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JOINT STATE/CITY
TASK FORCE ON DRUGS AND VIOLENCE:
ANALYSIS OF A MULTI-LEVEL TASK FORCE

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JUL 27 1995

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Funding for this study was provided 100 percent by a U.S. Bureau of Justice Assistance grant (90-DB-CX-0025) in the amount of \$7,200. The cooperation of the Massachusetts State Police, the Boston Police Department, the District Attorney of Suffolk County, and the Massachusetts Trial Court are acknowledged. Comments by Teresa Mayors and Mary Lou Szulborski were especially useful. 1991.

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JOINT STATE/CITY TASK FORCE ON DRUGS AND VIOLENCE:

ANALYSIS OF A MULTI-LEVEL TASK FORCE

In early 1990 Governor Dukakis and law enforcement officials examined the rapidly increasing violence on the streets of Boston, specifically gun related violence. Given the number of homicides was not decreasing while overall violence did appear to decline, concern grew in the area of illegal gun carrying and its' relationship with violent crime. In March 1990, a working group, later named the Joint State/City Task Force, was created to coordinate the state's law enforcement agencies in order to obtain the most effective use from their combined resources.

In 1974 legislation was passed requiring a mandatory one year sentence to be imposed on those individuals convicted of carrying a firearm without an identification card. The Bartley-Fox law, as it was known, became a key focus of the working group by examining arrest, disposition, and sentencing statistics. An examination of the pending gun carrying cases in the Boston Municipal Court (BMC) indicated an active backlog of 118 cases as of March 3, 1990. Although the Chief Justice of the BMC and his Chief Administrator indicated that these cases were being expedited and the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office was considering them priority cases, further examination showed 99 individuals in default for carrying as of May 31.

This report summarizes a project funded by the Anti-Drug Abuse and System Improvement Act formula grant program to reduce violent crime, especially gun crime. A Joint State/City Task force was established to coordinate efforts of State Police, Bos-

ton Police, the Suffolk County District Attorney, and the courts to remove violent offenders from the streets of Boston. The strategy of the project and its notable accomplishments are examined. Recommendations for using knowledge gained from this project in targeting other fugitive populations are also presented.

GOALS

The fundamental goal of the project was to remove the targeted individuals from the streets: to increase the certainty of their punishment and to incapacitate them from committing more crimes. The project had six goals that derived from the fundamental goal: finding the priority cases for which warrants existed, clearing the warrants, arresting the offenders (where appropriate), prosecution, disposition, and incarceration.

These goals were applied to three overlapping groups of offenders: individuals defaulting on their court appearances for Bartley-Fox gun carrying violations, members of identified gangs, and fugitives having a history of violent offenses.

Bartley-Fox Defaulters

The goals for defaulters were finding them, clearing their warrants, arresting them, prosecution, disposition of cases, and incarceration of the guilty.

Gang Members

The goals for gang members were arrest, prosecution, disposition, and incarceration.

Violent Fugitives

The goals for fugitives were locating them, clearing warrants, arrest, prosecution, disposition, and incarceration.

OBJECTIVES

Six objectives derived from the project goals: finding the targeted individuals, clearing their warrants, arresting them (when possible), prosecution, disposition, and incarceration of those convicted or who pleaded guilty. These objectives were applied, as appropriate, to each of the three target groups.

Bartley-Fox Defaulters

The defaulters had to be found. Once found, warrants were cleared by arrest or determination that the offender was already in custody or impossible to arrest (for example, deceased). Arrests made when the offender was located and available for arrest (for example, one individual was located in Greece, but was not available for arrest). These defaulters were targeted for speedy prosecution by the Suffolk county District Attorney. Since an overall goal was to speed up the handling of the cases, increasing the disposition of the cases was a specific objective. For those convicted or who pleaded guilty, incarceration was a goal and assuring that all individuals guilty of Bartley-Fox violations were given at least the one year minimum mandatory sentence was an important objective.

Gang Members

Since it was already known where most gang members were, finding them was not a major objective. However making appropriate arrests of the gang members was an important objective. Prosecution of the cases was monitored to assure speed and certainty of the outcomes. Incarceration of the guilty was an additional objective.

