Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council

Regional Criminal Justice Strategic Plan

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LRGVDC Regional Criminal Justice Strategic Plan
Executive Summary

Mission

To address the region's changing and diverse needs in the criminal justice area as well the enhancement and sustainment of programs that currently target the region's criminal justice's needs.

Vision

To have effective criminal justice programs and services in the region, therefore, making the area resilient to the ever changing problems affecting the communities due to local and national trends.

Introduction

The Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC) represents the counties of Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy. Together, these three counties cover 3,644 square miles, and have a total population of 1.3 million residents as per the 2020 U.S. Census (Cameron: 424,884, Hidalgo: 893,365, Willacy: 20,134). The 1.3 million does not take into account the influx of Winter Texans that visit the region each year as well as the thousands of undocumented people who cross via the U.S.-Mexico border and reside in the area without documentation. Both of these groups are also vulnerable to many of the issues identified in this plan.

Planning Process

The LRGVDC Regional Criminal Justice Strategic Plan emerged in 2014 from the existing community plans of Cameron County, Hidalgo County, Willacy County and the 5 year LRGVDC Regional Strategic Plan. This regional strategic plan overall process included meetings in each of the counties. In the winter of 2014, another meeting was held in each of the counties to improve the current regional criminal justice plan. The participants consisted of local entities from all three counties who provided their subject matter knowledge and experiences.

Among those contributing to the process were: elected officials, law enforcement personnel, victim services program staff, community-based partners, and other local agencies.

Guiding Principles

- Relationship building among agencies fostering regional collaboration.
- Flexibility of a living, breathing document that is responsive to emerging trends, new ideas, and opportunities.

Local Priorities

The Regional Criminal Justice Strategic Plan for Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy Counties lists several high-priority issues in the region to be addressed with the Office of the Governor's Criminal Justice Division funding. In no particular order, based on the planning process, the gaps listed within this strategic plan were identified to be most common to the region:

Drug Related Crime
Border Related Crime
Violent Crime
Juvenile Crime
Crime and Drug Prevention
Technology/Public Safety
Mental Health
Human Trafficking

The plan recognized the needs, the available resource providers, the coordination of those resource providers, and the goals and strategies available to address the identified priorities. The participants also pinpointed the gaps in services within the community, determined what is needed to overcome those gaps, and looked at program measures for the priorities established.

Gaps Identified in the Region

The community plans of Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy were initially used to identify gaps for the region. Yearly meetings with community members in each of the counties as well as previously criminal justice local grant applications were also referenced as additional resources for identifying gaps.

- **Drug Related Crime**
  Gaps Identified:
  1. Lack of financial support for multi-agency drug enforcement task forces.
  2. Lack of police/law enforcement equipment to sustain and enhance operations.
  3. Lack of in/outpatient alcohol and substance abuse programs.
  4. Training and Training Availability for each population (apply to all gaps)

- **Border Related Crime**
  Gaps Identified:
  1. Lack of detention and processing facilities for undocumented immigrants.
  2. Identifying funding and emergency applications provisions for trafficking and immigration related crime.
  3. Lack of medical and mental health care.
  4. Training and Training Availability for each population

- **Human Trafficking**
  Gaps Identified:
  1. Need for direct and referral services, including treatment, for victims of labor and sex trafficking.
  2. Lack of housing programs for victims of labor and sex trafficking.
  3. Lack of public information and education programs that address victims of labor and sex trafficking.
  4. Human Trafficking and lack of shelter and services for victims
  5. Training and Training Availability for each population

- **Violent Crime**
  Gaps Identified:
  1. Need for direct and referral services, including treatment, to victims of crime.
  2. Lack of housing programs for victims of family violence.
  3. Lack of public information and education programs that address violent crime.

4. Crimes committed on school campuses
5. Training and Training Availability for each population

- **Juvenile Crime**
  Gaps Identified:
  1. Lack of adequate staff to address the juvenile population, i.e. counseling, residential services, etc.
  2. Lack of community outreach programs to target youth.
  3. Lack of programs to address life and parenting skills for youth and their families.
  4. Crimes committed on school campuses
  5. Training and Training Availability for each population

- **Crime and Drug Prevention**
  Gaps Identified:
  1. Lack of funding to operate crime watch and crime stoppers programs to include public schools.
  2. Lack of anti-drug use information and education programs for adults and juveniles that address domestic violence; sexual assault; human/sex trafficking; bullying; elder abuse; underage drug abuse; substance abuse; cybercrime.
  3. Need for crisis management training for school personnel.
  4. Training and Training Availability for each population

- **Technology/Public Safety Improvement**
  Gaps Identified:
  1. Lack of hardware and software to automate criminal justice records and link separate local law enforcement computer systems.
  2. Lack of adequate personnel to operate criminal justice information systems.
  3. Lack of implementation of automated mug shot, criminal imaging, and fingerprint scanning systems in local jails.
  4. Lack of a centralized clearinghouse for data collection and program evaluation.
  5. Lack of adequate public safety measures in the schools, i.e. including training, personnel, and protected systems,
  6. Training and Training Availability for each population

- **Mental Health**

  Gaps Identified:
  1. Limited services related to mental health and disabilities for adults and juveniles.
  2. Limited community awareness and prevention education services.
  3. Limited equipment and technology to address mental health issues.
  4. Limited mental health collaboration task forces
  5. Limited housing capacity for mental health related issues
  6. Training and Training Availability for each population

Goals Identified for the Region

The Criminal Justice Advisory Committee and the CJAC subcommittee help identify goals for the region. After looking at the goals for each county, seven common goals were identified out for the region.

