National Institute of Justice

Gangs Research Working Group Meeting

February 22-23, 2011

Gangs Research Working Group Meeting

February 22-23, 2011

On this page find:

Meeting Summary: Challenges in Basic Research

On February 22-23, 2011, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) held a two-day Topical Working Group meeting of expert gang researchers and practitioners (see [Participant List](#)). The participants considered the issues and gaps in basic gang research and anti-gang programs, including intervention, prevention and deterrence. The Working Group spent the first day discussing challenges in basic research; on the second day, they focused on improving the anti-gang programs.

 In 1999, NIJ and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) convened a meeting called the Gang-Related Research Cluster Conference. At that time, the field of anti-gang programs and gang research was in its infancy. Participants at this meeting created a list of high-priority research needs (see [High Priority Research Needs, 1999](#)). The current Working Group used this list as a starting point for discussion of the state of gang research. They concluded that several advances had been made in areas of gang research since 1999 (see "Advances in Research"). In general, the advances in knowledge included: the nexus between gangs, violence and victimization; the transitory nature of gang membership; female involvement in gangs; gangs existing among white, suburban and rural communities; and the diversity and nontraditional typology of gangs.

Despite the advances, several research gaps remain to be considered (see [Research Gaps](#)).

[Back to Top](#)

Definitions

Often, gang research suffers from a multitude of definitions for how individuals are identified and verified as gang members. Gang membership can be identified in many ways, including self-identification, graffiti marks, talking with informants, having tattoos or certain clothing, and behavior assessment. Using legal definitions for gangs has proven to be problematic because the burden of legal proof is very high.

From a research standpoint, coming to a consensus of what a gang is, and who counts as a gang member, is critical to guiding future research. A consensus definition allows for researchers to engage in comparative, cross-site and multimethod research. Currently, there seems to be a move in the research community toward embracing a definition of gangs that is similar to the definition of a delinquent youth group. In the past, however, researchers have drawn a distinction between these two groups.

It is possible for an individual to be identified both as a gang member and as a member of a delinquent youth group if that individual does, in fact, interact with both groups. This lack of clarity blurs the line between the groups. However, differences do exist. For example, youth groups generally have large peer networks and may interact regularly with very different populations with no identified affiliations. Gangs, by contrast, have a transferable group identity that maintains itself even after the original group members have moved away from the gang life.

Currently, researchers commonly use self-identification in determining gang affiliation and membership. When an individual takes on a gang identity, it often involves a process by which an individual is labeled as a gang member by law enforcement, self-identifies as a gang member and joins the gang. In addition, the role of gang member enforces the meaning and connotation of being a gang member. There are expectations and standards in gangs, just as there are in other groups, and they must be met to be considered part of the gang by other members. If a youth does not meet at least some of those expectations, it would be difficult for him or her to self-identify as a member of the gang (as the gang would not accept the person as one of their own).

In addition, there are few ways of assessing national estimates of the prevalence of gangs, gang membership or gang-related activity. A creative approach to gathering gang-related data might include researchers building elements of gang membership into existing national surveys. Validated gang measures could be included in studies that are not specifically about gangs. For example, researchers have collected a surplus of self-reported data that have been validated through multiple studies. The same is not true for official data; therefore, more national studies need to be done with official data to demonstrate their utility and validity.

There has been considerable research on individual factors involved with joining gangs and engaging in gang activity, but more research needs to focus on gangs as groups. Currently, there seems to be a move in this direction within the research community. However, the area of gang research does not have a shared language for discussing organizational elements of gangs such as structure, process and specialization. NIJ might consider sponsoring a summit on gangs that deals with these kinds of issues, including how to define gangs and gang membership.

Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships

To build an awareness and understanding of structural and functional elements, gang researchers should consider building research partnerships with law enforcement. These partnerships are useful for law enforcement but also could help the researchers in developing innovative research as a result of enhanced access to the data. One such collaboration was with a researcher who was examining the social networks of gangs. The pilot study conducted in Boston, Mass., found a strong relationship between getting shot and having a dense network of gang members and friends. The probability that someone would be shot was highly dependent on the friendships formed across different groups, called a "structural signature. " Field Information (FI) cards used by law enforcement were a source of official data, with mixed results. FI cards produce mainly conservative estimates of relationships; however, it is often difficult to get law enforcement officers to complete the FI cards.