Violent Fugitives

Finding the violent fugitives was a challenging objective. Most of these individuals were actively avoiding discovery. Clearing their warrants was also more complicated than Bartley-Fox violators or gang members because some of these offenders had older warrants than the gun defaulters or the gang members. Even finding these warrants was, at times, a problem. Several of these warrants were never found. Replacement warrants had to be obtained for them. This made arrest and prosecution more difficult. Once arrested and charged, however, disposing of the cases and incarcerating the guilty were specified objectives.

STRATEGIES OF TASK FORCE

This section describes the variety of strategies used by the task force to implement the project and accomplish its goals. Five basic strategies were utilized: prioritizing warrants, coordinating state and city efforts, use of a Violent Fugitive Arrest Squad (VFAS), frequent monitoring of results and flexibility of

action.

Prioritizing Warrants

There were three major types of procedures for prioritizing the warrants: examination of alternative criteria, involvement of all agencies involved, involvement of major policymakers. A number of meetings were held with state, county, and city personnel that discussed how to prioritize the warrants. These meetings helped achieve a common understanding of the criteria to be used and who were in the target population.

At the beginning of the project when each group listed their priority offenders, there was little overlap between the lists. After this was discovered, discussion of criteria for inclusion on the list produced a common target population.

The joint discussions of criteria also strengthened the involvement of the agencies in the project. The exchange of information, views, and concerns was essential to achieving agreement about the warrant priorities. This exchange allowed a full picture of the characteristics used in prioritizing and how each of the candidate offenders compared with those characteristics.

Involvement of major policymakers was also important. The presence of the Governor, the Secretary of Public Safety, the Commissioner of the State Police, the First Assistant in the District Attorney's office, a Superintendent of the Boston Police, and the assistant to the Presiding Judge for the Trial Courts established the project as important in the minds of the

participants carrying out the project.

Agreement about prioritizing led to formulation of a list of offenders to be targeted. The list had three components: 99 individuals who had defaulted on gun carrying court appearances, identified gang members, and priority violent fugitives. This list was then given to Boston Police Anti-Gang Unit (AGU) and the State Police Violent Fugitive Arrest Squad (VFAS) at which time an attempt was made to locate both the warrant and the individual.

The list of 99 Bartley-Fox defaulters was compiled up to May 30, 1990. A second list was kept on individuals that had defaulted after this date. The Boston Police AGU and State Police VFAS targeted this second list also.

Coordinating State and City Efforts

There were a number of groups to be coordinated: VFAS, Boston Police, the Suffolk County District Attorney, the Massachusetts Trial Court, senior state public safety officials, and a Bartley-Fox administrator (who had responsibility for monitoring operation of the project).

Initially, law enforcement coordination occurred by combining the State Police Violent Fugitive Arrest Squad (VFAS) and the B.E.A.T. Team from the Registry of Motor Vehicles Police to work with the Boston Police Anti-Gang Unit (AGU). Its purpose was to increase law enforcement presence in Area B, the section of Boston which has high gang related violence and where many of these

offenders lived.

The Joint State/City Task Force met on a bimonthly basis to facilitate communication and create a plan of action that would impact the increasing gun violence. This was in addition to weekly meetings that included a smaller group of individuals that discussed day to day procedures. This smaller group was composed of the Bartley-Fox Administrator and representatives from the Executive Office of Public Safety, VFAS, the Boston Police, the DA's office, and the Trial Court.

Once a week, a meeting was held at the Secretary's office in the Executive Office of Public Safety. Representatives of the State Police, the Boston Police, the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office, the Administrative Office of the Trial Court, the Governor's Legal Counsel and the Massachusetts Committee on Criminal Justice were invited to discuss the problems, concerns and progress made in targeting the 99 individuals on default from the BMC. The agenda of most meetings included discussion of updates, the sentencing dispositions of individuals, and progress in agreement on which individuals would be targeted as "Boston's Most Wanted." While most of the information was very straight forward, concern about the time lag between disposition and sentencing was often voiced by both the Secretary of Public Safety and the Governor's Legal Counsel. Although this concern was raised on many occasions, there were never any real answers provided by the BMC Clerks Office or the Trial Court Administra-

tive Office in explaining repeated continuances for sentencing. This lack of answers was often due to the reasons for continuances not being recorded in the docket information. In trying to reduce the delay, many of the cases were directly indicted by the District Attorney's Office from the lower district courts. The use of the one year mandatory sentence was also closely monitored by the Governor's Office. Judges were often questioned when an individual wasn't sentenced to the mandatory one year.

