



# National Institute of Justice

## Research in Brief

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### Issues and Findings

**Discussed in this Brief:** The National Evaluation of Operation Weed and Seed, a strategy to control violent crime, drug trafficking, and drug-related crime in targeted areas and to provide a safe environment for residents to live, work, and raise their families. From the initial three grant sites in 1991, Weed and Seed has grown to include 200 sites nationwide. The Weed and Seed programs in eight sites—Hartford, Connecticut; Manatee and Sarasota Counties, Florida; Shreveport, Louisiana; Las Vegas, Nevada; Akron, Ohio; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Seattle, Washington—were selected for the national evaluation of their implementation and measurable effects on crime and public safety.

**Key issues:** Weed and Seed strategically links concentrated and enhanced law enforcement efforts to identify, arrest, and prosecute violent offenders, drug traffickers, and other criminals operating in the target areas (weeding) and community policing with human services—including afterschool, weekend, and summer youth activities; adult literacy classes; and parental counseling—and neighborhood revitalization efforts to prevent and deter further crime (seeding). The eight evaluation sites were selected because they provide examples of different aspects of Weed and Seed in application. In each site, the evaluation focused on one or two Weed and Seed target areas. Although each site had its own distinctive crime problems, they all shared high rates of violent crime related to drug trafficking and drug use. Most sites had serious gang-related crime problems.

## National Evaluation of Weed and Seed

by Terence Dunworth and Gregory Mills

Operation Weed and Seed represents an ambitious Federal, State, and local effort to improve the quality of life in targeted high crime areas of America's cities. First launched by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) in 1991, the program attempts to control violent crime, drug trafficking, and drug-related crime and to provide a safe environment for residents to live, work, and raise their families.

These are, by themselves, conventional law enforcement goals. What makes the Weed and Seed concept distinctive and innovative is the means by which these goals are achieved: Community-focused human services programs and neighborhood improvement initiatives are strategically linked with intensified, geographically targeted law enforcement efforts by police and prosecutors. Weed and Seed is essentially a coordination strategy; funding is only one tool among many to achieve the program's objectives. (See "What is Weed and Seed?")

Weed and Seed is administered by the Executive Office for Weed and Seed within DOJ's Office of Justice Programs. As exhibit 1 shows, from the initial three grant sites—Kansas City, Missouri; Trenton, New Jersey; and Omaha, Nebraska—in 1991, Weed and Seed has grown to

include 200 sites nationwide. Until recently, cities were funded either as demonstration sites, which generally received between \$500,000 and \$750,000 annually over 4 consecutive years, or officially recognized sites, which received much smaller amounts (\$35,000 in some cases). Most sites currently (1999) receive about \$225,000 annually.

The Weed and Seed programs in eight sites were selected for the national evaluation of their implementation and measurable outcomes related to crime and public safety: Hartford, Connecticut; Manatee and Sarasota Counties, Florida; Shreveport, Louisiana; Las Vegas, Nevada; Akron, Ohio; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Seattle, Washington. These sites were selected by DOJ as examples of different aspects of Weed and Seed. In each of them, the evaluation focused on one or two Weed and Seed target areas. (See exhibit 2.) Although each site had its own distinctive crime problems, they all shared high rates of violent crime related to drug trafficking and drug use. Most sites had serious gang-related crime problems.

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## Issues and Findings

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**Key findings:** The effectiveness of weeding and seeding activities varied across the eight sites. The evaluation found:

- Preexisting community features may make Weed and Seed easier or more difficult to operate effectively. Important factors included the strength of the social and institutional infrastructure (an established network of community-based organizations and community leaders), the severity of crime problems, geographical advantages favoring economic development, and transiency of the community population.
- The mix of weeding and seeding activities and the sequencing of these components appear to be important factors in gaining community support for the program. Important positive factors included early seeding, sustained weeding, high-level task forces combined with community policing, and an active prosecutorial role.
- Sites appeared to have greater success if they concentrated their program resources on smaller population groups, especially if they could similarly channel other public funds and also leverage private funds.
- A less tangible ingredient that seemed to characterize the more successful programs was the active and constructive leadership of key individuals.
- The most effective implementation strategies were those that relied on bottom-up, participatory decisionmaking approaches, especially when combined with efforts to build capacity and partnership among local organizations.

The full cross site analysis and the eight case studies are also available.

**Target audience:** Congressional representatives and legislative staff; Federal, State, and local law enforcement officials; State and local government officials; and criminal justice practitioners and researchers.

The evaluation found significant favorable effects of Weed and Seed on key outcome measures for some sites and time periods. The evidence is modest in terms of its statistical significance, but the indicators consistently point in favorable directions. At the same time, the evaluation has pointed out a number of weak links in the chain, most noticeably the limited and tenuous role that many local prosecutors played in the weeding process. A number of local prosecutors reported they simply lack the funding and personnel to conduct enhanced prosecution of the target area caseloads generated by more aggressive policing activities. Although difficult to measure with precision, the effect of this constraint almost certainly has been to limit the removal of offenders from target areas.