Joining Gangs

Another area of interest for researchers is the process by which youth join gangs. For example, if a youth is engaged in delinquent behavior, what is the factor that moves him or her to join a gang? One of the ways to tease out this process is through structured interviews to get at factors and dynamics that could be in play, other than risk factors (e.g., social identity models, or strength of identification). Social psychologists would probably suggest that reducing uncertainty, improving self-esteem and gaining positive distinction as three major reasons for youth choosing to become part of a specific group. These reasons (and other dynamics) provide researchers with another potential path to understanding gang membership. Using these dynamics, in conjunction with social networking data, should produce a different picture of gang membership — one that falls along a continuum rather than providing a dichotomous gang/no-gang perspective.

Desistance From Gang Life

Finally, the group examined how to improve factors to keep individuals out of gangs and help others desist from gang life. Issues in these studies are similar to other deterrence studies. A primary issue is to research something that has yet to happen. One possible solution is to conduct prospective longitudinal studies. This, of course, means that longitudinal databases need to capture researchers' best guesses as to which variables are important. Thus, a problem to solve is making sure that appropriate measures are included in research on these issues. It also means taking into account both practical factors — such as creating interviews of a reasonable length — and more theoretical ones — such as having the foresight to think about resiliency in late adolescence — when creating the interview.

Secondary Analysis

Secondary data analysis is a critical part of conducting gang research. NIJ should continue to provide funding for secondary data analysis, and data from evaluations should be made available to outside researchers as soon as possible. Conducting secondary data analysis is much less expensive than gathering new data. One researcher pointed out that data sets about schools and communities also can be used. Researchers do not need to limit themselves to data from program evaluations or criminal justice-related research.

Translating Research

Over the past 30 years, there has been considerable research on gangs. However, much of this work is not disseminated to line-level practitioners, such as street-level law enforcement officers or individuals working in community-based organizations. For these individuals to do their work successfully, research must be translated into an accessible language that is clear and concise. The information provided should discuss how research findings apply to policy, process or program development and needs to be in a form that is easily accessible to all audiences.

The responsibility to translate and disseminate research findings falls to the research community. This is important for several reasons. First, researchers need to provide information to practitioners that ensures programs will be implemented faithfully. Second, researchers need to confirm that research does not get translated in such a way that it loses its meaning. Finally, programs need to be translated so that if adaptation occurs, it does not affect the outcome.

Researchers might not be adept at translating and disseminating their research findings, especially as they relate to policy. Too often, translating research findings for the practitioner world is not rewarded by research or academic institutions. NIJ can play a unique role in translating this research into a form that is useful to the field.

However, some training and technical assistance should assist in familiarizing practitioners with the research field and interpretation of research data. Both researchers and practitioners must participate in moving knowledge from research to practice. It is not clear, for example, that all law enforcement personnel understand what social science research could be done, and its value to the day-to-day operations in the field. Additional education on this topic could be beneficial for practitioners.

Anti-Gang Programs

Selecting Sites and Identifying Populations

Communities and individuals who become involved in a program can affect outcomes. Researchers may choose communities that are cooperative and accepting of program trials but possibly avoid communities with higher risk factors that are more in need of the programming. Furthermore, the youths who participate in the programs are often either: (a) those who volunteered for and chose to participate in the program or (b) those youth identified by the people implementing the program as those with the greatest need, although this might not match with youth who have the most risk factors. The youth who participate usually are in need, but their participation means that the programs are not reaching the high-risk group.

Some programs also may integrate youth of different risk levels. This can be beneficial and can provide a positive peer group for high-risk kids. However, the literature indicates that it can have negative effects, particularly if the program is not highly structured. In that case, the program may have a detrimental effect on low-risk youth rather than a positive effect on high-risk youth.

Conversely, bringing programs into communities from the outside can be a challenge. It is important to get "buy-in" from the community, particularly if that program is viewed as imposing standards on a community from the outside. Many programs for youth create a "new community" in which youth

may participate. However, these youth must live in and confront the social norms to navigate their current community, as nothing in the old community has changed — the risk factors all remain in place.

The community needs to be invested in the building and implementation of programs. In addition, youth must find activities with which they personally identify; they do not participate just because of obligation or boredom. Being part of a particular group needs to become part of their social identity — part of who they are, rather than simply something they do. In the same way, participation in a gang can establish a youth's self-identity.

Implementation

Implementing anti-gang programs can be difficult across multiple populations, social and political contexts, and cities. Different geographical areas and groups have different issues, resources and strategies for resolving those issues. Challenges naturally arise when applying a "one-size-fits-all" model to a community. Prevention programs must delve into the marginalized populations in a community, taking into account the needs of those populations and adapting programs to accommodate those needs.

