



# FORUM ON NEW MEXICO GANG STRATEGY

## FINAL REPORT

- Forum results
- May 10, 2012

### CONVENER

New Mexico Gang Task Force

### FACILITATOR

New Mexico First

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# INTRODUCTION

## Forum Purpose

Gangs pose a serious threat to public safety throughout New Mexico. According to law enforcement officers in the Southwest, gangs are responsible for as much as 60% of crime in some communities. The gang issues faced in New Mexico are complex, and there are limited and diminishing resources to address these issues. At the May 2012 forum, the New Mexico Gang Task Force invited stakeholder involved in gang prevention/intervention, enforcement/suppression, and re-entry/re-integration to recommend key strategic priorities that will lead to a well-informed and shared strategic plan. These stakeholders represented communities throughout the state. The details of this plan will be developed by the Blueprint Action Team made up members of the task force as well as volunteer participants from the forum.

Ultimately, all stakeholders can use this strategy as a roadmap to address criminal gang activity in New Mexico. Such a roadmap can allow stakeholders to prioritize and align individual skills, talents, and resources to achieve collective goals to protect the safety and well-being of New Mexicans.

This report outlines the key results of the forum:

- Strategic priorities
- Resource leveraging ideas
- Stakeholder advantages and challenges

## Forum Process

A diverse group of stakeholders attended the forum including law enforcement at the federal, tribal, state, and local levels; prosecutors; corrections and parole officers; and prevention and re-entry program specialists from a number of non-profit, state agency, tribal, and military organizations.

Prior to the forum, participants reviewed a background brief that outlined information on gang trends and risk factors specific to New Mexico. At the forum, participants received a list of state programs and activities currently available. Participants at the forum also benefited from a presentation by the program manager of the task force. Afterwards, participants engaged in small group discussions in which they reviewed the advantages and challenges in addressing gang crime and violence, came to consensus on strategic priorities in the areas of prevention/intervention, enforcement/suppress, and re-entry/re-integration, and identified ways to leverage resources. During the closing session, participants had the opportunity to review the work of all groups and weigh-in on the level of effectiveness of each priority and level of difficulty in implementing these priorities.

## Forum Convener

The New Mexico Gang Task Force was originally established in 1990 as an intelligence sharing entity. The organization has grown to become the largest, organized, multi-jurisdictional task force in the State of New Mexico. The NMGTF is composed of approximately 55 member agencies that include local, state, federal, and tribal law enforcement agencies. Through its initiatives, the NMGTF targets criminal gang activity by providing these agencies with quality training, coordinated intelligence sharing and networking, and overtime funding for multi-jurisdictional operations to enhance gang enforcement and prevention efforts. Because any

comprehensive gang strategy calls for a coordinated approach between enforcement, prevention, and intervention efforts, the NMGTF actively participates in, and facilitates communication and collaboration between law enforcement, community groups, schools, social services agencies, and governmental organizations to recognize and address the factors that contribute to the state's gang problem.

## Forum Facilitator

**New Mexico First** engages people in important issues facing their state or community. Co-founded in 1986 by Senators Jeff Bingaman and Pete Domenici (retired), the public policy organization offers unique town halls and forums that bring together people from all walks of life to develop their best ideas for policymakers and the public. New Mexico First also produces nonpartisan public policy reports on critical issues facing the state. These reports – on topics like water, education, healthcare, the economy, and energy – are available at [www.nmfirst.org](http://www.nmfirst.org).

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The following strategic priorities were developed by participants in small groups at the forum. Similar priorities have been combined. The entire forum group considered all the priorities and weighed-in on the level of effectiveness<sup>1</sup> and level of difficulty<sup>2</sup> in implementing each priority. The priorities are listed in categories depending on the intended focus and in order of perceived effectiveness.

