



**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 1.2 million residents as per the 2010 U.S. Census. The 1.2 million does not take into account the influx of Winter Texas that visit the region each year as well as the thousands of people who cross via the U.S.-Mexico border and reside in the area illegally. 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.

The regional criminal justice strategic plan continues to be a work in progress. Plans are currently underway to form a regional strategic planning committee; the committee and the LRGVDC will work together to continue improving the process of updating the region's criminal justice strategic plan.

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 upon the planning process, the gaps listed within this strategic plan were identified to be most common in two or more of the counties:

Drug and Human Trafficking Related Crime

Violent Crime

Juvenile Crime

Crime and Drug Prevention

Technology/Public Safety Equipment

Mental Health

Participants in each county composed, with details relevant to their county and community, a plan to address the high priorities identified in their county. 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 former 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/out patient alcohol and substance abuse programs.

- **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.

- **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 to youth and their families.

- **Crime and Drug Prevention**

Gaps Identified:

1. Lack of funding to operate crime watch and crime stoppers programs.
2. Lack of anti-drug use information and education programs that address domestic violence; sexual assault; human/sex trafficking; bullying; elder abuse; underage drinking; substance abuse; cybercrime.
3. Need for crisis management training for school personnel.

- **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 implantation 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.

- **Mental Health**

Gaps Identified:

1. Limited services related to mental health and mental disabilities.
2. Limited community awareness and prevention education services.
3. Limited equipment and technology to address mental health issues.

Goals Identified for the Region

Meetings were held in Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy to help identify goals for the each county. After looking at the goals for each county, six common goals were factored 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 drug enforcement task forces.
2. To advocate for public awareness of drug related issues in the community, especially in the rural areas.
3. To build the capacity of local school districts to address law enforcement and social service issues.
4. To advocate for prevention and intervention programs that deter drug-related crimes.
5. To build the capacity of local law enforcement and juvenile agencies that address drug interdiction and identification.

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, including treatment to victims of violent crime (i.e. child abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault).
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 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 additional law enforcement to help meet the need to assist victims of violent crime.

Goal 3: To build the capacity of local agencies to address juvenile crime.

Objectives:

1. To support the hiring of juvenile law enforcement officers, juvenile probation officers, juvenile correction and warrant officers, juvenile prosecutors, attendance personnel officers and support staff.
2. To support teen parenting skills programs for families and youth.
3. To advocate for the development of juvenile residential service centers, diversion, treatment, and rehabilitate programs.
4. To advocate for parental involvement programs.
5. To provide effective training for school personnel to identify and address juvenile issues.

Goal 4: To build the capacity of local agencies to address crime and drug prevention.

Objectives:

1. To initiate and/or enhance neighborhood watch programs and other community policing programs.
2. To advocate for public information and education programs on alcohol and substance abuse.
3. To advocate the establishment of programs that educate the community about domestic violence; sexual assault prevention; and cybercrime.
4. To support school programs that help deter crime and drug use.
5. To provide training for law enforcement and other agencies that address issues as a result of crime and drug use.

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 intelligent gathering hardware and software for law enforcement agencies.

4. To advocate for training regarding information sharing among law enforcement agencies.
5. To support radio interoperability amongst law enforcement agencies in the region.

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 youth.
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 the rural communities.

STRATEGIC PLANNING WORK GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Agency
LRGVDC Criminal Justice Department
LRGVDC Criminal Justice Advisory Committee
Cameron County Juvenile Justice Dept.
Boys & Girls Club of Harlingen
Cameron County Office of Emergency Management
Santa Rosa ISD Police Department
Rio Hondo Police Department
Los Fresnos Police Department
Raymondville Police Department
Willacy County Probation Office
Raymondville ISD
Willacy County D.A.'s Office
Family Crisis Center
Family Crisis Center, Inc.
RGV Empowerment Zone
Cameron County D.A.'s Office-Domestic Unit
Cameron County D.A.'s Office
Friendship of Women
Family Crisis Center
City of Rio Hondo
Cameron County Children's Advocacy Center
San Benito Police Department
South Padre Island Police Department
Harlingen Police Department
Santa Rosa Police Department
TSTC
Cameron County Juvenile Justice Department
Hidalgo County Office of Emergency Management
City of San Juan
Cameron County D.A.'s Office
City of Alamo
Alton Police Department
City of Donna
Elsa Police Department
Hidalgo County Sheriff's Office
Edinburg C.I.S.D. Police Department

Edcouch Police Department
Hidalgo County Adult Probation
City of Penitas
City of Weslaco
City of Pharr
Sullivan City Police Department
Alamo Police Department
City of Edcouch
Alton Police Department
San Juan Police Department
City of Penitas
206 th Court
City of Pharr Police Department
Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid
City of Mission Police Department
Edinburg C.I.S.D. Police Department
Mercedes Police Department
La Joya I.S.D.
Women Together

Future Steps and Implementation

The LRGVDC Criminal Justice Regional Planning Team works in conjunction with other planning groups in the region to 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 regions needs and make necessary additions, deletions, or modifications to the LRGVDC Regional Criminal Justice Strategic Plan. At least one formal meeting in each county with the entire group will be held but agency and community representatives will typically submit suggestions and changes via telephone and e-mail throughout the year to the Planning Coordinator.

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 for families struggling with problems described in the Plan and provide the vital services that they requires. 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.