The importance of measuring the effectiveness of community-oriented wraparound programs currently in place cannot be overstated. However, researchers and practitioners need better ways of measuring effectiveness. Certainly, outcome measures are important when examining gang prevention programs; however, despite the many existing prevention programs, researchers have had problems evaluating them in a rigorous and consistent way. Researchers either need to improve the way they measure outcomes in gang research or they need to turn their attention to programs that present promising methods of measuring outcomes. Finn Esbensen, from the University of Missouri, St. Louis, noted that community-based programs have almost no effect on gang membership in the communities in which they are implemented. That is not to say that gang research should avoid expanding its horizons. In fact, nothing in the research literature provides a strong rationale that justifies using one specific group of programs or activities.

Blueprints Program Applied to Gang Members — Terry Thornberry

Terry Thornberry, from the University of Maryland, College Park, presented an overview and update of the Blueprints for Gang Prevention program during a luncheon discussion. The original Blueprints initiative — Blueprints for Violence Prevention — was launched in 1996. The purpose of Blueprints was to identify and replicate effective violence prevention programs. Blueprints has strict and rigorous scientific standards for determining which programs are effective:

- The program must use an experimental design or rigorous quasi-experimental design to determine whether or not a program works.
- There must be significant deterrent effects, demonstrated by reductions in delinquency, violence or drug use.
- The program must be replicated with demonstrated effects. Programs that meet these standards are considered to be model Blueprints programs.

In 2008, Blueprints began a new initiative focused specifically on developing and testing gang prevention and intervention programs. The goal was to identify two or three Blueprints programs

with the highest likelihood of success for gang members. An extensive review of gang prevention and intervention programs showed that none of the programs met the Blueprints standard for evidence-based model programs. The three programs with the most success were family-based programs: Functional Family Therapy, Multisystemic Therapy, and Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care. Visit the [Blueprints for Violence Prevention Web page](#).

<div align="right">

[Back to Top](#)

</div>

The Comprehensive Anti-Gang Initiative (CAGI) — Gretchen Shappert

Gretchen Shappert, Assistant Director of Violent, Indian and Cyber Crime in the Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys (EOUSA) at the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), provided a history of the Comprehensive Anti-Gang Initiative (CAGI). CAGI was launched in 2006 as an extension of DOJ's Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) program. PSN focused on reducing gun violence. CAGI uses PSN's enforcement strategies but targets its efforts to gangs as opposed to gun violence. The initiative includes prevention, enforcement and reentry strategy components that seek to reduce gang involvement and gang violence.

CAGI faced some early challenges, including the absence of performance measures identified at the outset, and the lack of guidance from DOJ to sites for implementing the program. On the other hand, by granting sites considerable flexibility, CAGI allowed communities to balance local needs with the national standards when conducting the program.

Currently, DOJ is waiting for the results of an overall evaluation of CAGI by Michigan State University. In a teleconference conducted with representatives from CAGI cities in the fall of 2010, the general feeling was that CAGI was worthwhile despite implementation challenges. It encouraged task force collaboration and development of working relationships, which improved the caliber of law enforcement overall. Additionally, participants in the conference call felt that, anecdotally, the relationships developed between law enforcement and local communities were more prominent and less adversarial as a result of CAGI and PSN. Communities no longer saw law enforcement as an intruding force.

Lessons learned from CAGI include the following:

- Funding without extensive planning was inadequate for a completely new initiative; the need for a sufficiently long period of planning is essential.
- The federal government defines, for its purposes, what a gang is, but the definitions of gangs vary from state to state and therefore from one CAGI pilot site to another. Before undertaking an initiative such as CAGI, it is important to establish, at the outset, a definition of what a gang is.
- Gangs move around, and gang activities change; effectively matching resources to reentry needs is a challenge. For example, gang members identified in prison as being from specific neighborhoods do not always go back to those neighborhoods. Discrepancies in outcome can result from gang movement from one community to another.

<div align="right">

[Back to Top](#)

</div>

Chicago CeaseFire — Candice Kane

Candice Kane, from the University of Illinois Chicago Project for Violence Prevention, presented information on Chicago CeaseFire. CeaseFire is a Chicago-based violence intervention program that targets a small population: members of the community with a high chance of "being shot or being a

shooter" in the near future. Outreach workers counsel clients and connect them with services; violence interrupters engage members of the target population on the street, mediating conflicts between gangs and working to prevent the cycle of retaliatory violence from starting after a violent incident. The core training for employees is related directly to the work and focuses on conflict mediation and response.