Questions about the location of warrants and the issuance of alias warrants were also frequently discussed. When an offender was to be arrested and the warrant was not able to be located, the Boston Police were questioned regarding its location. They often did not have answers to questions of responsibility for gathering warrants from their officers. At this time, arrest of targeted defaulters whose warrants cannot be located has been halted. Alias warrants have not yet been requested by the BPD; and, therefore, have not been issued by the courts. At present, there are six individuals whose warrants are still missing. Discussing warrants in the weekly meetings often accomplished nothing in furthering the process of arrests or in answering questions as to who is responsible for the missing warrants. Acquiring a warrant management system is being investigated by the Massachusetts Committee on Criminal Justice in hopes that a positive change can be made in Boston's current warrant system.

Every six to eight weeks, the Governor would hold a working group meeting in the Executive Office to discuss the current process and to clarify statistics. These meetings were often helpful in clarifying those responsibilities that were shunned before. Actions by judge's in dismissing cases and allowing extensive continuances were clarified for the Governor. Decisions of expanding the target group to two district courts were also made in these meetings. In addition, they fulfilled a political function in combining state forces with the City of Boston and Mayor Raymond Flynn. This task force and the goals that it wanted to reach were coordinated with the Mayor's Safe Neighborhood Plan, intended to make the streets in the city of Boston, safe from gangs, drugs, and violence.

Use of Violent Fugitive Arrest Squad

The Violent Fugitive arrest Squad (VFAS) is a team of State Police Officers assigned specific duties for tracking down violent offenders for whom a warrant has been issued. It concentrates its efforts on offenders who are believed or known to have committed serious violent crimes. These offenders have often used guns in their crimes, killed people, or been involved in major drug offenses.

VFAS was given the list of priority targets for arrest. Each week the State Police reported to the Bartley-Fox Administrator the number of individuals from the lists that had been located, arrested, or had their warrants cleared. Telephone discus-

sions were often held in the attempt to make the process run smoother.

Monitoring of Results

Three procedures were used to monitor the results of the project: weekly and monthly summary reports, task force meetings, and direct communication. The summary written reports were distributed at each of the task force meetings. Successes or problems were discussed, procedures revised, and encouragement given for successful efforts. On a weekly basis, the Bartley-Fox Administrator would also talk with members of the task force to check on activity and discuss ways of dealing with problems.

Flexibility of Action

A key aspect of the project was its willingness to modify actions in light of prior results or new information. Procedures that might need changing were reviewed at each meeting of the task force. VFAS and the Boston Police Department were allowed latitude in the day to day operations of finding and arresting offenders, but they were also held accountable for the results.

CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

The Joint State/City Task Force was studied using several techniques. Both qualitative information and quantitative data were used in assessing the project.

Qualitative Information

Three forms of qualitative information were used: oral

reports from task force members, direct conversations, and examination of project documents. The weekly contact of the Bartley-Fox Administrator with the project participants allowed establishing a relationship in which information was provided by the participants and available to the monitoring and evaluation staff.

Quantitative Information

Quantitative information focussed on three aspects of the project: baseline description, periodic status updates, and description of the project outcomes. The quantitative measures were directly related to the project objectives: statistics on individuals found, arrested, disposed, tried, convicted, sentenced, incarcerated, and warrants cleared. Progress in the project was indicated by increases in these statistics.

IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of the project was crucial to its accomplishments. The identification of obstacles and problems on an ongoing basis, as well as possible solutions, was essential for implementation. To overcome potential obstacles, the results of the task force were extensively monitored.

Monitoring Implementation

Four procedures were used to monitor implementation: reports, meetings, phone calls, and documents. These procedures have been described above. However, it is useful to know how

these procedures were actually carried out.

On a weekly basis, an arrest report was obtained from the State Police VFAS. If a Bartley-Fox defaulter that had been targeted on the list of 99 was arrested, he was put on an "apprehended list." The BMC clerks office was then contacted to obtain bail status and date of trial. The individual would be followed in the BMC until a disposition was reached. All of this information, and updates on the location of any individuals would be presented in a weekly report to then Governor Michael S. Dukakis.