Goal 1. To support agencies that address drug related crimes in the communities of the region.
Objectives:
1. To build the capacity of multi-agency task forces.
2. To advocate for public awareness of drug related issues in the community.
3. To advocate for prevention and intervention programs that deter drug-related crimes.
4. To build the capacity of agencies that address drug interdiction and identification.
5. To decrease crimes on school campuses
6. To increase Training and Training Availability for each population

Goal 2. To build the local agencies capacity to assist victims of violent crime.
Objectives:
1. To support programs that provide direct and/or referral services, to victims of violent crime.
2. To support programs that provide housing and employment opportunities for victims of violent crime.
3. To advocate for effective outreach education, prevention, and intervention programs to service communities and public schools in the region.
4. To strengthen the working relationship between law enforcement, assistance centers, and other agencies that provide services to victims of violent crime.
5. To advocate for the hiring of victim liaisons to help meet the need to assist victims of violent crime.
6. To increase awareness of other funding sources for victim services
7. To increase Training and Training Availability for each population

Goal 3: To build the capacity of local agencies to address juvenile crime.
Objectives:
1. To support the hiring of criminal justice personnel and juvenile mental health professionals.
2. To support quantifiable research base programs.
3. To advocate for the development of community base rehabilitation programs and post residential services.
4. To advocate for family strengthening programs.
5. To provide effective training for school personnel to identify and address juvenile issues.
6. To increase Training and Training Availability for each population
7. To decrease crimes on school campuses

Goal 4: To build the capacity of local agencies to address crime and drug prevention.
Objectives:
1. To support neighborhood watch programs and other community policing programs.
2. To advocate for the establishment of public information and education programs that educate the community about domestic violence; sexual assault prevention; substance abuse; and cybercrime.
3. To support school programs that help deter crime and drug use.
4. To provide training for law enforcement and other agencies that address issues as a result of crime and drug use.
5. To increase Training and Training Availability for each population

Goal 5: To build the capacity of law enforcement agencies by providing them with equipment to address technology and public safety issues.
Objectives:
1. To support new/current databases to link local enforcement agencies.
2. To advocate for more automated systems that include criminal imaging, mug shots, fingerprinting scanning, and long-term evidence retention equipment.
3. To advocate for increased capacity and technology for long term video evidence storage for prosecution purposes
4. To advocate for intelligence gathering hardware and software for law enforcement agencies.
5. To advocate for training regarding information sharing among law enforcement agencies.

6. To support radio interoperability amongst law enforcement agencies in the region.
7. To increase Training and Training Availability for each population

Goal 6: To enhance the capacity of mental health programs.
Objectives:
1. To increase mental health programs for indigent and low-income populations.
2. To advocate for mentoring, guidance, counseling, and character development programs targeted toward the persons in need.
3. To support additional training resources for professionals in the mental health field as well as law enforcement who work with individuals with mental health challenges.
4. To provide educational awareness in prevention, intervention, and treatment of mental health to the public.
5. Advocate for mental health services in rural communities.
6. To increase training and training availability for each population

Goal 7: To build the capacity of local agencies to address border related crime.
Objectives:
1. Identify resources and funding during crisis situations.
2. Support a comprehensive report when addressing border related crime amongst local agencies.
3. Support training opportunities for programs/agencies that addresses border related crime
4. Address the need for multipurpose facilities during temporary surges in the region.

Goal 8: To build the capacity of local agencies to address human trafficking. Objectives:
1. Identify resources and funding for shelter facilities and victim services
2. Support a comprehensive report when addressing human trafficking amongst local agencies.
3. Support training opportunities for programs/agencies that addresses human trafficking

STRATEGIC PLANNING WORK GROUP PARTICIPANT DISCIPLINES

Disciplines of Participants
LRGVDC Criminal Justice Department
LRGVDC Criminal Justice Advisory Committee
Prosecution
Victim Services
Mental Health Services
Law Enforcement
Public education

Future Steps and Implementation

The Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC), the Criminal Justice Advisory Committee, and the CJAC subcommittee help ensure a regular exchange of ideas and best practices. Individuals active in the planning process generally serve on many of these committees and share mutual concerns.

The Planning Team strives to meet periodically throughout the year to review the region's needs and make necessary additions, deletions, or modifications to the LRGVDC Regional Criminal Justice Strategic Plan.

Drafts and annual updates of the Regional Criminal Justice Strategic Plan are circulated by e-mail with requests for comments, changes, etc. Wherever possible, e-mail is used to reduce the need for meetings, printing, postage, etc.

It is the intent of the Planning Team to improve the outcomes with problems described in the Plan and provide the vital services that they require. Efforts are being made by many local agencies and organizations to address problems with local funds. However, considering that the needs in services are much greater than anticipated, multiple state and federal funding sources are being considered as well. To the extent that these funds are available, the Regional Planning Team will continue to encourage agencies to provide programming that addresses the outlined focus areas.