### Setting up Weed and Seed at the local level

The eight sites differed substantially in how they organized their Weed and Seed programs, due, in large part, to the unique law enforcement and social needs and existing organizational infrastructure and

resources available in each site. (See “Study Methodology.”) In general, the sites were organized along these lines:

**Grantee organization.** The grantees included mayors’ offices, local police departments, and local nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations. The staff assigned to the Weed and Seed effort and their ability/authority to operate cohesively in conjunction with community representatives were among the most important factors in successful program implementation at the eight evaluation sites. In general, an adequate supply of dedicated staff resources, from both grantees and other participating agencies, produced positive results in program implementation, oversight, and cohesion. In most sites, the role actually played by the grantee was dynamic, as key participants changed, programs and roles evolved, and community and interagency relationships developed.

**The U.S. Attorney’s role.** The U.S. Attorney is asked to play a central role in organizing the steering committee and

*Exhibit 1. Number of Weed and Seed sites and annual funding*

Fiscal Year	Number of Funded Sites	Total Program Funding (millions)
1991	3	\$0.5
1992	20	\$11.5
1993	21	\$13.5
1994*	36	\$31.5
1995*	36	\$32.5
1996*	88	\$37.5
1997*	118	\$37.5
1998*	176	\$42.5
1999*	200	\$49.0

\* Since 1994, in addition to appropriated funds, the U.S. Department of Justice has allocated \$9 million annually in Asset Forfeiture Funds for Weed and Seed-related task forces administered through the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and other DOJ law enforcement agencies.

## W What Is Weed and Seed?

eed and Seed is a strategy to mobilize and coordinate resources in the targeted communities rather than simply a program or mechanism to fund local activities that share no collective aim. Weed and Seed is an “incubator for social change” to stabilize the conditions in high crime communities and to promote community restoration.<sup>a</sup> The key components of this strategy are as follows:

- **Enhanced coordination**—Coordinated analysis and planning of local problems and strategies to address them.
- **Weeding**—Concentrated and enhanced law enforcement efforts to identify, arrest, and prosecute violent offenders, drug traffickers, and other criminals operating in the target areas. The objective is to remove criminals from the target areas.
- **Community policing**—Proactive police/community engagement and problem solving in which police officers are assigned to specified geographic locations. By gaining the growing trust and support of the community, police and prosecutors engage residents and businesses as problem-solving partners in the law enforcement effort. This effort is the bridge between weeding and seeding.<sup>b</sup>
- **Seeding**—Human services—including afterschool, weekend, and summer youth activities; adult literacy classes; and parental counseling—and neighborhood revitalization efforts to prevent and deter further crime.

The Federal oversight responsibility for each participating site rests with the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the corresponding district. This decentralized arrangement was intended to reinforce local participation while at the same time providing a more hands-on Federal role—in particular, to enable Federal prosecutorial action to be more responsive to local law enforcement initiatives. Other components of each local organization’s structure generally include:

- The Weed and Seed steering committee, which establishes operational goals, designs and develops programs, guides implementation, and assesses program achievements.
- The weeding committee, which plans and monitors the law enforcement efforts, including interdiction and prosecution.
- The seeding committee, which plans and monitors the prevention, intervention, treatment, and neighborhood restoration efforts.
- The Weed and Seed program staff, who operate and maintain daily program activities.

Each site is required to create at least one “safe haven,” a highly visible and accessible multiservice center where youths and adults can receive needed services, develop relationships, enhance personal skills, and find opportunities to be productive and successful.<sup>c</sup> Special effort is made to keep these safe havens secure from drug trafficking and other criminal activities.

The full National Evaluation Research Report is available in print and online. The eight case studies are available online.

## Notes

a. Executive Office for Weed and Seed, *Operation Weed and Seed, Implementation Manual*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Executive Office for Weed and Seed: 1–3 and 1–4.

b. The Executive Office for Weed and Seed regards community policing as “increasing police visibility and developing cooperative relationships between the police and citizenry in target areas.” The associated techniques include foot patrols, police ministrations, nuisance abatement, victim referrals to support services, and community relations activities, in which the community is encouraged to undertake such initiatives as neighborhood watches, citizen marches and rallies, drug-free zones, and graffiti removal. See Executive Office for Weed and Seed, *Operation Weed and Seed, Implementation Manual*: 9–6.

c. Executive Office for Weed and Seed, *Weed and Seed Fiscal Year 1998 Program Guide and Application Kit for New Sites*, Attachment 2, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Executive Office for Weed and Seed, 1998: 2–1. In its literature, the Executive Office for Weed and Seed describes safe havens as an integral part of a “risk factor and protective factor” approach to crime prevention. This is viewed as the counterpart to comprehensive community-based disease prevention programs, which have operated effectively in the public health arena. In the Weed and Seed context, risk factors, those that make an individual susceptible to criminal behavior, must be identified and addressed. At the same time, protective factors, those that serve to counter or neutralize risks, must be enhanced.

bringing together community organizations and other Weed and Seed participants. A basic Weed and Seed premise is that the U.S. Attorney’s Office provides Federal oversight and coordinates Federal, State, and local law enforcement and prosecutorial activities, as well as general DOJ oversight of the Weed and Seed strategy. Through such coordination, some sites effectively used Federal law in weeding strategies and mobilized resources for seeding programs from a variety of Federal agencies. In other sites, however, Weed and Seed was managed and operated by a city agency (e.g., a police department), and the role played by the U.S. Attorney was much more limited.