A team from Northwestern University conducted process and outcome evaluations of CeaseFire programs at multiple sites. The outcome evaluations revealed that there were significant changes in gang homicide patterns (e.g., decreases in gang involvement in homicides, and fewer retaliatory killings) that could be attributed to the program, but no individual site improved on all outcome measures. Feedback from the client population determined that clients received the help they needed. Process evaluations were not conducted at all sites, so it was not possible to see what specific components of the program contributed to the overall success. Programs differed significantly from site to site because they were largely under the direction of local host organizations.

Read "Evaluation of CeaseFire-Chicago" by Wesley G. Skogan et al.

See an interview with Ceasefire-Chicago executive director Gary Slutkin.

Read "CeaseFire: A Public Health Approach to Reduce Shootings and Killings" by Nancy Ritter, from the *NIJ Journal*.

Gang Diversion Team, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department — Cecil Rhambo

Cecil Rhambo, with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, Field Operations Region II, discussed the Gang Diversion Team (GDT). GDT targets male and female probationers between 12 and 17 years of age. The program has eight sites and approximately 300 youth who participate in each 16-week session. Youth are grouped into one of four levels (Level 4 is confirmed active gang members). The program has elicited positive reactions from parents, but its overall success rate is unknown. A formal evaluation has not been conducted.

Rhambo noted, as an aside, that the most successful program he had participated in was a Weed & Seed program in Compton, Cal., that transformed the area. Violence was not eliminated entirely, but drug dealing and gang activity were reduced. He argued that wishing to avoid a federal charge seemed to provide a good incentive for avoiding criminal activity.

When asked, Rhambo identified the aspects of the GDT program he would most want to see evaluated. Focusing on the Level 4 youth, Rhambo had two questions for which he wanted answers: (1) How do you prevent Level 4 youth from joining gangs? (2) How do you get them out of gangs once they are in — what is the "tipping point" that motivates a youth to leave a gang?

Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) — Finn Esbensen

Finn Esbensen, from the University of Missouri-St. Louis, presented information on the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) program evaluation, on which he is the principal investigator. The G.R.E.A.T. program is an officer-facilitated, school-based curriculum that is focused on preventing gang membership and youth violence by developing positive life skills in youth. The

program was created by a group of law enforcement officers in Phoenix, Ariz., in 1991; they were given a couple of months to create a gang prevention program, which laid the groundwork for G.R.E.A.T. The program initially looked similar to the D.A.R.E. program (all of the officers involved were D.A.R.E. members). By 1992, the program had been implemented at sites across the country. In 1994, NIJ funded a program evaluation of G.R.E.A.T., which was headed by Esbensen.

Results of the evaluation were presented in 1998; they indicated that G.R.E.A.T. was not having much program impact. This led to a two-year critical assessment and several recommendations for change. A new and expanded G.R.E.A.T. program was developed, and in 2003, the new version replaced the old one. In 2006, NIJ announced a solicitation for process and outcome evaluations of the revised program. As in the earlier study, Esbensen served as the principal investigator for these evaluations.

Esbensen found high fidelity in G.R.E.A.T.'s implementation in most of the 500 G.R.E.A.T. programs observed. He credited the intensive training the officers received for the high officer fidelity in presenting the program materials. On the basis of evaluation results, the G.R.E.A.T. program appeared to reduce gang membership, but it did not show any effects on delinquency or violence. The evaluators found significant differences among sites, but the differences did not appear to be explained by program fidelity. The next step in the evaluation will be to identify and control for targeted risk factors at different sites.

Esbensen recommended that practitioners who operate within a large bureaucracy should take advantage of evaluations already completed by others, especially if they are struggling to get evidence-based programs started or are implementing existing programs. If promising programs such as G.R.E.A.T. are implemented in the way they were intended, the evaluation results should be the same.

A participant commented that some programs do not work, but they have high name recognition and continue to be used — such as Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.). He asked whether, under those circumstances, it would be better to scrap the program completely or to change the program but keep the name. Fear of evaluation can be a significant factor for gang prevention and intervention programs. Too often, program personnel fear a rigorous evaluation that might find that their program is "broken." Program officials would be better served by incorporating evaluation findings to improve their programs. If a program is "broken," steps can be taken to fix it so it can be re-evaluated, possibly resulting in better outcomes. Particularly in times of tight budgets, it is important to fix already existing programs rather than creating entirely new ones. The G.R.E.A.T. program is an example of this.

