

NATIONAL MUNICIPAL NETWORK ON CRIME PREVENTION

Background and Reference Document

Overview

The National Municipal Network on Crime Prevention brings together Canadian municipalities from across the country that are interested and committed to sharing experiences and expertise in order to make communities safer. The action of the Network contributes to reinforce the capacities of municipal and local stakeholders to expand or develop evidence based crime prevention programmes and collaborative strategies. Through the Network, municipalities maintain a sustained dialogue, discuss common issues, trends and new initiatives, exchange key information on projects and programmes, and coordinate the development of proposals to support inter-municipal cooperation, knowledge building and training of municipal resources.

This document presents background information on the role of local government in crime prevention and on the origins and achievements of the National Municipal Network since 2006. It outlines the mission, objectives and governance of the Network as well as future perspectives. It also describes the benefits of participating in the Network and sets criteria for new municipalities to join the Network.

The role of municipal government in preventing crime and building community safety

Crime and insecurity are challenges confronting all Canadian municipalities. The traditional approach of responding to those challenges through policing and criminal justice is gradually being complemented by a larger notion of community safety that calls for a diversity of preventive initiatives, the mobilization of local stakeholders and public engagement. This reflects the complexities of the nature and causes of crime and insecurity as well as their links with other global challenges related to the social and economic development and the management of urban centres.

Municipalities are the level of government closest to neighbourhoods, communities and citizens. They provide many direct services and programmes that enhance community safety, from community policing to safe urban design and support for vulnerable groups. They are in a strategic position to mobilize local stakeholders, to ensure coordination of crime prevention efforts and to interface in that regard with other levels of government. In that perspective, local authorities are called to play a key role in fostering an integrated approach in order to reduce and prevent crime and insecurity.

The strategic role of municipalities in preventing crime and building community safety has been gradually recognized over the last 25 years in Canada and in many countries in the world. For example:

- In 1989, the final declaration (*Agenda for Safer Cities*) adopted at the Montreal International Conference on Urban Safety and Crime Prevention underlined that “the community is the focal point of crime prevention” and that “crime prevention must bring together those responsible for housing, social services, recreation, schools, policing and justice to tackle the situations that breed crime”.

- In 1993, the Twelfth Report of the Standing Committee on Justice and the Solicitor General (*Crime prevention in Canada: Toward a National Strategy*), also known as the Horner Report, recommended that “all levels of government are responsible for crime and they must work together to prevent its occurrence” and that “crime occurs in communities and priorities concerning crime prevention are best determined at the local level.”
- The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) policy statement on Community Safety and Crime Prevention stresses that “to address violence and crime in our communities, we have to both prevent crime through social development and address the root causes of crime” and that “strategies for preventing crime should be sensitive to local needs.”

For a long time Canadian municipalities have developed and implemented strategies, programmes and projects in order to respond to the challenges of crime and insecurity. These include collaborative partnerships structures, innovative community policing models, integrated urban renewal, specific preventive programmes focused on youth gangs, drug abuse and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, services adapted to the needs of vulnerable groups (including women, children and youth), community mobilization and awareness campaigns. Complex social issues such as intercultural relations and management of diversity, social housing, food security and homelessness are as well addressed through municipal policies and interventions.

However, even if community safety is a major issue for Canadian municipalities, there has not a formal and permanent platform or forum to facilitate exchanges of experiences and expertise between cities, to develop the capacities of local authorities to initiate and implement integrated safety and crime prevention strategies and to foster long-term evidence based targeted actions. The National Municipal Network on Crime Prevention aims to respond to those needs.

The origins and achievements of the National Municipal Network

In 2006, the Institute for the Prevention of Crime (IPC) of the University of Ottawa invited mayors from 14 large municipalities coast to coast to delegate a community safety manager to participate in a network of Canadian municipalities to harness knowledge to prevent crime as part of a project in partnership with the National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC). All municipalities responded positively to this invitation (see Annex 1 for the list of the cities involved initially). The Federation of Canadian Municipalities was also invited to be part of the network as an observer. For the next three years, this initiative of the IPC provided an opportunity for municipal representatives to examine the evidence and experience on what is effective and cost efficient crime prevention and how municipalities have undertaken to deliver crime prevention at the local level. The participants soon identified themselves as the National Municipal Network on Crime Prevention. Recently, two new municipalities joined the Network (see Annex 1).