**Police and prosecutors.** Additional law enforcement resources are brought to bear on targeted areas. Police and prosecutors concentrate their efforts to identify, arrest, and prosecute crimi-

nals, especially those engaging in drug trafficking and violent crime. By providing more effective crime detection and response, speedier investigations and trials, and the stricter sentences available through Federal prosecution, police and prosecutors seek to get drug dealers and other criminals off the street. The goal of these activities is to build trust and support with the residential and business communities. Police and prosecutors can then engage area residents and business people as problem-solving partners, who, through their cooperation, will promote further arrests and prosecutions.

**Steering committee.** The role and composition of steering committees varied among sites, with some dominated by public-sector representatives and others more heavily represented and guided by community residents. In general, the committees established

goals and objectives, provided guidance and oversight on key program design and implementation issues, and integrated weeding and seeding at the policy level. In most sites, the steering committee played a critical role in coordinating efforts across agencies, sectors, and jurisdictions. For several sites, the steering committee or Weed and Seed community organizations provided a critical means of resident participation in program decision-making. Across all eight sites, steering committee members included key public agency representatives and local government officials and various social service providers, community-based organizations, and residents.

**Interorganizational linkages.** Increased interagency collaboration was a central component of most weeding strategies. Such efforts included monthly meetings between Weed and

Exhibit 2. Target area characteristics

Site/Target Area(s)	W/S Start Date	Funding	Part I Crime Rate*	Area in Square Miles	Population
Akron: West Side	October 1995	\$158,172	69.5	3.5	23,930
Hartford: Stowe Village	January 1995	\$2,448,424	199.2	0.001	1,300
Las Vegas: Meadows Village West Las Vegas	October 1994	\$2,168,066	206.3	0.05	4,819
	October 1994		118.0	1.6	10,103
Manatee/Sarasota: North Manatee South Manatee	October 1994	\$2,515,000	73.9	1.1	3,327
	October 1994		85.3	1.2	8,620
Pittsburgh: Hill District	April 1992	\$3,275,000	246.6	0.5	4,244
Salt Lake City: West Side	March 1995	\$550,000	55.1	6.3	22,000
Seattle: Central District	January 1993	\$3,125,000	172.6	1.2	13,812
Shreveport: Highland/Stoner Hill	February 1995	\$2,250,000	211.6	4.6	12,668

\*Per 1,000 residents in the year preceding implementation of Weed and Seed.

## T Study Methodology

The National Evaluation of operation Weed and Seed was designed to gain the perspective of target area residents in eight sites, to assess the trends in arrests and crime in those areas, and to draw from the personal experiences of participants in the seeding programs. The evaluation included a wide variety of activities at each site as follows:

- A review of funding applications and other significant program documents.
- Individual interviews with key program administrators, senior law enforcement staff, managers of seeding organizations and activities, service providers (both current and former), and community leaders.
- Analysis of automated, incident-level crime and arrest records provided by the local police departments.
- Group interviews with seeding program participants.
- Resident surveys in target areas, conducted in June 1995 by the Institute for Social Analysis and in December 1997 by Abt Associates Inc.

**Resident surveys.** To a large extent, both surveys focused on the same issues—resident perceptions of crime, public safety, police performance and activities, quality of life, and awareness of the Weed and Seed program. There were, however, some differences in the methods used in the two surveys. The 1995 survey consisted of 1,531 in-person interviews, while the 1,995 interviews in 1997 were conducted by telephone. In addition, the 1997 survey consisted of

fewer questions than the 1995 survey. The decision to proceed in 1997 with telephone interviewing and a shorter questionnaire was based on the difficulties experienced in 1995 in completing the targeted number of interviews per site.

To analyze arrest and crime patterns in the 10 Weed and Seed target areas, the research team requested computerized incident-level data from law enforcement agencies, including basic facts about each arrest, crime (e.g., when and where the crime was committed), and associated criminal charges. Because the primary interest was in arrests that were made and crimes that occurred in the target areas, procedures were developed to identify those arrests and crimes from data files provided by each jurisdiction. In most cases, the procedures involved geocoding the address where the arrest was made or where the crime was committed.

The focus has also been on the seven Part I crimes—homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and auto theft. Although these crimes account for only one segment of the overall crime problem (ignoring, for example, order maintenance and other crimes closely associated with quality-of-life issues), there are standard definitions of these crimes that all law enforcement agencies follow, thus allowing for site-to-site comparisons. Given that controlling drug trafficking and drug-related crime is one of the key Weed and Seed objectives, the researchers also focused on drug arrests.

**Onsite observation of programs.** Interviews were conducted with seeding program

participants in each site (excluding Akron, Ohio) to gain their perspectives. Evaluation staff visited 4 to 6 programs in each of the sites and conducted interviews with groups of 7 to 10 people. These interviews were not intended to measure outcomes of the programs that were visited; rather, they were designed to learn the perceived benefits and drawbacks of the programs from the individuals who participated in them. Long-term effects of these programs on the lives of the program participants cannot be deduced from the interviews conducted.

