

WHAT IS WEED AND SEED?

Overview

In 1991, the U.S. Department of Justice established Operation Weed and Seed—a community-based multi-agency approach to law enforcement, crime prevention, and neighborhood restoration. The goals of Weed and Seed are to control violent crime, drug trafficking, and drug-related crime in targeted high-crime neighborhoods and provide a safe environment free of crime and drug use for residents. The Weed and Seed strategy brings together federal, state, and local crime-fighting agencies, social service providers, representatives of the public and private sectors, prosecutors, business owners, and neighborhood residents under the shared goal of weeding out violent crime and gang activity while seeding in social services and economic revitalization. Weed and Seed began with three pilot sites in 1991 and has spread quickly to more than 350 high-crime neighborhoods across the nation.

The Weed and Seed strategy is a two-pronged approach to crime control and prevention:

1. Law enforcement agencies and prosecutors cooperate in “weeding out” criminals and criminal activity from the target area
2. “Seeding” brings prevention, intervention, treatment, and neighborhood revitalization services to the target area.

The Weed and Seed approach is unique when compared to traditional crime prevention approaches of the past. The strategy is based on collaboration, coordination, community participation, and leveraging resources. Weed and Seed sites maximize existing programs and resources by coordinating and integrating existing federal, state, local, and private sector initiatives, criminal justice efforts, and social services. The strategy also puts heavy emphasis on community participation.

Residents of Weed and Seed neighborhoods are actively involved in problem solving in their community. Neighborhood watches, citizen marches and rallies, clean-up events, drug-free zones, and graffiti removal are some of the common programs that encourage community participation and help prevent crime.

Fundamental Principles

Four fundamental principles underlie the Weed and Seed strategy. These include collaboration, coordination, community participation, and leveraging resources. These principles set Weed and Seed apart from traditional approaches of the past and are key to the success of the strategy at the neighborhood level.

Collaboration

A host of government departments at the federal, state, and local levels; social service agencies; community organizations; private sector businesses; and residents play important roles in community safety. Each has a responsibility to the community and a stake in its future. In the past, these stakeholders didn't have many opportunities to coordinate and share information, let alone plan strategically. Weed and Seed requires communities to establish a collaborative process to capitalize on the full potential that the formal and intentional interaction of stakeholders can provide. Collaboration leads to:

- ✓ Permanent channels of communications among stakeholders
- ✓ Partnerships among organizations with similar goals
- ✓ A strategic approach to effective crime prevention and restoration
- ✓ Innovation
- ✓ Broader support for the Weed and Seed strategy
- ✓ Additional resources and support.

Coordination

The number of government agencies and community organizations providing services to our citizens is breathtaking. You may not even be aware of the many service providers in your area, the goals and objectives of each organization, and where there are overlapping and duplicative services. Weed and Seed brings together the officials who represent these organizations and assists in coordinating their activities. Both vertical coordination across disciplines such as law enforcement, social services, and economic development and horizontal coordination, such as across levels of government, are critical to the Weed and Seed strategy. Coordination enables

- ✓ Effective concentration of resources in designated neighborhoods
- ✓ Better match of services with community needs
- ✓ Identification and elimination of overlap and duplication
- ✓ Maximum benefit from existing services and programs.

Community Participation

Communities that are empowered to solve their own problems function more effectively than communities that depend on services provided by “outsiders.” Workers who own part of the company are more committed than those who simply collect a paycheck. Initiatives that empower communities to help themselves, involve residents in decision-making processes, and encourage broad citizen involvement will be more effective than those designed to simply provide services to people or clients.

Clients are people who are dependent upon and controlled by their helpers and leaders. Clients are people who understand themselves in terms of their deficiencies and people who wait for others to act on their behalf. Citizens, on the other hand, are people who understand their own problems in their own terms. Citizens perceive their relationship to one another and they believe in their capacity to act. Good clients make bad citizens. Good citizens make strong communities.

Leveraging Resources

The Executive Office for Weed and Seed disseminates funding to local sites in support of their Weed and Seed strategies. These funds are limited, however, and cannot provide the entire amount of resources required to transform and revitalize a neighborhood experiencing high crime and social and economic decay. Therefore, the Weed and Seed strategy is an opportunity for a community to leverage the available resources—funding, strategic planning, and organizational structures—that enable communities to tap into additional resources from federal, state, and local agencies, foundations, corporations, and other funding organizations.