In 2007 in collaboration with the Network, the IPC published a review of the evidence and experience on municipal crime prevention strategies from Canada and abroad – *Making Cities Safer: The International Experience*. In 2008, IPC collected and analysed the crime prevention and community safety activities of the 14 municipalities. These were published in *Making Cities Safer: Canadian Strategies and Practices* that describes crime trends in the municipalities, reviews developments in other countries and identifies guiding principles to help Canada reduce and prevent crime, victimization and fear of crime. In this report, the National Municipal Network came to the conclusion that in order to get results municipalities need strong political leadership, sustained funding, a municipal responsibility centre, a strategic plan and public engagement.

In 2009, IPC built on these reports, expert reviews of best practice, and the experience of the municipalities to publish 10 Actions Briefs for Municipal Stakeholders clustered in Series I *Invest Smartly in Safety for the City* and Series II *Tackle Safety Successfully in the City*. These are designed to assist municipal leaders and stakeholders to share what works and deliver it.

During the last four years, the members of the National Municipal Network have established close working relationships through regular conference calls and yearly face-to-face meetings. They were able to share experiences, expertise and tools on successful municipal and community-based crime prevention and urban safety programmes and projects. They have learned from each other and the Network now constitutes a unique community of practice.

Mission, objectives and governance of the National Municipal Network

The mission of the National Municipal Network on Crime Prevention is to **build municipal capacity to reduce and prevent crime and foster community safety through sharing and developing knowledge, expertise and vision.**

The Network brings together senior municipal managers, community safety coordinators and professionals involved in the development and implementation of community-based strategies, programmes and projects aimed at reducing and preventing crime and at tackling risk factors in an integrated and evidence led manner.

Through its activities, the Network has for objectives to:

- Develop the capacities of key municipal personnel to plan, manage and deliver community safety and crime prevention initiatives in their communities
- Contribute to the common understanding of the nature and trends of the different forms of urban crime and insecurity throughout Canada
- Develop a knowledge base of municipal practices contributing to reduce and prevent crime and insecurity and foster exchanges and knowledge transfer between municipalities
- Share expertise about the methods and tools to implement integrated community safety and crime prevention strategies and programmes
- Foster the leadership and engagement of municipal authorities to promote community safety through evidence based comprehensive and collaborative initiatives
- Foster the mobilization of institutional and community stakeholders through networking and training
- Facilitate discussion and develop a consensus and a shared vision on issues of common interest that can impact on community safety and crime prevention.

The members of the National Municipal Network on Crime Prevention have agreed to appoint two co-chair persons for a period of two years in order to coordinate communications and to facilitate exchanges. In addition, anchor persons have been designated in each region of Canada to provide an increased capacity to plan and develop activities (see Annex 2).

Future perspectives for the National Municipal Network

The momentum generated since 2006 led the municipalities involved to develop a proposal to consolidate and expand the activities of the Network. This proposal (*Building Municipal Capacity to Harness Evidence to Prevent Crime*) was formally submitted to the National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC) in October 2009 by the City of Montreal on behalf of the Network and with letters of support from the participating municipalities. An annual contribution of \$300,000 was requested from the NCP for a period of three years.