The seeding programs that were visited fall under four general categories: youth recreation and education, community building, employment and training, and violence prevention. Programs visited included Police Activities (or Athletic) Leagues, Boys and Girls Club Athletic Programs, Safe Haven After-School Programs, and Youth Enrichment Programs. Based on the comments of the participants interviewed, the seeding programs appeared to provide services that would otherwise not have been available in the target areas. Most of the interviewees also indicated participation in the seeding programs has been a positive experience that helped them feel more secure emotionally, physically, or both. The general themes that emerged focused on providing additional structure and discipline in the lives of target area youths and providing opportunities and assistance for adults to work toward personal and professional growth.

Seed officers and probation/parole officers to catch parole violators, frequent joint Federal and local special narcotics operations, and the creation of formal interagency Weed and Seed law enforcement task forces, such as in Las Vegas, Manatee/Sarasota Counties, and Pittsburgh. In Salt Lake City, Weed and Seed worked closely with the existing Metro Narcotics Task Force, which focused on high-level drug dealers.

The eight Weed and Seed sites tried to build their seeding programs around existing resources, in addition to creating new partnerships. For example, Hartford Weed and Seed integrated seeding efforts with the existing U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Family Investment Center, and the Salt Lake City Weed and Seed program built on the Comprehensive Communities Program. Extensive partnerships and collaborations were created through Weed and Seed in the public and private sectors, with most of the private-sector partnerships with nonprofit and community-based organizations. In Shreveport, for example, Weed and Seed arranged for existing services to come to the target area, including free immunizations for children provided by the State Department of Public Health, a library bookmobile, and free computer training from a local university. In Seattle, the Washington Insurance Council joined Weed and Seed to establish the Seattle Neighborhood Action Program as a public/private partnership to help revitalize a Weed and Seed neighborhood.

Seeding program partners and providers who were interviewed emphasized how Weed and Seed increased coordination and communication links among neighborhood groups and other agencies. Almost all respondents said

they felt more connected to the community and service providers. A director of a youth service organization in Shreveport said:

Establishing partnerships is the key to Weed and Seed—cooperation on projects and working together to bring the community together. [You] can touch more people as a group of organizations than as a single entity.

### Building trust and community capacity

Several of the evaluation sites encountered early community resistance to Weed and Seed because residents were concerned about an exclusive focus on enforcement or the potential for targeted harassment. The clear lesson from these experiences was the importance of involving residents early in Weed and Seed planning, providing residents with substantial program authority, and nurturing higher levels of interaction and trust between public-sector representatives and those they serve. The seeding component and community policing were typically the intended means for building community trust and encouraging participation. In the initial concept, it was assumed these elements would follow intensified enforcement. In practice, it became apparent to many Weed and Seed organizers that the target areas had to become involved at the outset and a comprehensive strategic plan was needed to bring this about.

Even when target areas had strong preexisting community organizational infrastructures, considerable resources were needed to effectively catalyze resident participation and increase the organizations' scope of operations and outreach. Weed and Seed sites that

employed a bottom-up, grassroots approach tended to build trust among residents and community-based leaders and enhanced community capacity for crime prevention and reduction and social development.

Weed and Seed also provided a forum for leadership development among residents. In Salt Lake City, for example, a resident took the lead in the initial Weed and Seed grant application and played an instrumental role in early program implementation. In the North and South Manatee target areas, charismatic individual leaders emerged who essentially ran the safe havens as volunteers and directed a variety of community activities. For all sites, it remained a central organizational challenge to continuously develop and broaden leadership to implement and sustain the Weed and Seed strategy.

### Approach to law enforcement

Most sites developed and implemented coherent law enforcement strategies that responded to local conditions and incorporated stronger patrols at the street level with some degree of higher level interagency cooperation. Law enforcement approaches across the target areas typically included increased police presence through additional staffing and overtime, with the majority of sites assigning officers dedicated to the target area, and increased special operations for targeted law enforcement, especially for drug-related and violent crime.

**Multiagency task forces.** The sites developed varying degrees of increased local, State, and Federal coordination, whether in targeting offenders, narcotics operations, prosecution, or probation/parole. Local responses ranged

from increasing communication through monthly meetings to creating formal interagency and multijurisdictional task force operations housed at the same facility. Although multiagency task forces concentrated on the target area, they pursued drug cases across jurisdictional lines. Consequently, the benefits of these efforts extended beyond the target areas, particularly when the focus was on high-level drug dealers who controlled large operations. Task force missions varied primarily according to the nature of crime in the target areas and preexisting law enforcement operations, so the Weed and Seed task forces complemented existing efforts.

**The community policing bridge.**

The implementation of Weed and Seed enabled most sites to expand or strengthen community policing efforts or institute new programs; better concentrate, coordinate, and integrate efforts within police departments; and increase integration of law enforcement with seeding type activities. Community policing initiatives such as nuisance abatement, landlord programs, graffiti eradication, code enforcement, and neighborhood cleanups helped improve property maintenance and neighborhood environments. Officers participated in a wide range of youth recreation and education programs in the target areas. Such activities engaged local youths in constructive activity, provided positive role models for the youths, and built community relations.

