

# Guide for Selecting an Effective Crime Prevention Program

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BUILDING A SAFE AND RESILIENT CANADA

Through a step-by-step approach, this document seeks to facilitate and guide the selection of an effective crime prevention program and to provide advice for program implementation and sustainability.

## QUESTION

For several years, the evidence-based approach has been used in the crime prevention domain to support programs that have demonstrated their effectiveness in reducing crime and improving community safety. In practice, the evidence base is operationalized through a continuum of program effectiveness: from “model programs” to “promising programs” to “ineffective programs”.

When the time comes to select a crime prevention program, several questions must be answered. For example, among all the crime prevention programs supported by evidence, how do you select the most appropriate program that will meet the demands of funders, the needs of the population, and the organizational capacities of the lead organization? Where can information on programs and practices supported by evidence be found? How do you ensure that effective strategies and potential challenges will be considered?

This guide has been developed to provide some answers to these questions on the use of evidence-based programs by practitioners and decision makers. Practical guidance is provided to help individuals better understand the evidence-based approach in crime prevention. In addition, a ‘step-by-step’ method is proposed to guide practitioners during program selection and implementation and suggestions are made with respect to key elements for program sustainability.

## METHOD

Choosing a crime prevention program for implementation is a complex decision-making process that relies on various factors. It requires a significant investment of time and commitment. To date, research and evaluation

studies have largely focused on presenting the results and impacts of programs (e.g., in terms of crime reduction). Only a few have investigated the process of selecting a program and explained the criteria that should influence or orient the decision. This guide was created with this information gap in mind.

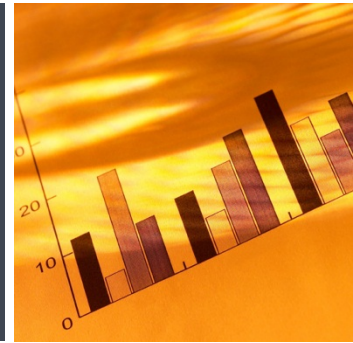
Although not exhaustive, this guide presents some key considerations and questions designed to help stakeholders and communities make the most informed decisions possible when selecting a program for implementation in their community.

## ANSWER

To guide the decision making process and implementation of the most appropriate evidence-based crime prevention program, a comprehensive approach is needed which includes four interconnected steps:

**Step 1. Assessing the Local Situation:** What are the crime and safety issues in the community and links with other issues? What segment(s) of the population needs to be reached? What are the main characteristics of this population? What are the local resources and initiatives in crime prevention? This component addresses the local context and the importance of conducting a local needs assessment which provides an overview of issues in the community, emerging and current risk behaviours, issues for a specific population, risk factors, and the context in which they occur. To conduct this local assessment and identify current and emerging priorities, several sources can be used such as official statistics, government programs and media reports.

**Step 2. Selecting an Effective Crime Prevention Program:** What program works for the identified priorities and issues? Which program will best match the characteristics and needs of the identified



population? This component addresses responses to the local assessment and identifies best practices and programs in evidence-based registries.<sup>1</sup> These registries classify programs according to various criteria of effectiveness (sometimes including cost-effectiveness) and thus ensure that the best available evidence is taken into consideration when selecting the program. The selection process, in addition to considering program effectiveness, should also take into account program suitability and alignment with the future participants and the lead organization as well as organizational resources and capacities. At this step, the final decision concerning the program to be implemented will be made.

**Step 3. Implementing an Effective Crime Prevention Program:** What are the factors for successful implementation? This component addresses the implementation drivers and conditions that affect the process of implementing a program. Research has demonstrated that the implementation process is composed of four dynamic and iterative stages and there are a number of factors that can affect the implementation of the program. Not all programs lead to successful implementation in the same way. This component takes into account the lessons learned from other implementation experiences and is based on the key elements of successful replication.

**Step 4. Building Program Sustainability:** What elements encourage the continuity of a program? This component addresses the analysis of programs that have the greatest probability of long-term sustainability. Not all programs, even those that are successful, have the same probability of being incorporated into existing systems or receiving sustainable long-term funding. During the selection process, it is important to take these elements into consideration. In fact, even if this step appears to be a logical continuation once a

program ends, sustainability must be assessed early in the program selection process. Each organization should develop its own sustainability plan to meet their vision for sustainability and to respond to the unique needs of their organization and programs. Further, even if nothing is guaranteed, it makes more sense to choose a program that has a higher level of continuity within the lead organization.

## IMPLICATIONS

While greater effort may be required to select and implement an evidence-based program, the benefits for the participants as well as for the local communities are also greater. Well-planned interventions can prevent crime and victimization, and promote community safety. But in order to be effective and generate positive outcomes, it is important to select the most appropriate evidence-based program that will best fit the needs of the local communities and populations, and align with organizational capacities.

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## SOURCE

Savignac, J., & Dunbar, L. (2015). *Guide for Selecting an Effective Crime Prevention Program*. Ottawa, ON: Public Safety Canada.

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<sup>1</sup> The most recognized evidence-based registries in crime prevention/positive youth development are : Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development, Crime Solutions and Model Programs Guide, Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy – Top Tier Evidence Initiative, and SAMHSA National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices. These systems are all based in the United States. In Canada, such a classification system for crime prevention programs and practices does not exist. Due to this limitation, it should be acknowledged that a gap may exist between the literature and the existence of other crime prevention programs in local Canadian communities.