



The Community Safety Strategy

Women and Community Safety Fact Sheet #5

Women's fear and experiences of violence, and the impact of these on women's participation in community life, was the catalyst for the first safe city initiatives in Canada. The Safer Communities approach to crime prevention was built on the recognition that focusing on women's personal security issues was not only necessary, but would lead to safer communities for **all** citizens.

The safer communities approach enables us to effectively address the complex nature of women's personal security issues through integrating a range of physical, social **and** institutional measures. An effective safer communities initiative requires a combination of broad-based long term preventative strategies, and immediate community-based prevention measures, focussing on those most at risk.

Strategies for building safer communities must be based on an understanding of both the physical and social obstacles to safety experienced by women. They must include both planning and community development improvements and ensure ongoing consideration of women's safety in decision-making processes.

It is essential that this work be carried out at the local level, and that it be guided by a collaborative community-based process. The process must include meaningful and comprehensive inquiry into community safety issues and needs; and a collaborative process of analysis, planning and action.

The process of developing the community safety strategy requires:

- solid leadership and a partnership effort involving the whole community;
- meaningful community involvement that highlights the perspective of those most vulnerable to violence;
- a comprehensive process of inquiring about women's needs and issues;
- safety audits of community environments; and
- an integrated strategy with supporting processes and mechanisms for implementing solutions.

There are five distinct stages to this process:

- Creating a community partnership structure
- Information gathering, community consultation and involvement
- Developing a plan (data analysis and action planning)
- Moving from words to action: Implementation
- Monitoring and Evaluation

The Community Safety Initiative

Stage One: Committee Development

A strong partnership between local government, women's and other community organizations is key to the development of an integrated community safety strategy that addresses women's safety concerns. Local government is in an ideal position to provide leadership and structure in this area. It is important that women's safety be a formally recognized component of the committee's mandate. The committee structure must also ensure representation that reflects the diversity of the community.

Stage Two: Defining and Developing the Initiative

The second stage involves developing a plan and outlining the steps that will be taken to identify community concerns and solutions. Members of the committee will need to identify the steps that will achieve the goals of the partnership; identify resources that will be needed and how they will be obtained; and define roles and responsibilities of each member.

Stage Three: Community Consultation and Involvement

Community research and consultation is a standard procedure in many facets of community work. However, it is critical to remember that understanding issues specific to women and other vulnerable groups requires a range of information that is often not obtained through commonly used research methods and avenues. This stage will involve:

- Conducting community background research to obtain information on community demographics, socio-economic data, planning and other regulatory mechanisms, past and current initiatives.
- Conducting community consultation and mobilize the community through a variety of methods including outreach, media, meetings, surveys, focus groups.
- Carrying out Safety audits to examine places and factors that are identified as problematic in the community.
- Compiling and analyzing the data and preparing to form recommendations.
- Establishing and adopting short, medium and long-term goals and benchmarks for program development and implementation.
- Identify existing resources, as well as resources needed for implementation.

Stage Four: Moving from Words to Action

A **process** is needed for moving recommendations forward. Although the process might vary, it must be guided by objectives with measurable outcomes. At the same time, it must be flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances. Depending on the scope of the strategy, there will be many possible ways to organize and carry out the process of implementation, but it must be done within an articulated framework, the cornerstones of which are structure and process. Whatever structure is chosen, process remains key; good process will ensure that action does take place, and that it is monitored and assessed for quality.

Stage Five: Monitoring and Evaluation

At this point you need to assess whether or not you are doing what you said you would do, and whether changes made have been effective. The goals, objectives and activities that you articulated at the beginning of the process form the basis for evaluating your progress. Use a range of methods and measurements such as user satisfaction surveys, process evaluations and before and after comparisons. At intervals, a comprehensive progress report should be prepared and shared widely.

For more information, check out "Women and Community Safety: a resource book on planning for safer communities" available from the Women and Community Safety Project, or online at www.saferfutures.org.