The assignment of dedicated officers to the Weed and Seed target areas was important in building relationships with residents and in aiding enforcement through better knowledge of the neighborhood, better intelligence, and the ability to operate proactively. In Shreveport, for example, many

residents knew the four dedicated “bumble bees”—the bicycle patrol officers in their yellow shirts and black shorts—and, in Pittsburgh, residents lobbied to keep one of their Weed and Seed officers from being reassigned to another district. One police lieutenant in Las Vegas would find jobs for gang members, and, occasionally, he would drive them to their jobs or check with their supervisors to see how the youths were doing on the job. Although weeding has typically involved less resident participation than has seeding, communication between residents and the police seems to have increased across sites.

In addition to enhancing community policing efforts, Weed and Seed provided a vehicle for mobilizing residents to participate in crime prevention and, in some cases, for creating effective structures for community authority and leadership. Responses ranged from increasing neighborhood watches, to community meetings, to a citizens’ advisory committee that provided guidance on law enforcement priorities.

**The U.S. Attorney’s role.** At the Federal level, the U.S. Attorney’s two potential roles were to serve as:

- A coordinator or “people mover” for Weed and Seed operations. For example, when the U.S. Attorney chaired steering committee meetings and used resources of the Office of the Attorney General in the process, this served as a stimulus to other partners.
- A key player in multijurisdictional task forces when the focus was on high-level drug distribution and sales. This helped to integrate, coordinate, and focus local and Federal enforcement efforts.

In Las Vegas, for example, the U.S. Attorney’s Office played both roles during the early stages of program implementation. The role played by the U.S. Attorney in each area might be strong or weak, depending on the personalities and motivations of the partners involved.

**Prosecution.** Overall, prosecution has been a relatively weak link in Weed and Seed due to various institutional, political, and judicial issues. In the majority of sites, there was no special Federal or local prosecution or tracking of Weed and Seed cases except for efforts conducted by joint Federal/State/local task forces. In general, district attorneys operate with limited resources and in politicized environments that act as barriers to the provision of the additional resources needed for local prosecution of Weed and Seed cases. Some local prosecutors said although weeding activities generated more criminal complaints, their office budget was not increased to hire new prosecutors or to cover the operating costs that would be added by enhanced prosecution of Part II or quality-of-life offenses.

At the local level, police departments and prosecutors often work through different political systems. Most police departments are city based and receive their local and Federal funding through their city council. That process is fairly well defined in most cities. Prosecutors, on the other hand, often are county based and receive their funding from the county. This funding process often encompasses multiple municipal priorities and other competing political considerations. The role of Federal prosecution also varied from no or few Federal prosecutions to substantially increased Federal, State, and local cooperation.

## Approach to seeding

One of the greatest challenges for the sites was to develop an appropriate seeding strategy with community members that targeted Weed and Seed resources most effectively and leveraged existing public and private resources. Simply selecting and successfully implementing seeding programs, such as safe havens, in itself was more difficult for most sites than implementing their weeding programs, with some sites initially stumbling at this level of program execution.

Seeding was inherently a broader and more complex task, both in development of goals and strategies and from a practical organizational standpoint. Seeding efforts involved engaging participation and commitment from public- and private-sector organizations, whereas weeding had a relatively clearer mission, operating within more established hierarchical structures of law enforcement and criminal justice organizations. Due to the broader and less defined nature of seeding, relatively more time was needed for planning, relationship building, and gaining consensus and commitment from the wide range of participants who shaped this domain. Seeding, by its nature, is resistant to short-term fixes designed to produce observable, overnight results.

The eight Weed and Seed sites tried to build their programs around existing resources, in addition to creating new partnerships. Seeding program partners and providers who were interviewed emphasized how Weed and Seed increased coordination and communication links across neighborhood groups and other agencies. Weed and Seed sites reflected different emphases in funding local seeding programs—

with varying degrees of program breadth, depth, and duration. In several sites, providing communities with a voice in the seeding grant award process was critical to gaining community participation and trust.

Seeding initiatives undertaken by the evaluation sites can be clustered as follows, in order of predominance:

- Prevention and intervention programs for youths that included afterschool programs, safe havens, recreation and sports programs, skills and employment training, job development, and health and substance abuse-related programs.
- Neighborhood restoration, such as neighborhood cleanups and code enforcement.
- Community building and community development initiatives.
- Adult employment and economic advancement programs, such as computer, Internet, and educational training.
- Family support services targeted to adults.
- Community economic development.

## Impact on crime trends

Across the evaluation sites, crime patterns varied widely. As exhibits 3a and 3b show, in nine target areas available data allowed a comparison of the number of Part I crimes (homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and auto theft) in the year prior to program implementation to the second year of Weed and Seed. Six of these areas showed declines: Stowe Village in Hartford, 46 percent; Crawford-Roberts (one neighborhood within the Hill District) in Pittsburgh,

24 percent; North Manatee, 18 percent; the Shreveport target area, 11 percent; the Central District in Seattle, 10 percent; and West Las Vegas, 6 percent. Three target areas experienced increases in Part I crimes: South Manatee, 2 percent; Meadows Village in Las Vegas, 9 percent; and Salt Lake City, 14 percent. A comparable estimate was not possible for the Akron target area due to insufficient data.