## Prevention/Intervention Priorities

Theme	Priority	Level of Effectiveness	Level of Difficulty
<b>1. Elementary / Middle School Programs</b>	Start prevention in elementary school to give children tools to resist gang pressure before they make choices about gangs and continue the work in middle school. Prevention efforts should include anti-gang, anti-violence, and anti-drug education programs that are evidence-based and show long-term behavioral change. Also provide assistance, including warning signs of gang activity and responses, to principals, teachers, and counselors.	High	Hard
<b>2. Continuum of Prevention Services</b>	Establish a continuum of proactive, sustainable, evidence-based, and structured prevention/intervention services in all communities that increase protective factors, reduce risk factors (i.e., substance abuse, teen pregnancy, drop-out rate, youth suicide, etc.), and promote positive community outcomes. Prevention efforts should include school and community-based programs that utilize soldiers and law enforcement officers as role models, enable drop-outs to complete school, provide mentoring similar to Big Brothers Big Sisters, etc.	High	Moderate
<b>3. Tougher Crime Penalties</b>	Pass legislation with tougher penalties, such as adding mandatory, minimum sentences for crimes with gang enhancements (i.e., gang-motivated, gang-related), as a deterrent to committing crimes.	Medium	Hard

<sup>1</sup> Effective is defined as a priority that results in a proven outcome and is a good use of both people and funding resources. This measure can inform members of the Blueprint Action Team when identifying the resources needed to achieve success for a priority.

<sup>2</sup> This measure is an indication of how difficult it would be to achieve success and can inform members of the Blueprint Action Team when identifying short-term and long-term goals.

<b>4. Business Support</b>	Challenge the business community to help support and underwrite evidence-based prevention/intervention programs and the associated needs of youth to access these programs (e.g., scholarships, transportation, supplies cost, internships, mentoring).	Medium	Hard
<b>5. Employment Programs</b>	Establish supportive employment programs, such as the youth advocate program in Farmington, which educates the employer on the young person's problems and helps with issues to keep the young person employed.	Low	Moderate
<b>6. Targeted Communication Plan</b>	Engage community leaders and stakeholders to identify demographic-specific needs and then design and implement a targeted communications plan (i.e., community specific, culturally sensitive, age and language appropriate) to inform, educate, and empower families and youth to address at-risk behaviors and gang issues in their community.	Low	Moderate

### Enforcement/Suppression Priorities

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Level of Effectiveness</b>	<b>Level of Difficulty</b>
<b>7. Gang Definition Legislation</b>	Advocate for and enact legislation that defines and describes gang-related crimes and penalties. The new law should strengthen sentencing laws to make them comparable to surrounding states and prioritize the enforcement of strict sentencing guidelines.	High	Hard
<b>8. Effective Community Advocacy</b>	Mobilize, educate, and inform community members (e.g., youth, families, crime-victims, advocates, businesses, media) to be effective and consistent advocates for gang-related legislative change and to monitor and report on judicial action.	High	Moderate
<b>9. Multi-jurisdictional Joint Operations</b>	Utilize more multi-jurisdictional (i.e., local, state, federal, tribal) joint operations that specifically target gangs, use media to get the word out that law-enforcement is targeting gang members, and use deconfliction <sup>3</sup> where necessary.	High	Hard

<sup>3</sup> Deconfliction is used in various engineering and management fields. It is essentially a command-and-control concept and means designing systems and operations to reduce conflict and interference.

<b>10. Effective Legislative Advocacy</b>	Collaborate across stakeholder groups to work with specific, supportive legislators who will advocate for the legislature to formally develop laws regarding gangs in the areas of prevention, law enforcement, family reunification, rehabilitation, education, etc. and implement a civil injunction program and/or pass other laws that increase sentencing with a gang enhancement (i.e., gang-motivated, gang-related).	Medium	Hard
<b>11. Gang Information Database</b>	Develop a comprehensive information-sharing database that identifies 1) gang names, 2) gang locations, 3) gang signs, 4) activities specific to gangs, 5) gang recruiting locations, 6) gang risk factors for use statewide by juvenile justice, agencies, advocates, and educators.	Medium	Hard
<b>12. Juvenile Crime Criteria</b>	Develop criteria for differentiating between gateway/at-risk versus habitual gang-related juvenile crimes in order to enable appropriate statutory and judicial response.	Medium	Hard
<b>13. Law Enforcement Training</b>	Ensure cases are well-investigated (e.g., interviews documented and recorded, physical evidence, surveillance videos, etc.) to solidly support the presentation of cases by providing professional mentoring, on-the-job training, coursework, and mandatory bi-annual training for law enforcement officers.	Low	Moderate
<b>14. Recognize the Gang Problem</b>	Educate organizations (e.g., DWI Committee), one-at-a-time, to recognize gangs are an issue in their communities.	Low	Hard

