-spot bike deployments. Officers indicated that bike patrols provided great opportunity for resident interactions and to better understand their perspective on why certain locations were attracting criminal activities. When they learned that poor lighting and overgrowth of trees and bushes were big issues for visibility that let residents feel safe in their surroundings, they presented these concerns to local utility Southern California Edison, and through partnerships with other collaborative organizations and funders, including the City, created a “LIGHTS ON!” initiative based upon CPTED principles about improved lighting at hot spot locations.

IPS also established a group of 15 dedicated residents who provide input to police, city officials, and the business community. These and other residents have become involved in projects to improve the physical environment within the San Bernardino target area, such as cleaning up a lot that had become an open air dumpster and painting the fence with a mural, making the neighborhood a better place to live and showing a culture change within the community.

Working with Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), which manages and delivers the technical assistance program for the BCJI grantees, the San Bernardino team also looked at various revitalization efforts. One concern centered around next steps if/when they were able to shut down places of business that were attracting criminal activity. Would those vacant buildings become even more attractive to criminal activity? Was a plan in place to ensure the buildings did not remain vacant?

Over the next several months, the BCJI team reached out to businesses throughout the corridor to let them know about the BCJI program and ask what specific action steps they wanted to see to improve the community, make it safer, and attract more business. One business priority was to have their curbs repainted red. While

seemingly a minor issue, the red curbs deterred illegal parking, made intersections easier to enter and exit, and provided space for bus stops. Through collaborations IPS had formed with local organizations, they were re-painted within a week.

After seeing successful changes as a result to BCJI efforts, the business community wanted to become more involved in advocating for changes. With the support of the BCJI team, they formed the Neighborhood Transformation Collaborative, which met monthly to build support for the BCJI plans and worked closely with local city council members to advocate for the project with other city officials.

At the end of 2016, the coalition-building efforts paid off when the City of San Bernardino agreed to allocate \$250,000 in CDBG funds for a business facade program and a small business opportunity center. They also agreed that enforcement operations would begin at two businesses that had been identified as areas of persistent crime activity.

At the conclusion of the BCJI implementation phase, crime data and community efficacy data was largely unchanged. Yet the initiatives and momentum that the BCJI grant began have remained. Solutions are in place to address the challenges that have historically led to criminal activity in the area: joblessness, low educational attainment, and poor housing conditions. Local businesses are working with city officials to create a business district that will provide more opportunities for employment and development of job skills. Collaborative partners are working towards building a community center that will provide safe spaces and activities for youth and their parents.

Residents, once skeptical of crime reduction efforts, felt like ICP and the BCJI team listened and heard their voice during this process. Because the BCJI team developed this clear direction, the business community and the city have continued working together post-BCJI implementation to improve the physical space in and around the hot-spot areas within the San Bernardino target area. Due to these ongoing collaborations, local organizations have stepped in to ensure the partnership has the financial backing to be sustained for years to come.

Organizations and individuals who worked on BCJI believe that looking long term, the persistent and sustained effort will increase community efficacy in the target area, decrease crime, and create new long-term opportunities for residents and the business community within the San Bernardino BCJI target area.

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