A Weed and Seed site is well placed to capitalize on a number of funding sources in both the public and private sectors. In fact, Weed and Seed sites are expected to leverage all available resources in order to fully fund their strategies for law enforcement, crime prevention, and neighborhood revitalization.

WEED AND SEED VOCABULARY

Weeding—consists of law enforcement’s and prosecutors’ efforts to “weed out” criminals who participate in violent crime and drug abuse through enforcement, adjudication, prosecution, and supervision efforts.

Seeding—brings prevention, intervention, treatment, and neighborhood revitalization services to the area.

Community Policing—is a collaborative effort between law enforcement and the community to identify problems of crime and disorder and involve all elements of the community in the search for solutions to these problems.

Neighborhood Restoration—revitalizes distressed neighborhoods and improves the quality of life in the target communities. Focuses on neighborhood revitalization and economic development activities designed to strengthen legitimate community institutions.

Safe Haven—is a multi-service center where a variety of youth and adult services are coordinated in a highly visible, accessible facility. Youth and other residents can also develop relationships, find opportunities, and enhance skills here.

Steering Committee—is the primary organizational body governing Weed and Seed sites.

EOWS—The Executive Office for Weed and Seed

NOWS—National Organization for Weed and Seed

Weed and Seed is managed and administered through the Executive Office for Weed and Seed (EOWS), a program office within the Office of the Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. EOWS provides grant management, technical assistance, training programs, and resources to support local Weed and Seed strategies.

The Four Components of the Weed and Seed Strategy

Weed and Seed is a comprehensive response to crime and neighborhood deterioration. Therefore, the strategy is a multilevel strategic plan that includes four basic components:

- Law enforcement
- Community policing
- Prevention, intervention and treatment
- Neighborhood restoration.

Law enforcement and community policing represent the “weeding” aspect of the strategy. The focus of community policing is improving the relationship and accountability between law enforcement and residents. Prevention, intervention, treatment, and neighborhood restoration represent the seeding components.

Law Enforcement

Law enforcement activities weed out violent offenders by coordinating and integrating the efforts of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies in designated high-crime neighborhoods.

Law enforcement goals are the identification, arrest, prosecution, conviction, and incarceration of violent criminals and drug traffickers operating in the target area. Some of the law enforcement initiatives in the Weed and Seed sites focus on special enforcement operations such as repeat or violent offender focused programs, intensified narcotics investigations, targeted prosecutions, victim-witness protection, and elimination of narcotics trafficking organizations operating in these areas.

Community Policing

The goal of community policing is to establish mutual trust between law enforcement and residents. It aims to raise the level of citizen and community involvement in crime prevention and intervention activities to solve drug-related problems in neighborhoods and enhance the level of community security. Activities focus on increasing police visibility and developing cooperative relationships between the police and residents in the target areas. Foot patrols, cooperative problem solving, victim referrals to support services, police mini-stations, and nuisance abatement activities increase positive interaction between the police and the community. Community-orientated policing bridges weeding and seeding strategies. Officers obtain helpful information from area residents for weeding efforts while they aid residents with community revitalization and seeding resources.

Prevention, Intervention, and Treatment

The prevention, intervention, and treatment component of the Weed and Seed strategy addresses the needs of the community and helps prevent crime and violence by addressing the risk and protective factors associated with drug abuse, violence, and crime. Coordinated efforts of law enforcement, social service agencies, private sector businesses, and residents help improve provision of services. Prevention, intervention, and treatment include youth services, school programs, and social programs. Safe Haven, for example, is a mechanism to organize and deliver an array of youth- and adult-oriented human services in a multi-service center setting such as a school. Every Weed and Seed site has at least one Safe Haven.

Neighborhood Restoration and Economic Development

The neighborhood restoration element of the Weed and Seed strategy is designed to revitalize distressed neighborhoods and improve the quality of life in the target communities through economic development and a revitalization of the community's health and wellness. Neighborhood restoration programs help to improve living conditions, enhance home security, allow for low-cost physical improvements, develop long-term efforts to renovate and maintain housing, and provide educational, economic, social, recreational, and other opportunities. Neighborhood restoration can be achieved only through the coordinated use of federal, state, local, and private sector resources. Economic development activities help strengthen legitimate community institutions by enhancing employment opportunities for residents, improving housing conditions, and improving the physical environment. Weed and Seed efforts help stabilize the community and promote restoration.