Read Evaluating G.R.E.A.T. : A School-Based Gang Prevention Program (pdf, 7 pages) by Finn-Aage Esbensen..

Homeboy Industries — Hector Verdugo

Hector Verdugo, from Homeboy Industries, Los Angeles, Cal., presented findings from the organization's work with individuals trying to leave gangs. Father Greg Boyle started Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles as a jobs program that offered alternatives to gang violence. Since its inception, Homeboy Industries has expanded to address the many different needs of at-risk, recently released and formerly gang-involved youth by offering a wide range of free programs (from mental health services to poetry classes to tattoo removal) and running four businesses as job-training sites. Homeboy Industries aims to help individuals redirect their lives into more positive paths.

Homeboy Industries is currently being evaluated by Todd Franke and Jorja Leap, who are at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Participant List

Katrina Baum
Director, Violence and Victimization Research Division, NIJ

Donna Davis
Social Science Analyst, Violence and Victimization Research Division, NIJ

Scott Decker
Foundation Professor,
Arizona State University, and
Director, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice

Finn-Aage Esbensen
Chair, Department of Criminology & Criminal Justice
University of Missouri, St. Louis, and
E. Desmond Lee Professor of Youth Crime and Violence

Bruce Folkens
Lieutenant, Minneapolis (MN) Police Department, and Commander, Gang Enforcement Team

Karen Hennigan
Assistant Professor of Psychology
University of Southern California

David Huizinga
Senior Research Associate, Institute of Behavioral Science
University of Colorado, Boulder

Candice Kane
Chief Operating Officer, Chicago Project for Violence Prevention
(Chicago CeaseFire), University of Illinois-Chicago

Charles Katz
Associate Professor, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Arizona State University;
Watts Family Director, Center for Violence Prevention and Community Safety

Barbara Kelley
Juvenile Justice Program Specialist, Demonstration Programs Division, OJJDP

Cheryl Maxson
Associate Professor, Department of Criminology, Law & Society
University of California, Irvine

Chris Melde
Assistant Professor and Coordinator of Undergraduate Studies
School of Criminal Justice, Michigan State University

Phyllis Newton
Director, Office of Research and Evaluation, NIJ

Andrew Papachristos
Assistant Professor of Sociology, University of Massachusetts, Amherst;
Robert Wood Johnson Health and Society Scholar, Harvard University

Steffie Rapp
Juvenile Justice Specialist, OJJDP

Winifred Reed
Division Director, Crime Control and Prevention Research Division
Office of Research and Evaluation, NIJ

Cecil Rhambo
Assistant Sheriff, Divisions of Custody, Correctional, Court,
Technical Services, and Leadership and Training
Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department

Gretchen Shappert
Assistant Director, Indian, Violent and Cyber Crime Staff
Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys (EOUSA), U.S. DOJ

Terence Thornberry
Professor, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice,
University of Maryland, College Park

George Tita
Associate Professor, Department of Criminology, Law & Society
University of California, Irvine

Louis Tuthill
Social Science Analyst, Crime Control and Prevention Research Division, NIJ

Hector Verdugo
Associate Executive Director, Homeboy Industries, Los Angeles, Cal.

Phelan Wyrick
Senior Advisor to the Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs

Agenda

High-Priority Research Needs, 1999

In 1999, the Gang-Related Research Cluster Conference, convened by NIJ, highlighted the fact that not much was known in gang-related research. Many programs and research initiatives were just starting, so much of the meeting was relegated to individuals talking about gang injunctions, organizational structure, and so on.

Conference participants identified high-priority research needs for NIJ. Since then, the majority of them have been addressed, but few have been addressed thoroughly. The needs identified at the conference included:

- Organizational theory applied to gang dynamics.
- Common data needs and standardized data collection across federal projects.
- Overlap between police and self-report data (definitions).
- Empirical evidence for best practices in gang prevention, intervention and suppression.
- Role of institutions in enhancing gang membership activity.
- Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches.
- Multisite, multimethod research.
- Uses of the gang problem for political purposes.
- Resolving risk, resiliency and resistance predictors.
- Gang crime vs. regular delinquency — temporal and spatial differences.
- High-crime vs. low-crime gangs — structure and function of activities.
- Differences in structures and group processes in gang and non-gang groups.
- Institutional and community relations with gangs.
- Institutions' socializing effects.
- What are the effective mechanisms of best practices/intervening variables?
- Impact of labor markets on gang crime and membership.
- Need for specialized (e.g., gender, cultural) gang prevention and intervention practices (the one-size-fits-all problem).
- Matching programs to needs of offenders (developmental considerations).
- Worst practices in gang prevention and intervention.
- What accounts for peaks and valleys in the gang cycle?
- Temporal cycles regarding gang violence (e.g., Is gang activity lower during the school year and higher during the summer?).
- Extent of weapons use.
- Focus on comparative cultural studies.