Extent of Implementation

Quantifying the degree of implementation for this project is difficult because it involved separate grants to VFAS, the Suffolk District Attorney, and the Boston Police Anti-Gang Unit. The funds provided to each of these organizations were not exclusively for the Joint Task Force. VFAS money was to be used for apprehending additional violent fugitives who were not on the Task Force list, but who were dangerous drug offenders nonetheless. For year 2 the VFAS funds were \$30,425; for year 3, \$48,000. All of this was expended. District Attorney funds included money for priority prosecution of major drug offenders beyond those targeted by the Task Force. For year 2 they had \$27,500; for year 3, \$100,000. The Boston Police AGU funds required broader anti-gang activities than those associated with the Task Force alone. The AGU was funded at \$18,960 with a third

year grant. Since each of these projects had multiple overlapping goals, it is understandable that there is uncertainty regarding how much was spent on achieving each goal. As a result of these uncertainties regarding how much of the grants were used for the Joint Task Force, rather than as other legitimate expenses, the implementation of the project is more appropriately assessed by the results of the project than by internal expenditures of the agencies involved in the project.

Most of the money was used for overtime and equipment. Microcomputers were purchased by each of the three funded project. The computers were commonly used to compile and organize information, develop plans for action, and to track the status of targeted individuals. Each of these uses proved helpful. The District Attorney's office used the microcomputer to prepare and track cases given priority for prosecution. The AGU utilized their microcomputer to compile information on gang members, prepare search warrants, and to track progress on anti-gang actions. VFAS use their computer to compile intelligence on the targeted fugitives, prepare search warrants, and monitor the status of arrestees.

Funding of overtime was chosen, rather than hiring new personnel, because of the experience and knowledge of the existing staff. To assure that the most experienced, skilled, and knowledgeable staff were able to devote adequate time to these priority cases, overtime was made available. Given that a good

deal of the gang arrests and violent fugitive arrests occurred late at night or in early morning hours, whereas intelligence gathering often occurred during the day, use of overtime for this purpose seems warranted.

Based on the project results (see project impact below), implementation was fairly complete. Nearly all of the offenders on the Task Force list were subject to one or more of the objectives. The few who were not appear mostly to have fled the state and not available for arrest and prosecution.

Qualitative information based on observation of project meetings and discussions with project members provides additional information on implementation. As directly observed by evaluation staff and as reported by participants, some of the original task force strategies were extensively carried out for target groups. Some were not. When the strategies could not be carried out as intended they were revised. Most of the strategies mentioned above, however, were implemented. Those that were the least successful in implementation are discussed in the next section.

Obstacles to Implementation

Problems in locating offenders, finding arrest warrants, and obtaining information on the court status of cases posed particular obstacles to implementation. Difficulties in locating offenders was gradually overcome by using a variety of standard investigatory procedures. Finding the arrest warrants for some of the fugitives, however, proved to be an ongoing problem. For

reasons described above, some warrants were lost and obtaining replacements ("alias warrants") was an extremely slow process. The solution to this obstacle requires having an efficient tracking system for the warrants and allowing authorized copies be used for some purposes to minimize the risk of losing the originals of the warrants. In response to this identified problem, such a system is being considered for the Commonwealth. Obtaining information on the court status of arrestees was improved by assigning personnel to directly inspect court records to verify or find information. This was a very labor intensive solution; but in the absence of computerization of the District Courts in Massachusetts, no alternative was available. A project has been designed in response to this identified problem to further the computerization of the District Courts.

Strategies to Improve Implementation

Several strategies were used to overcome obstacles or prevent their appearance. Extensive phone discussions, face to face meetings, and periodic reaffirmation of the importance of the project by the Governor helped to improve implementation. Although some of the obstacles were not completely solved during the project, their identification as problems has led to ongoing plans that are likely to result in their eventual solution.