During this same time period, in seven target areas—Hartford, Pittsburgh (Crawford-Roberts), North Manatee, South Manatee, Shreveport, West Las Vegas, and Salt Lake City—Part I crime rates declined more or increased less than in the rest of the city or county.

A relationship appears to exist between crime trends and the concentration of program resources in sites that had the largest increases or decreases in crime. Hartford, for example, has the smallest target area in terms of population and area, while Salt Lake City has the largest single target area in square miles and, along with Akron, the smallest level of Federal Weed and Seed funding. (See exhibit 2.)

Finally, changes in the drug arrest rates appear to follow the same general pattern as the changes in the Part I crime rate. For example, among those six target areas for which there are arrest data, the four with decreases in Part I crime from the year prior to Weed and Seed through the second year of implementation (i.e., Hartford, Pittsburgh, North Manatee, and Shreveport) all experienced initial high rates of drug arrests—suggesting an initial period of intense weeding activities—followed by declining drug arrest rates. Assuming the level

of enforcement as measured by police presence has remained somewhat constant, this trend reflects success in reducing drug activity. However, the Salt Lake City target area and South Manatee both experienced large increases in the number of drug arrests in 1997 compared with 1996, suggesting perhaps these sites had not yet succeeded in reducing the level of drug activity in the target areas. In the case of Salt Lake City, an influx of gang activity is an important contextual factor, raising the question of whether the crime rate would have been even higher there without Weed and Seed.

### Assessing the Weed and Seed strategy

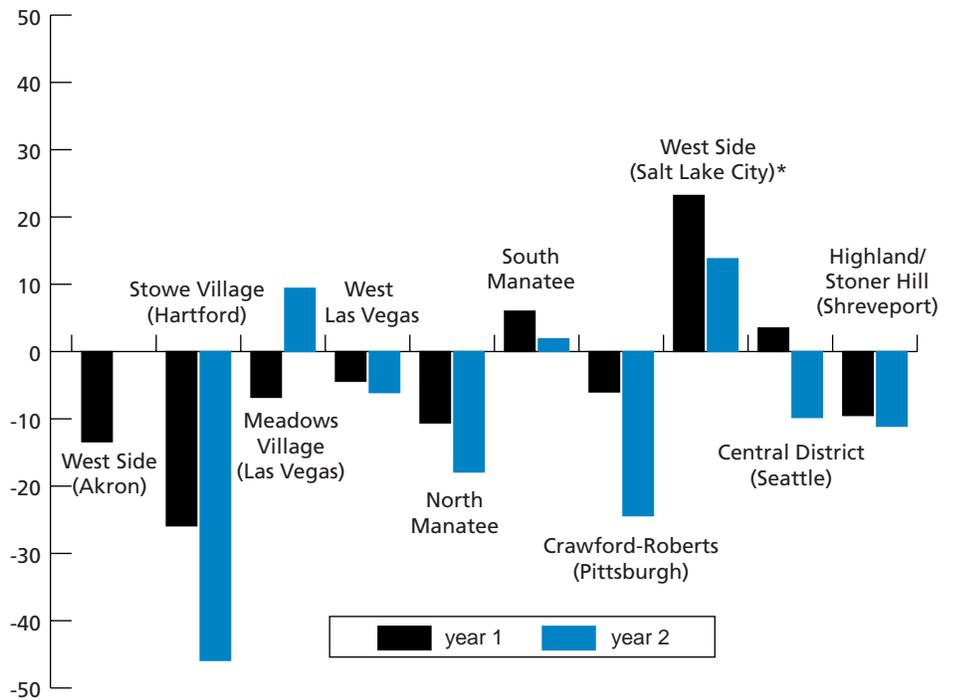
The evaluation investigated two major questions: What factors appeared to help or inhibit successful implementation of Weed and Seed; and did detectable changes in outcome measures take place as a consequence of Weed and Seed?<sup>1</sup>

### Effects on crime and public perceptions

Regarding the specific survey-reported pattern of residents' perceptions of crime, public safety, and police performance, the target areas cluster into three groups:

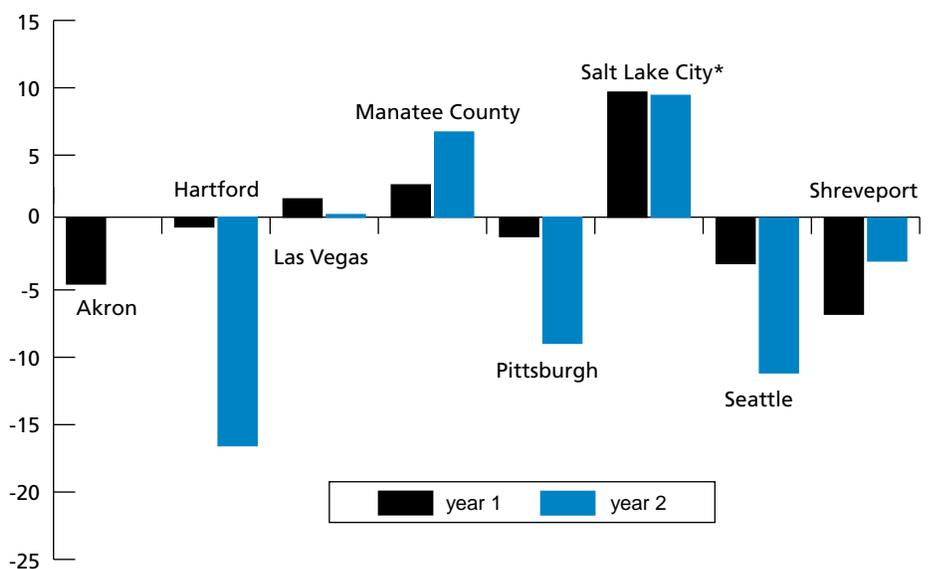
- North Manatee and Pittsburgh exhibited *substantial* evidence of changes in residents' perceptions across multiple outcome measures, including the severity of crime and police effectiveness in controlling crime.
- Akron, Hartford, and Seattle exhibited *some* evidence of changes in residents' perceptions on selected crime dimensions, either drug-related crime (Akron and Seattle)