Advances in Research

Since the 1999 conference, what have we learned from and about gang research?

- Based on longitudinal studies with youth surveys conducted in Denver, Colo., and Rochester, N.Y., which focused on the enhancement and facilitation effects of gangs on their members, the common wisdom is that levels of delinquent activity increase when youth join gangs, particularly where violent activity is occurring. The same pattern is observed in victimization.
  - Even when propensity-score matching is used to control for pre-existing differences, there is still an increase in violence and victimization among gang members that declines after gang members exit the gang.
- The relationship between victimization, fear and crime is all associated with gangs. Fear of victimization induces a youth to join/participate in gang-related activities.
- Criminal behavior of a youth declines after exiting a gang, which emphasizes the importance of gang prevention and intervention. Gang prevention and intervention will impact the offending rate of the individual. If the length of time in a gang can be shortened, the delinquency rate of the youth can be decreased.
- The enhancement effect of gang membership is associated with changes in attitudes when a gang member joins or leaves a gang. There is not much research in this area.
- Gang membership can be a transitory stage for the vast majority of adolescents. Research from Denver, Colo., Rochester, N.Y., Seattle, Wash., and the G.R.E.A.T. study — among

others — shows that the average length of stay is less than one year for 60 percent to 70 percent of youth who become involved in gang activities. There is a lack of information on the transitional phase of a youth's decision to either participate or not participate in a gang as well as when a youth may choose to stay or not stay in a gang:

- o *Relationship to methods:* When and how often one asks, "Have you ever been in a gang?" might increase the number of transitory members who can be identified.
- o *Relationship to intervention, prevention and suppression:* It is important not to stigmatize or label youth as gang members or with other negative connotations during the transitional phase.

Research Gaps

Basic Research on Gangs:

- Develop a consensus on a common definition of "gangs" for use in research.
- Examine the role of gang dynamics and gang affiliation.
- Vary the risk factors for gang membership across gender, ethnicity and other factors.
- Vary the risk factors for violent crime and gang affiliation.
- Examine the life cycle of gang membership.
- What are the methods and processes by which kids join, participate and leave gangs? Do these processes vary by gender, ethnicity or urban/suburban/rural location?
- Understand the transition between street and prison gangs.
- Understand the relationships between immigration and gang membership.
- Examine the differences between gang members and seriously delinquent youth.
- Examine the distinctions among nondelinquency, short- and long-term gang membership, and serious delinquency.
- Develop a better understanding of gang prevalence.
- Why, despite having similar risk factors, do some youth join gangs and some do not (resilience)?
- Conduct more research on gangs as groups.
- What are the social, community and neighborhood conditions that give rise to gang membership? What are the factors in U.S. society that lead to this?
- What are the current trends in gang-related crime? Why?

Responding to Gangs:

- How are interventions targeted?
- What youth benefit most from what type(s) of interventions?
- How should interventions vary for those who are intimately involved with gangs versus those who are marginally involved?
- Need to better understand the transferability principles of proven intervention programs.
- In what social conditions and in what ways can people be brought together to mobilize and to prevent youth from joining gangs?
- Need to conduct additional evaluations of gang interventions.
- Need to isolate individual effects of comprehensive programs.

Approaches to Gang Research:

- Translating the research findings more effectively to the practitioner and policy communities.
- Using more advanced statistical analysis techniques to examine the complex nature of gangs, such as social network analysis.
- Improving the methods of measuring the effectiveness of prevention, intervention and deterrence programs.
- Using secondary data to study gangs, and adding gang-related questions to existing surveys.
- Encouraging graduate research fellowships and postdoctoral research on gangs.
- Supporting cluster conferences of researchers so that peer-to-peer learning is encouraged.
- Suggesting smaller, less costly studies, including multisite ethnographic studies.

Date Created: June 29, 2012