IMPACT

The impact of the project focussed on three areas: reduction

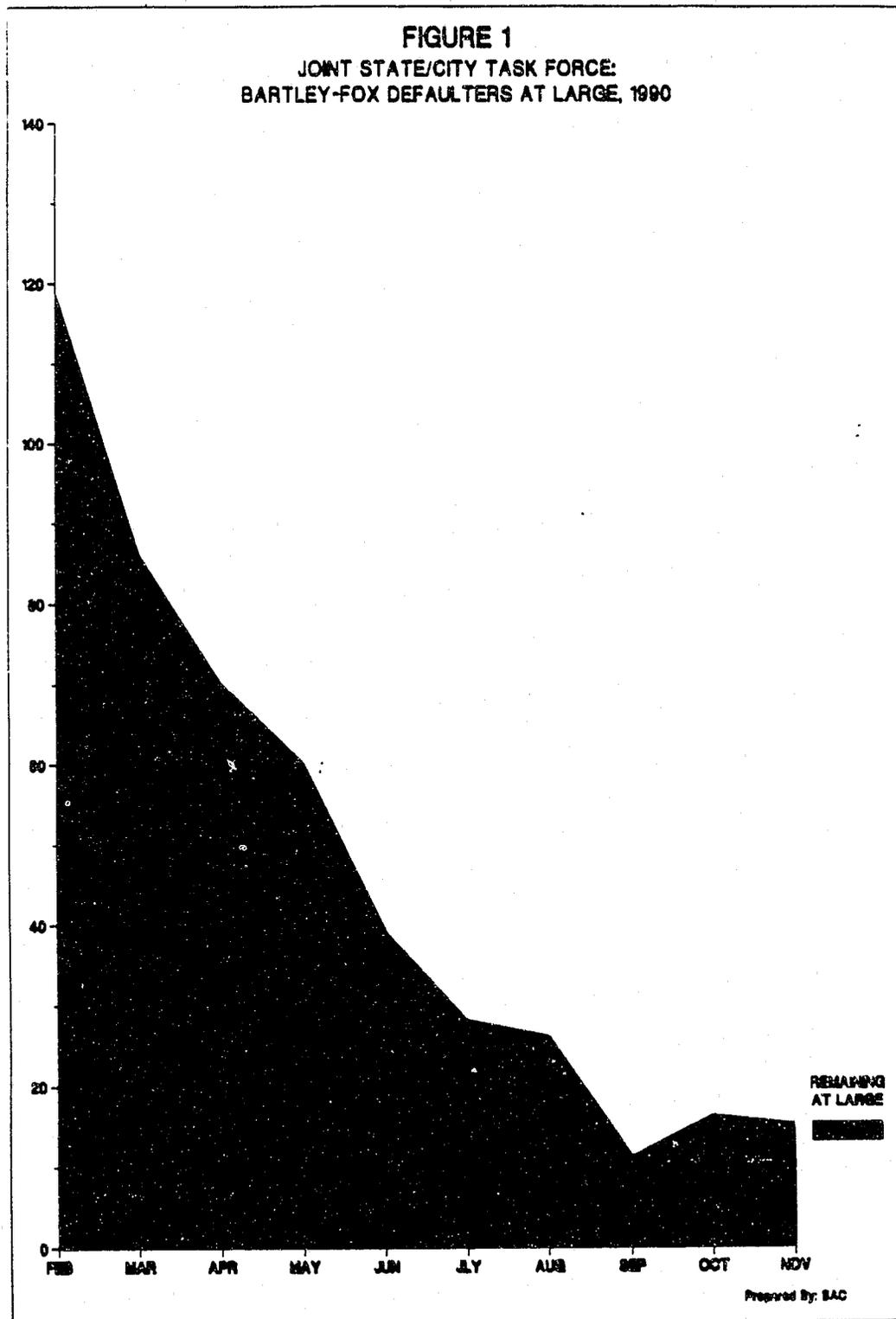
in the backlog of Bartley-Fox gun carrying default warrants, reduction in gang violence, and incapacitation of violent fugitives.

Reduction in Bartley-Fox Default Backlog

The Bartley-Fox Default list started with 99 individuals, to which 19 additional defaulters were added, for a total of 118. Of the original list of 99, 10 individuals were located in Massachusetts correctional facilities; twenty (20) individuals were located in the United States, either in penal institutions or at large; three (3) were located out of the country and were referred to the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI). Thirty-eight individuals have been arrested to date and forty-six (46) are still at large in both Massachusetts and other parts of the United States. However, less than half of those at large are still in Massachusetts. An examination of the disposition of those who have been apprehended will focus on disposition time and sentencing lengths.