### Re-entry/Re-integration Priorities

Theme	Priority	Level of Effectiveness	Level of Difficulty
<b>15. Reintegration Resource Database</b>	Develop and maintain a comprehensive resource database of reintegration resources and programs that work (e.g., restorative justice, substance abuse, behavioral health, medical services, housing, life skills, social behavior training, job placement, community-service opportunities, gender-specific programs, book clubs, etc.).	High	Easy

<p><b>16. Community Reintegration Resources</b></p>	<p>In addition to supervision, increase the number and quality of appropriate and evidence-based institutional and community reintegration services available to families and gang members that provide alternatives to gang involvement, especially in the first year after release from jurisdiction. Examples of important services include: case management, transportation, housing, tattoo removal, transitional counseling, faith-based activities, child support, inpatient and outpatient behavioral health services, workforce development, life skills and vocational training, work clothes/tools, mentors, internships, education).</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Hard</p>
<p><b>17. Focus on Juveniles</b></p>	<p>Concentrate reintegration efforts in the juvenile system, because that will reduce the number of youth who become embedded in the system.</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Moderate</p>
<p><b>18. Continuum of Reintegration Services</b></p>	<p>Implement a continuum of reintegration services, beginning with a full initial assessment when offenders are first incarcerated to ensure they are directed to the most appropriate programs, through release from prison, and discharge from supervision if paroled. Engage the re-entry committee right away, rather than at 180 days as is now the case.</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Moderate</p>
<p><b>19. Required Transitional Programs</b></p>	<p>Provide transitional programs at the community level (i.e., jurisdiction in which the client lives) that are required and that include either education or employment into new opportunities which instill hope.</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Moderate</p>
<p><b>20. Program Evaluation</b></p>	<p>Inventory all current programs and conduct program evaluations including tribal re-integration programs, which have unique difficulties. Collect data that reflect the degree of program success, the strengths and weaknesses of programs and approaches, best practices, and the factors that contribute to recidivism as well as research successful models in other states.</p>	<p>Low</p>	<p>Hard</p>
<p><b>21. Preparation for Release</b></p>	<p>Prepare all prison/detention clients for their release (e.g., education, job preparation, substance abuse treatment, cognitive treatment, resources available) and prepare the situation to which they will be released (i.e., vet the client for an appropriate situation).</p>	<p>Low</p>	<p>Hard</p>

# RESOURCE LEVERAGING IDEAS

## Increase Stakeholder Collaboration

1. Stakeholders need to continually find ways to increase their collaboration and communication among each other. This includes collaborating regarding funding to ensure that services are not being duplicated and working on mutually-reinforcing interventions and activities across the various agencies involved. Collaborating on program evaluations can strengthen success stories that show results. Collaboration is also important to support effective legislation.
2. Working with existing professional and community associations to support gang prevention, intervention, suppression, and re-entry at the community and administrative levels and existing task forces to target the highest risk gangs and gang members for arrest and prosecution is also important.
3. All stakeholders need to buy into and support the strategic plan that results from this forum as this support can work for all of us. This guidance is needed to comply with the federal grant checklist and to be accepted for funding.
4. Partnering with media will help us create public awareness of the issues.

## Invest in Integrated Data Systems

5. New Mexico needs to adopt effective tracking systems from other states and develop a shared data system. Law enforcement and corrections have a statewide tracking number for each person that can be used for broader statistical reporting. The larger state agencies currently collect information, but the systems cannot speak to each other. We need to invest in an integrated system which will make it is easy to access useful information as well as provide a feedback loop to designers for continuous improvement.