Exhibit 3a. Percent change in Part I crime from the year preceding Weed & Seed to year 1 and to year 2: target areas



\* Year-to-year comparisons in Salt Lake City are based on 5-month periods only. Weed and Seed started in August 1995, and data are available only back to March 1995.

Exhibit 3b. Percent change in Part I crime from the year preceding Weed & Seed to year 1 and to year 2: comparison areas



\* Year-to-year comparisons in Salt Lake City are based on 5-month periods only. Weed and Seed started in August 1995, and data are available only back to March 1995.

or violent and gang-related crime (Hartford).

- Las Vegas, Salt Lake City, and Shreveport exhibited *little* evidence of changes in residents' perceptions of general public safety or the severity of specific types of crime in the neighborhood.

Based on the pattern of findings on the rate of Part I crimes as well as responses to crime-related survey questions, the target areas fall into four categories, first according to the evidence of reduced Part I crimes and then (within each category) according to the evidence of improved public perceptions:

- Pittsburgh and Hartford showed strong evidence of reduced Part I crimes and improved public perceptions on crime-related measures (e.g., reduction of fear of crime, public safety).
- Manatee/Sarasota (North Manatee) and Shreveport showed substantial evidence of reduced Part I crimes. (North Manatee also showed improved public perceptions on multiple crime-related measures.)
- Seattle, Akron, Las Vegas (West Las Vegas), and Manatee/Sarasota (South Manatee) showed some evidence of reduced Part I crimes. (Akron and Seattle also showed improved public perceptions.)
- Salt Lake City and Las Vegas (Meadows Village) showed no evidence of reduced Part I crimes.

### Factors favoring successful implementation of Weed and Seed

Of course, these findings must be interpreted in terms of local circumstances and program approaches.

What factors appear to have promoted successful implementation of the program and thus have promoted the achievement of the program's intended results? To address this question, the evaluation considered site characteristics and program features.

**Community setting.** Preexisting community features may make Weed and Seed easier or more difficult to operate effectively. Important factors included the strength of the social and institutional infrastructure (an established network of community-based organizations and community leaders), the severity of crime problems, geographical advantages favoring economic development, and transiency of the community population. The last factor is particularly important. Rapid turnover, as in the case of Meadows Village in Las Vegas, undermines the crime-fighting effect of community policing and makes it difficult, if not impossible, to generate the ongoing community involvement that is a key element in the Weed and Seed concept.

**Program design.** The mix of weeding and seeding activities and the sequencing of these components appear to be important factors in gaining community support for the program. Important positive factors included early seeding, sustained weeding, high-level task forces combined with community policing, and an active prosecutorial role.

**Concentration of funds.** As is to be expected, sites appeared to have greater impact on crime rates if they concentrated their program resources on smaller population groups, especially if they could similarly channel other public funds and also leverage private funds. The important factors included funding "intensity" (applying

funding to a narrowly targeted group of residents in a small geographical area) and channeling and leveraging other funds.

**Leadership and partnership.** A less tangible ingredient that characterized the more successful programs was the active and constructive leadership of key individuals. By its very nature, Weed and Seed places a great premium on effective coordination of groups with different organizational missions, responding to different constituencies. To establish effective working relationships among these organizations required personal energy and initiative and an organizational structure that facilitated interaction. For example, those sites that based weeding and seeding staff in the same facility tended to develop better cooperation and coordination between the two program components.

The most effective implementation strategies were those that relied on bottom-up, participatory decision-making approaches, especially when combined with efforts to build capacity and partnership among local organizations. This required a long-term perspective about the program and its potential to bring about community change. Such sites, including some that achieved substantial crime reductions within the time period analyzed, have established a stronger foundation and more sustainable basis for further community-targeted initiatives.

### Policy implications

In charting the future direction of Weed and Seed, policymakers have a number of strategic choices to make. These include designating sites for continued funding, selecting sites for new awards, and allocating funds

among participating sites over time. (See “Where is Weed and Seed going?”) The key policy question is how to use program funds most effectively in ways that make the greatest long-term contributions to controlling crime and promoting a safe living environment for residents. Other nonfunding considerations include improved coordination among Federal, State, and local public and private partners.