Key Elements of the Weed and Seed Strategy

The Steering Committee

The steering committee is the primary work force in the Weed and Seed strategy. Chaired by the U.S. attorney as the major player, the steering committee is responsible for establishing Weed and Seed goals and objectives, designing and developing programs, providing guidance on implementation, and assessing program achievement.

The steering committee consists of key federal, state, and local agencies and stakeholders, such as the U.S. attorney, mayor, chief of police, faith-based representatives, businesses, residents, youth, school administrators, teachers, non-profit leaders, prosecutors, and regional leaders.

The Strategic Plan

Every Weed and Seed site is directed by a strategic plan developed by the steering committee through a process of assessing community problems and needs; developing sound resolutions and responses; and securing necessary resources and participation. The steering committees engage a wide range of people from their neighborhoods and organizations to plan this strategic approach, sharing information, analyzing the problems and proposed solutions, and coordinating delivery.

Key Players

- **The U.S. attorney** coordinates federal, state, and local law enforcement and prosecutorial activities, as well as oversight of the Weed and Seed strategy. It is through the U.S. attorney's office that the Weed and Seed application is submitted. The initial meetings are often supported through the U.S. attorney's office, providing meeting space, mailing resources, planning assistance, and other necessary items.
- **The mayor and the mayor's office** have responsibility to the neighborhoods designated as Weed and Seed sites, along with management of the many agencies and organizations that get involved with a Weed and Seed site. Commitment and dedication from the mayor is critical to Weed and Seed's collaborative approach.
- **The weed and seed coordinator** manages the steering committee, organizes day-to-day program activities, and oversees weeding and seeding initiatives. In many sites, there are two people performing these tasks—a weed coordinator and a seed coordinator. These are people who communicate well; can convene a diverse group of people and assist them in accomplishing a shared agenda; and can juggle tasks, demands, and challenges.
- **Residents** are a critical component to the Weed and Seed strategy. The community must be involved from the beginning in helping to identify priorities and formulate local solutions. Weed and Seed empowers communities to solve their own problems. Citizen involvement, whether through community meetings, local projects, marches, rallies, involvement on the steering committee, or other activities, is a key component for a successful Weed and Seed project.
- **Federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies and prosecutors** are essential to the weeding activities of your site. Collaboration between law enforcement agencies and prosecutors will increase the effectiveness of enforcement efforts in your target area, thus reducing crime and improving the quality of life for residents.
- **Business partners** help sites build and leverage resources to create positive change for the community. To create a comprehensive strategy, involve business leaders in your activities. Ask local businesses to sponsor community festivals and events. A local hardware store might be willing to donate paint for a graffiti paint-out.
- **Faith-based organizations** are often the heart of communities, particularly urban centers. Churches and other faith-based groups have resources and the unique ability to facilitate change and increase community involvement in Weed and Seed efforts.
- **Youth-serving organizations** are important members in any comprehensive community effort. As prevention and intervention are important components of the Weed and Seed strategy, it is important not to duplicate efforts. Sites must work collaboratively with other youth serving organizations to ensure that youth in the designated areas receive the resources and services needed.

How To Become a Recognized Weed and Seed Site

The process for developing a Weed and Seed strategy requires significant commitment by the community to engage in strategic planning, collaborate with key stakeholders, and coordinate programs and services. The basic characteristics of the strategic planning process are

- A focused process that concentrates on selected issues
- Consideration of resource availability
- Assessment of community problems and needs
- An action-orientation with a strong emphasis on practical results
- An emphasis on innovative approaches to problem solving.

The five basic planning stages involved in developing the Weed and Seed strategy are

Stage 1 Organize and convene a Weed and Seed steering committee

Stage 2 Select or confirm the designated neighborhood

Stage 3 Conduct a community assessment of the designated neighborhood

Stage 4 Select priorities and strategies to address neighborhood challenges

Stage 5 Identify goals, objectives, and major tasks

Stage 6 Develop an implementation plan

Steps to Official Recognition

1. Organize and convene a steering committee. The steering committee meets and identifies the target neighborhood, conducts a needs assessment for the target neighborhood, identifies existing resources and gaps where new resources are needed, develops implementation activities, and develops the implementation schedule.
2. Request an application for official recognition.
3. Communities that develop a Weed and Seed strategy in coordination with their U.S. attorney's office may submit an application for official recognition to EOWS.

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