



THE SARA PROBLEM-SOLVING MODEL

The SARA problem-solving model is comprised of four factors: scanning, analysis, response, and assessment. Now widely utilized internationally by law enforcement officials, the SARA model and other problem solving strategies evolved from the realization that targeting the underlying causes of criminal activity creates more sustainable impact than focusing resources on individual crimes.

Scanning

During the Scanning stage, the steering committee creates inventories of all quality of life issues pertaining to the area that they are working in. The information necessary for quality inventories must be timely, accurate, and thorough. For example, it is not enough for a member to report that there are drug sales on his block. A quality inventory outlining the reported problem would also include descriptions of individuals, the time of operation, location, type of drugs being sold, and the history of the dealer on the block. It is important to note that law enforcement and civilians each have access to specific types of information that are critical to the Scanning stage. Committees should not simply pass information onto the police to act upon, but instead should be sharing and strategizing between both parties. Due to the nature of the information, it is crucial that Steering Committee members maintain strict confidentiality at all times.

The following is a partial list of sources to utilize when creating an inventory:

- Crime data statistics
- Door-to-door interviews with neighbors
- Surveys, polls, and focus groups
- Community meetings
- Laundromats, beauty parlors and barber shops

If your steering committee is interested in using problem solving techniques to address quality of life issues, the accuracy, thoroughness, and timeliness of the inventories will set the tone for the other three stages of SARA.

The "21-day model" was developed during the first year of LISC's Community Safety program, back in early 1996. This calls for steering committee meetings to occur every 21 days, doing a full implementation of SARA. However, your group should meet at least monthly in order to ensure that the information provided is of the highest quality. During these meetings, each member should bring his/her updated inventory for sharing during the Analysis stage.

Analysis

The goal of the analysis phase is to identify the priorities that the combined information of the inventories present, and then gain an understanding of the scope and nature of the problem. A simple way to determine priorities in problem solving is to identify "hot spots." Sharing all inventories of gathered information, plotting them on a simple map of the area, and examining the results does this easily and accurately. Areas that have a higher concentration of plotted data will stand out as hot spots. Once you have determined your hot spots, you can begin your analysis, which in itself has several steps:

- Determine the origins of the problem itself
- Identify stakeholders that profit and lose by the resolution of the problem
- Assess the problem's strengths and the harm it causes
- Examine the area in which the problem is occurring
- Determine what resources are needed and available to address the problem

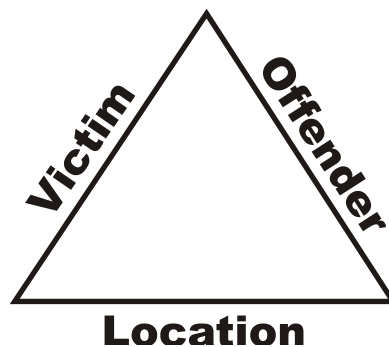
During this stage of the process it is important that sufficient information be collected so that realistic goals can be established in the response stage. By the end of your analysis stage, you should have determined which problems you will focus on and have a full analysis available to enter stage three.

Response

This stage has three parts: developing a set of response options that are consistent with the information gathered, selecting your response(s), and implementing it (them).

Using the Crime Triangle

The Crime Triangle was developed to gain a clearer understanding of the nature of a problem.



Your problem solving response should focus on the location, the offender, the victim, or all three, but no less than two. Response plans should involve brainstorming and evaluating strategies keeping the Crime Triangle in mind, and checking back against the analysis of the problem itself. The plan should specify group members' responsibilities for each task. At LISC, we have found that one of the best ways to facilitate this is by splitting your tracking sheet (usually a large easel pad) into two sections, community and police. Finally, establish a timeline for completion taking care not to over-commit to tactics in your strategy.

Your response options should be wide-ranging, with no approach overlooked. These are some options that you should consider:

- Concentrate attention on those accounting for the problem
- Alter the physical environment to reduce opportunities for the problem to occur
- Have rules and policies altered or increased to address conditions that contribute to a problem

Law enforcement's contributions here should not be limited to the individual police who are assigned to the safety project. They should include special units of the police (narcotics, gang intervention, vice), and also, in the absence of representation of the local prosecutor, agree to coordinate efforts between them.

Civilian contributions should include a wide-range of tactics, including enacting local initiatives. This strategy requires additional training, but utilizing tax abatement, nuisance abatement, code violations (fire, building, health, etc.), and many other departments can be quite powerful. Utilizing a comprehensive list of social service providers in your target area is critical to holistic problem solving. For example, if you eliminate drug dealing in an area, you have solved only part of the problem. What about the addicts? Do they have children? Do they have access to quality housing or employment? Knowing the available resources can aid in creating a sustainable change. Community projects are also an important civilian contribution. Targeted projects such as block and lot clean ups, graffiti removal, and block watches are just the beginning.

Part of your response may be to take a large problem and break it into smaller ones. Doing so allows for the development of specific responses to manageable problems. It will be up to the individual project coordinator to monitor the progress of commitments being met by both police and community. He/she will do this via telephone or face-to-face meetings.

Now that your response plan is ready, go and carry out the work!

Assessment

The objective of this stage is to collect data and evaluate the effectiveness of the response. During this stage, your organization should ask four questions based on your analysis.

- Was the problem totally eliminated?
- Was the problem substantially reduced?
- Was the harm caused by the problem reduced?
- Were better methods devised to deal with the problem?

The ultimate goal is to answer YES to the first question, however this may not happen the first time out (in fact, more serious problems can take months to solve). If your answer is NO to the first question, but YES to one of the subsequent questions, you can begin the SARA process again from a stronger perspective.

A good place to start with your Assessment stage is to go back to the Scanning stage. Have your members do a complete inventory again, and compare it to the last one.