The experience of the eight sites evaluated suggests Weed and Seed has affected the target areas through either (or both) of two avenues. The first, program effectiveness, relates to the specific initiatives that focus on law enforcement and crime prevention. These activities, both on the weeding and seeding sides, appeared to have varying degrees of success in reducing crime and improving perceptions of public safety. The second, community mobilization, is the process in which Weed and Seed provides a catalyst for greater involvement of neighborhood residents and community-based organizations. As mentioned earlier, some sites were more predisposed than others to participatory problem-solving arrangements by virtue of their preexisting infrastructure and active leadership by respected individuals and established organizations.

These two mechanisms of change are clearly interrelated. The experience of the sites studied here showed:

- The Weed and Seed program has been a strong stimulant to community coalition building. Public and private organizations came together, for the first time in a number of sites, to develop interventions that would have a broad base of support. It seems clear these developments would not have occurred in the absence of Weed and

## Where Is Weed and Seed Going?

Beginning in 1996, the Weed and Seed program altered its paradigm and approach to site longevity and funding levels. After funding 36 sites as part of a 3-year demonstration at approximately \$750,000 per site, funding was extended to additional sites at a lower level. By 1997, Weed and Seed funding was offered to almost 120 sites, typically at \$250,000 per year. At this new, lower annual funding level per site, Weed and Seed appropriated funds to 176 sites in 1998. In 1999 the program grew to approximately 200 sites, despite a drop in total national funding.

In fiscal year 2000, new policies will require the original 36 sites to submit comprehensive reapplications to be eligible for funding. Subsequently, every site must reapply after 5 years of continuous funding. This new approach is consistent with the basic Weed and Seed strategy of pursuing effectiveness through coordination and leveraging of additional public and private resources (in many cases, several times the amount of Weed and Seed funding).

Additional resources sites are urged to investigate include other U.S. Department of Justice funding streams (e.g., Local Law Enforcement Block Grants, Byrne Formula Grants, Juvenile Justice Formula

Funds, Asset Forfeiture Funds, COPS hiring awards) as well as other Federal, State, local, and private resources. The long-range objective is for recipient sites to use the Weed and Seed funds to develop successful, self-sustaining community-based interventions.

Consistent with the program’s emphasis on flexibility and customer orientation, sites are given considerable latitude to develop programs with the Executive Office for Weed and Seed grant funds and to request training and technical assistance. Increasingly, experienced sites are asked to provide peer-to-peer training to show new and developing sites what to do and what to avoid to develop successful local programs. Sites are encouraged to organize regional training sessions to facilitate these exchanges and coordinate with other Federal agency partners.

In addition to providing funding directly to sites, Weed and Seed supports many multisite activities. For example, in cooperation with the U.S. Navy Drug Demand Reduction Task Force and other military partners, Weed and Seed supports the implementation of the Drug Education for Youth (DEFY) program in Weed and Seed communities. Weed and Seed DEFY sites increased from 3 in 1996 to 60 in 1999.

Seed influence. To maximize impact on crime rates, Weed and Seed should seek the highest feasible concentration of funds in the program sites. Given the annual funding constraint of the congressional appropriations process, this implies a more selective process in choosing sites to receive new awards and/or limiting the number of years that ongoing sites receive program funding. Having a concentrated and focused stra-

tegic effort is also an important means of increasing the intensity of the intervention. Increasing coordination with other Federal funding sources is another key element. Furthermore, the evaluation finds that Weed and Seed funding has acted as a significant catalyst for general community revitalization efforts and that most target area communities have undertaken programs and created beneficial community

organizations that likely would not have come into existence without Weed and Seed.

- In selecting sites for new program funding, Weed and Seed should place its funding priority on sites with geographically small target areas and with favorable community settings and program designs. This is more likely to produce demonstrable successes. In turn, this should increase potential spinoffs from the Weed and Seed target area to other areas in the site.
- The Executive Office for Weed and Seed should expand its provision of technical assistance to the funded sites. The lessons learned from the more successful sites—and the less

successful ones—on these issues are, to a large degree, widely applicable. New sites should receive the benefit of this experience. This seems especially important in promoting the partnership arrangements that have characterized the more successful programs examined in this research.

**Note**

1. The most rigorous means of establishing the counterfactual is an experimental design in which the intervention, in this case Operation Weed and Seed, is not implemented among a randomly selected set of subjects, in this case the sites. Such a design was infeasible in this context. Another approach would have been to match each evaluation site with a comparison site of similar baseline characteristics. At an earlier stage of this evaluation, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and the Institute for

Social Analysis identified such comparison sites and included them in the 1995 survey of community residents and other baseline data collection efforts. Soon thereafter, however, NIJ and Abt Associates concluded the comparison sites were not sufficiently comparable to their corresponding target areas in demographic characteristics and crime trends. The matched site approach was not pursued further. See Terence Dunworth, et al., *Overview of Institute for Social Analysis National Evaluation Baseline Data and Implications of the Data for the Weed and Seed Impact Evaluation*, Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates Inc., January 1996.

Findings and conclusions of the research reported here are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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**This document, the full cross site analysis, the eight case studies, and other NIJ publications can be found at and downloaded from the NIJ Web site (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij>).  
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