The project has three main components:

- *A coaching/mentoring and inter-municipal exchange programme* in order to share expertise and to reinforce municipal crime prevention capacities
- *Knowledge development and application*, in collaboration with the Institute for the Prevention of Crime, to get evidence and evaluation used in targeted community mobilization and partnerships to reduce crime and enhance community safety
- *Support for the mobilization of local stakeholders and training* of key municipal personnel

This project would result in multiplying the use of effective and cost-efficient ways to both prevent and reduce crime by addressing known risk factors in high-risk populations and places. It would allow for an annual face-to-face meeting, regional workshops and coordination. It would foster the involvement of 15 new municipalities for a total of some 30 participating cities, the sensitization of 500 local stakeholders, including city officials and leaders in schools, social services and policing as well as the training of 50 municipal crime prevention managers.

Due to budget reductions, the NCPC has suspended in August 2010 the analysis of the proposal. However, representations have been undertaken to reverse this situation and to have the project approved and funded in the near future.

In the meantime, the members have agreed to reinforce the Network by putting in common some financial resources and by contributing time and logistical and coordination capacities. These include devoting time to coordination and liaison, direct financial contributions to the Network, hosting conference calls, preparing and distributing minutes, assembling documentation, drafting letters and documents, etc.

The benefits of the National Municipal Network

The National Municipal Network on Crime Prevention is a unique platform and forum for inter-municipal cooperation and exchanges of experiences and expertise related to community safety. The Network can be described as a community of practice aimed at fostering evidence based and integrated and collaborative approaches to prevent crime and make cities safer. By being a member of the Network, the participating municipalities:

- Establish direct contact and have regular exchanges with the managers, coordinators and professionals in charge of the community safety and crime prevention portfolio in different municipalities across Canada
- Have access to key information on strategies, policies, programmes and projects developed and implemented at the municipal and community levels (for example on youth gangs, difficult neighbourhoods, public disorders, women safety, early interventions with children and families, awareness campaigns, public engagement, etc.)

- Share methodological approaches and tools for the design, follow-up and evaluation of crime prevention initiatives (such as surveys, local safety audits, safe urban design regulations, strategic and business plans, communication strategies and tools, evaluation reports, etc.)
- Have the opportunity to exchange on strategic issues of common interest regarding community safety and to develop a shared vision and perspective on those issues
- Develop their capacities to mobilize local institutional and community stakeholders, to establish partnerships and to interact with the other levels of government
- Have access to more evidence based information on which municipal investments and budgetary decisions can be based
- Can speak from a united voice on issues and challenges related to delinquency, violence and insecurity that threaten the quality of life and sustainable development of municipalities.

Criteria for municipalities to join the Network

In the last two years the activities of the National Municipal Network on Crime Prevention have attracted the attention of municipalities that were not part of the initiative at the origin. This led the members of the Network to develop a set of criteria for new municipalities to come on board and to join the Network.

These criteria are the following:

- A shared vision of the global approach promoted by the Network on community safety and crime prevention, basically:
 - The recognition of the importance of community safety and crime prevention for the development of the municipality
 - A willingness to develop a collaborative and community based approach for municipal safety and crime prevention
 - The capacity to effectively provide orientation and coordinate municipal action through an existing or to-be responsibility centre or another mechanism
- The designation of a representative to be part of the NMN and to act as an anchor and key resource person.
- A commitment to take an active part in the NMN, including sharing information, taking part in conference calls and, eventually, attending national and regional meetings, and making key municipal resources available for coaching/mentoring, mobilization and/or training activities (providing financial support through the NCPC).

Following initial contacts and discussions with representatives of the Network, the interested municipality will be invited to officially confirm its wish to become a member. This could be done by a letter from the municipality (Mayor, city manager or senior official) and/or a resolution of the City Council. The municipality will also be asked to share with the other members an overview of its activities and programmes related to crime prevention and urban safety. In 2010, two new municipalities have joined the Network (see Annex 1).

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Annex 1

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Municipalities that have joined the Network in 2006/2007

- Halifax Regional Municipality
- Saint John
- Quebec
- Montreal
- Ottawa
- Toronto
- Waterloo Region and Kitchener
- Winnipeg
- Regina
- Saskatoon
- Calgary
- Edmonton
- Surrey
- Vancouver

Municipalities that have joined the Network in 2010

- Mississauga
- Thunder Bay