

SARA (Scanning, Analysis, Response, Assessment)

The problem solving process developed to implement problem oriented policing consists of a four step, decision-making model, **SARA** (Scanning, Analysis, Response, Assessment).

SCANNING - Individuals determine problems through:

- ◆ Personal experience with location, activity, or the behavior that has come to police/community attention; and
- ◆ Communication with residents, businesses, or other public or private agencies
- ◆ Other officers or other employees

A **problem** is two or more incidents, which are similar in nature, are causing harm or have the potential to cause harm, and the public expects the police agency to handle the problem. Similarities among incidents include:

- ◆ Person
- ◆ Location
- ◆ Behavior
- ◆ Time

ANALYSIS - Problem solvers learn everything possible about the players, incidents, and actions already used to try to deal with the problem. Analysis should be as thorough, creative, and innovative as the response because the characteristics of each problem vary. Two basic questions that should be asked are:

- ◆ What do I want to know about this problem?; and
- ◆ Who could provide an answer to the question?

To assist the problem solvers, questions regarding the problem should revolve around: Location, Suspect/Offenders, and Victim/Complainants.

If an individual understands all of the components of a problem, that person can create a custom-made response to fit the problem.

RESPONSE - Based on careful analysis, individuals then develop a goal which can be reached using a custom-made response. Solutions can be designed to:

- ◆ Eliminate the problem
- ◆ Reduce the problem
- ◆ Reduce the harm created by the problem
- ◆ Deal with the problem better
- ◆ Remove the problem from police consideration

By removing the problem from police consideration, the invested party gives the problem to the individual or agency that can better handle the problem.

ASSESSMENT - Individuals evaluate effectiveness. Did the problem solver achieve their goal? It may include:

- ◆ Reduced calls for service or reported crime
- ◆ Satisfied residents or businesses
- ◆ A more manageable problem
- ◆ Policy makers (Chief, Staff Officers, Elected Officials) notice a difference in complaints or comments.

Assessment allows the problem solver to determine what effect the response had on a problem. If the response had little or no effect, more analysis can be completed so that a more appropriate response can be applied. If the response resulted in a positive change, the problem solver can determine what, if anything, is needed to maintain the change

WHAT IS A PROBLEM?

Repeat incidents occurring in a community

Related Characteristics

Behavior

Location

People

Time

Concerns the community and the police

- ◆ Single isolated incidents do not require a Problem Solving Approach
- ◆ A problem is something that concerns or causes harm to citizens, not just the police. Police need to work in partnership with the community to identify needs and concerns.
- ◆ Addressing problems means more than quick fixes; it means dealing with conditions that create problems.
- ◆ Police officers must routinely and systematically investigate problems before trying to solve them, just as they routinely and systematically investigate crimes before they make an arrest. Individual officers and the department as a whole must develop routines and systems for investigating problems.
- ◆ The investigation of problems must be thorough even though it may not need to be complicated. This principal is as true for problem investigation as it is for criminal investigation.
- ◆ Problems must be described precisely and accurately and broken down into specific aspects of the problem. Problems often aren't what they first appear to be.
- ◆ The way the problem is currently being handled must be understood and the limits of effectiveness must be openly acknowledged in order to come up with a better response.
- ◆ Initially, any and all possible responses to a problem should be considered so as not to cut short potentially effective responses. Suggested responses should follow from what is learned during the investigation. They should not be limited to, nor rule out, the use of arrest.
- ◆ The police must proactively try to solve problems rather than just react to the harmful consequences of problems.
- ◆ The police department must increase the police officers' and detectives' freedom to make or participate in important decisions. At the same time, officers must be accountable for their decision-making.

WHY ORGANIZE?

- ◆ Knowing your neighbors is the first step toward improving the quality of life in your community.
- ◆ There is power in numbers. You are more likely to get better lighting on your block, for example, if you ask as a group.
- ◆ By creating relationships on your block, you create a safer environment for your family. Kids know who to ask for help when they are alone and elderly residents have more resources.
- ◆ Starting a neighborhood watch group is pro-active. People feel less vulnerable.

BEFORE THE FIRST MEETING:

- ◆ You don't have to work alone. Find someone to help out. When more people are involved in the organizing, more people will participate.
- ◆ Distribute fliers about your first meeting. Give an address and explain the purpose of the meeting. Include the time, but don't plan to meet for more than an hour and a half.
- ◆ Make it a point to personally invite a few neighbors on the block to the meeting. A good turnout motivates others.

AT THE FIRST MEETING:

- ◆ Serve a light snack. Food offers a great opportunity to socialize.
- ◆ Use a sign-in sheet asking for names, addresses, and phone numbers.
- ◆ Set the tone. Your dual purpose is to identify concerns and to establish a communication network. Point out successes.
- ◆ Stay on schedule. An agenda is useful for staying on track.
- ◆ Project optimism and your enthusiasm will be contagious.
- ◆ Be sure to start with introductions. Ask neighbors to give their address, how long they have lived there, and to talk about their families.
- ◆ Ask neighbors to list their top concerns. Have someone take notes.

DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN:

- ◆ Reach consensus on the group's top priority for taking action.
- ◆ Volunteer to contact an appropriate city or police agency to get more information. When you volunteer first, others are likely to offer help.
- ◆ Identify stakeholders in the problem or concern; make sure they are invited to the next meeting.
- ◆ Follow the problem-solving model to address the concerns.
- ◆ Ask for volunteers to help prepare for the next meeting.

FLIERS

- ◆ Fliers are an inexpensive way to distribute timely information. You can include more information than on a postcard and distribute more widely.
- ◆ By tri-folding, you can mail fliers without envelopes.
- ◆ Use volunteers to distribute fliers by hand, do not use mailboxes for hand-delivery.

NEWSLETTERS

- ◆ Newsletters are often the glue that binds communities. Try to make them informative, inclusive, balanced, consistent, timely, on schedule, and a cooperative neighborhood effort.
- ◆ Find out whom in the neighborhood has a computer and the skills to design a newsletter.
- ◆ Try using small amounts of advertising to offset the cost of printing. Local restaurants, theaters, and shops may want to run coupons to jumpstart business in the neighborhood.

BROCHURES/ WELCOME PACKAGES

- ◆ When new residents move into the neighborhood, tell them about your group and include them in your mailings.
- ◆ A local realtor can provide you with lists of new residents.
- ◆ A brochure is relatively inexpensive and should include a list of board members, a membership directory (if available), a recent newsletter and a schedule of upcoming meetings.
- ◆ Make the effort to hand deliver the package and take the time to welcome each resident.

PHONE SERVICES

- ◆ Telephone trees - Organizations use this communication method to spread information quickly. Each person on the tree agrees to call x-number of people, who also agree to call x-number of people.
- ◆ Voice mail and answering machines allow you to leave and receive messages between issues of your newsletter.
- ◆ Some cellular phone companies such as AT&T will provide free cell phones and airtime for neighborhood group events and walking patrols.

“WHERE DO I START?”

This is a common question asked by those who have never used problem solving to deal with recurring problems. The following **Problem Solving Process Forms** are designed to assist you in starting and working through problem solving projects. These items are meant to stimulate thinking about creative problem solving, not to limit you to a standardized process that is appropriate for every problem.

SCANNING

1. **What is occurring? Describe the problem (be specific).**
 - ◆ Crime Problem: drugs, theft, burglary, robbery, vice, liquor, juvenile, car prowls, noise violations
 - ◆ Environmental/crime related: litter, abandoned autos, health problems, traffic, abandoned property/buildings, transients
2. **Where is it Occurring?**
3. **When is it Occurring?**
4. **How is it impacting the community?**
5. **How did this problem come to your attention?**
6. **Is an immediate response required (arrest, warrants, etc.)?**

Crime Triangle ▲

1. Who does this problem affect?
 - ◆ list all victims, suspects, and locations
2. Who are the guardians?
 - ◆ list all people or things that exercise some control over each side of the triangle to make it more resistant to crime

ANALYSIS

1. **List the questions you have for each individual or group that is affected by this problem. What specific source would you go to for the answer?**
 - ◆ Interviews complainant, victim, defendant, witnesses
 - ◆ Surveys of affected parties formal and informal
 - ◆ Personal Observations
 - ◆ Information from other officers
 - ◆ Information from other units in department
 - ◆ Information from agencies public and private
 - ◆ Information from community/business/associations
 - ◆ Crime Analysis information
 - ◆ Crime/arrests reports
 - ◆ Information from other police departments
2. **Redefine the problem. How has the problem changed from when you started the process? What else do you know about the problem? Is there a need for more information?**

RESPONSE

1. **What are your goals of your problem solving process, both short and long term? What are you trying to accomplish?**
2. **What strategies can you apply to solve this problem? What resources are needed?**

Possible Resources:

- ◆ High visibility patrol
- ◆ Block Watch/Community Meeting
- ◆ Refer to appropriate agency
- ◆ Organize Community
- ◆ Obtain assistance for public/private agencies
- ◆ Obtain assistance from other units in the police department
- ◆ Obtain assistance from the media
- ◆ Aggressive enforcement of the applicable laws and regulations
- ◆ Tactical action plan
- ◆ Abatement
- ◆ Education programs regarding problem
- ◆ Change in local, state, and federal laws
- ◆ Change in reporting procedures, dispatch policy, etc.
- ◆ Neighborhood environmental changes (lighting, roads, etc.)

ASSESSMENT

1. **What specific measures will you use to access the effectiveness of your problem solving effort?**
 - ◆ Changes in calls for service, crime reporting, perception of the problem
 - ◆ Will the problem arise again?
 - ◆ Is there some form of monitoring required? Did you achieve your goal?



SCANNING

What is occurring? Describe the Problem (be specific)

Where is it occurring?

When is it occurring?

How is it impacting the community?

How did this problem come to your attention?

Who is affected by this problem?

Victims

Suspects

Locations

Who are the guardians?



ANALYSIS

List questions you have for each individual or group that is affected by this problem.
What specific source would you go to for the answer?

QUESTION

SOURCE

Go back to SCANNING. Does the problem need to be redefined?