## Establish Standards of Practice

6. Stakeholders need to establish statewide, uniform and minimum standards of practice among existing agencies in order to develop a common agenda related to gang activity. This will help us recognize when programs or program contractors are not working and either replace the programs or better prepare program contractors. Each stakeholder needs to develop an organization business plan indicating roles and responsibilities and payment scales.

## Enhance Advocacy to Legislators

7. Stakeholders need to work their “realm of influence” to bring the issues to legislators. This means meeting with them one-on-one, informally and more frequently. A consistent message and agenda can help change the system.

## Re-access Funding Practices and Share Costs

8. The funding system is competitive, making it difficult to be collaborative. However funders require collaboration to receive funding. At times, there is an assumption that successful programs no longer need funding creating a penalty for being successful. Also, staff vacancies work against an organization. If a funder emphasizes and funds one aspect of the system, it is important to fund all parts affected.
9. Encourage smaller communities that have DWI funding to apply some of this funding to serve gang offenders.
10. There are existing councils in each community and pueblo that can mobilize, inform, educate, and develop local policy. However, these organizations and agencies need to collaborate and share costs.

### **Utilize Private Grants**

11. It is important to seek private grants through foundations to supplement state and federal funding. Nonprofit agencies could share grant writers and provide services through these grants.

### **Create More Halfway Houses**

12. Create more halfway houses in the state for parolees.

### **Maintain Community Resource Flexibility**

13. Requiring programs to be evidence-based needs to be more flexible for communities, especially Native American communities. In addition, create a juvenile justice program continuum and utilize community college programs that are available for people coming out of detention or prison.

# APPENDIX A: ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES

## Advantages

### Common Understanding

Those who work in the field admit there is a gang problem, have a common understanding of the problem, and are aware of the issues. They have a wealth of experience and a desire to solve the gang problem. In addition, the Department of Justice has identified gang violence as a priority and has a strategy that guides funding to address the issues.

### Collaboration and Communications

There is good collaboration and communication among the stakeholder groups. Different agencies meet regularly to share information and intelligence. Activities like this forum help the groups work together toward the same goals and network to find resources. There is mutual respect among law enforcement, agencies, nonprofit organizations, and some school districts. These partnerships allow the groups to achieve their missions with limited funds. There is hope that stakeholders will be able to work more effectively with some of the freshman legislators who are more open to supporting gang legislation.

### Resources

Federal resources and funds are available to border states like New Mexico. This allows for needed programs, training and cross-training, administrative support, and access to a variety of experts. The leadership and communication of the NM Gang Task Force is headed in the right direction and supports the agencies in their efforts.

### Data

There is technology, tools, and data available to identify gangs and gang members and to build awareness of the issues.

### Multiple Approaches

The stakeholder community seeks new ideas and supports using multiple approaches to solve the gang problem. There are existing models for strengthening resilience factors, possibilities for different types of early interventions, and cognitive and prevention programs in some schools. The GREAT and OPT OUT programs were seen as positive examples. There are health models and opportunities to view gang violence as a public health problem. In addition to conducting solid investigations and having access to investigative support centers, law enforcement is willing to support prevention and intervention strategies. Education for local and state agencies, communities, pueblos, and schools is available. The small town nature of the state allows residents to watch out for children and work with them over time. Law enforcement officers know the gang members in their communities. The Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee and Juvenile Justice Boards were seen as effective community resources. NM Children, Youth and Families have structured their facilities so that families can access assistance. These community programs and resources can strengthen communities so that gangs have less control.

## Challenges

### Recognition of Gang Problem

Many of the stakeholders felt that some communities, tribes, residents and legislators were in denial and complacent about the size and severity of the gang problem in the state. Some residents, therapists, educators, elected officials, and even law enforcement officers were resistant to recognizing the warning signs and participating in education programs offered by the various stakeholder groups. They viewed the media as sometimes sensationalizing gangs which can lead to desensitizing the public to gang violence.