The progress of clearing the Bartley-Fox default warrants is demonstrated in Figure 1. Of the 118 targeted defaulters, less than twenty remained at large in the Commonwealth after nine months. Interestingly enough, there have been no defaults on Bartley-Fox charges since November of 1990. There had only been twenty (20) defaults from June 1, 1990. Eleven (11) of those individuals (55%) have been apprehended to date. An examination of their length of disposition time and sentencing will be conducted

in comparison with the other Bartley-Fox defaulters.



By the beginning of July, 1990, three months into this program, most of the list of 99 had been cleared through the tracking of individuals. A discussion at one of the meetings raised the suggestion to look at the number of new defaulters in Roxbury District and Dorchester District Courts. Eighteen (18) and twenty-eight (28) individuals, respectively, were found to have defaulted between August 1989 and July of 1990. Some of the BMC Bartley-Fox defaulters on the original list dated back to 1980.

Reduction in Gang Violence

Many of the more violent gang members were incarcerated. During the course of the study there was a significant reduction in gang violence, especially gun violence. This reduction in gun use was associated with an increase in the proportion of knife crimes, a displacement of weapons. Given that knives resulted in fewer fatalities, this displacement is not an undesirable effect.

Incapacitation of Violent Fugitives

A number of violent fugitives were incarcerated as a result of the program. By February, 1991, 371 gang members were arrested and indicted by the AGU project. The majority of those indicted were convicted or pleaded guilty and were incarcerated. Sixty percent (220) of the individuals indicted had reached a disposition of their case by February, 1991. Eighty-six percent (191) of the disposed individuals had guilty verdicts or pleas. Eighty-seven percent of the guilty (166) were incarcerated.

Given the relatively small size of gangs in Boston compared

to such cities as New York, Chicago, or Los Angeles, this is a significant percentage of the more violent gang members. Many of these also had multiple prior charges and/or convictions. The 371 persons charged represented a total of 1,139 indictments. Their removal from society would have an effect in reducing crime beyond the numbers that were incarcerated.

VFAS arrested thirty-eight of the Bartley-Fox defaulters. Ten were found currently in county or state correctional facilities. Seven individuals surrendered. Over twenty-five fled out of state or out of the country. Thus, a large majority of the gun defaulters were prevented from continuing their crimes in the Commonwealth. Overall, VFAS arrested 653 violent fugitives between March and December, 1990.

SUMMARY

This report examines a cooperative project between the Governor's Office, the State Police, the Boston Police, the Suffolk County District Attorney, and the Massachusetts Trial Court in targeting a group of violent offenders for priority handling by the criminal justice system. The organizations involved developed a list of target individuals; cooperated in locating, arresting, and prosecuting them; and exchanged information to monitor the performance of the project.

A number of the project objectives were met. The cooperative project between state, county, and city criminal justice

agencies helped remove serious offenders from the streets. Almost all of the Bartley-Fox gun carrying violators were located, arrested, found guilty, and incarcerated. A number of the gang members on the priority list were arrested, prosecuted, and incarcerated. Many of the targeted violent fugitives were also found, arrested, and their cases disposed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A task force involving state and local governmental agencies requires special efforts to be successful. Active leadership and support from public officials is needed to overcome traditional institutional barriers that exist between the agencies involved. Particularly when different branches of government are involved (i.e., courts and executive branch), leaders in these branches must make clear that cooperation is expected.

A designated coordinator for the project is also helpful. Someone is needed to assure that information is being shared by all parties involved, to monitor progress of the project, identify barriers, and to coordinate resources and procedures to overcome barriers.

Very clear criteria for identifying a target group of offenders is also essential. When the project began, different agencies in the task force did not totally agree on what names should be on the target list. This led to problems in assuring desired outcomes of the cases. When the criteria were clarified

and agreement on the lists obtained, a smoother operation of the project occurred and deviations from intended policy were easier to identify and rectify.

Even after a specific project is over, periodic meetings of the agencies should occur to maintain gains in the ability of these agencies to track cases and assure their proper disposition.