### Understanding of Root Causes of Gang Problem

The stakeholders acknowledged they had the same goals but often different priorities, incarceration versus rehabilitation. There is a lack of understanding regarding the root causes of the gang problem. Many believed gang activity is not well understood and some viewed gang problems as a result of societal problems such as poverty, mental health, physical health, and alienation from family and community. Others saw these issues as contributing to the problem, but that the lack of best practices for prevention and reintegration activities was also a limiting factor. Others pointed out that gang involvement was often inter-generational and has become part of family culture.

### Lack Strong Gang Legislation

Law enforcement stakeholders viewed state law as weaker than other states in terms of sentencing for crimes and immigration. Efforts to influence gang legislation has been seen as an assault on New Mexico cultural identity and has created law maker reluctance in supporting comprehensive gang legislation.

### Lack Gang Definition

Many stakeholders believed passing legislation that creates a common definition of gangs and gang-related activity as very important. Lacking this definition impedes accurate data collection and documentation. This common definition would also support program structure and priority.

### Lack of Integrated Data

There is a problem getting data on what is effective. Using a statewide tracking number would allow stakeholders to review what has been effective over time with gang members and what has not worked. This would also facilitate more adequate collaboration between the NM Department of Health and law enforcement. In addition, stakeholders suggested that the Youth Risk and Resiliency Survey should be expanded to address gang violence factors.

### Lack of Resource Supports

There is a lack of communication and gang education in some areas of the state, especially in rural and tribal areas. These communities also lack resources and infrastructure to address the gang problem as well as assist victims of gang crime. Some communities are resistant to the restorative process. Families that want to intervene cannot because the services are outside their jurisdiction. Tribal communities were experiencing problems when there are no clear laws from their tribal council. Some tribes don't have jails and therefore have to release gang members back onto their communities. At times, tribal members released from prison are not allowed back into their own reservation and therefore migrate to other pueblos.

### Silos

There are also territorial issues with agencies and organizations operating as silos which can lead to an escalation of the problem. Some organizations have experienced difficulty in building or maintaining relationships with schools in order to provide education to staff or programs for children.

### **Lack of Funding**

Funding is being lost from federal sources and the state is not filling the gap. Resources go to multiple agencies which creates fragmentation making it difficult to identify the program funding available and creating dilution of effort. Lack of funding also makes county-wide coordination of all violence related services difficult.

### **Size of the Gang Problem**

Another challenge is the increasing number of gang members in the state and the increase of substance abuse and drug trafficking, a common activity of gangs. Out of loyalty, any gang members return to their gang and gang activities once they are released from institutions. Lack of law enforcement resources makes it difficult to manage the problem as gangs change in subtle ways and known gang members go underground.

### **Border State**

New Mexico's close proximity to the border is a challenge. Mexican nationals bring in different gang populations and different challenges. The state also has many jurisdictional constraints (e.g., local, state, tribal), as well as private land constraints. The state's geography also contributed to the problem (e.g., large territory with a sparse population, the interstate and rail system makes it easy to transit in and out, and if gang suppression is effective in the urban areas, gangs can move on to more rural and less prepared communities).

# APPENDIX B: FORUM LEADERSHIP

## New Mexico Gang Task Force Staff

Tamera Marcantel  
Program Manager

Jeanne Britton

## Forum Leadership Team

Heather Balas Plenary Chair	Robin Lackey Recorder	Charlotte Pollard Recorder
Philip Crump Discussion Leader	Gina Maes Forum Registrar	Melanie Sanchez Eastwood Plenary Assistant
Kathy Komoll Discussion Leader	Celia Merrill Recorder	Ray Terhorst Discussion Leader

## Blueprint Action Team

The following members of the action team will review the strategic priorities recommended at the forum and develop a detailed action plan.

Jessica Anastasi Bernalillo County Juvenile Detention	Gorden Eden NM Department of Public Safety	Tamera Marcantel NM Gang Task Force Matt Martinez Santa Fe Police Department
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