

**Taking Stock**  
**Researching Community Safety Handbook**

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**part of**  
**Research 3: Community Strengths Toward Safety & Wellbeing**

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**<http://www.theirisgroup.ca/>**

## SUMMARY

### What you can do with this booklet

The aim of this booklet is to help you **find people, resources and programs** which deal with crime prevention and to **carry out research** in your community.

### Six Steps

The booklet's **six steps** take you from defining your search to working with others. You may not need all six. If you just want to connect with someone who is active in crime prevention, step two may get you there. Use the booklet in a way that works for you.

All six steps are included on this page for easy reference. Each step is explained in more detail later along with suggestions for finding further information.

### Let's Get Started.

#### STEP ONE

**Be clear about who you're interested in and what you're looking for.** Put your search in the form of a question. For example, "What do people in my community say are the root causes of crime?"

#### STEP TWO

**Find out who's involved in your community** by scanning the media and local organizations.

#### STEP THREE

**Learn from what's already been done** by skimming reports and speaking with knowledgeable people.

#### STEP FOUR

**Find out what your community thinks** using focus groups, interviews and surveys.

#### STEP FIVE

**Share what you've learned** using reports and presentations.

#### STEP SIX

**Work with others** in ways which promote teamwork.

## STEP ONE

### Be Clear About Who You're Interested in and What You're Looking For

Being specific at the beginning helps you in several ways:

- It makes you focus your thinking and shows you if it's fuzzy
- It helps you plan your questions
- It tells you who you need to speak to
- It encourages you to select efficiently from conversations, reports and notes, and,
- It suggests how to organize your material when you present it.

Suppose you want to know if people feel safe in your community. People vary in age, income, gender, education, and so on. Would any of these affect their sense of safety? Even if you don't yet know the answer to this question, just asking it leads you to do several useful things:

- Ensure you speak to people from a range of backgrounds, and
- Be on the lookout for patterns in what people tell you.

Being clear also helps you know if you're starting in the right place or if you need to find out preliminary information. For example, if you want to know people's ideas for making your community safer, you may first want to know whether they think it's safe now. They are unlikely to support a safety program unless they see a need.

Put your search in the form of a question. Some examples:

- Which programs are offered in my area?
- Do women feel safe in my community at night? And,
- What can my community learn from other places?

As you research, stop regularly and set your findings beside your question.

- Do they help to answer it? If they do, you're on track, and
- If not, take a moment to get your bearings and refocus your search.

Here's a link to resources for non-profits and profits on [research methods](#).

## STEP TWO

### Find Out Who's Involved in Your Community

Many people and organizations are active in crime prevention, but at the local level there is no central clearinghouse for information. You can uncover the network in your community by using the “snowball method”. Ask someone involved in crime prevention to tell you every person, organization and program they know. Go to these leads and ask them the same question. If you want to find everyone, continue until no new leads turn up.

Here are some suggestions for where to start:

- **A community organization.** Most people will be happy to help if you tell them what you're doing.
- **Media.** Local newspapers carry stories about crime prevention. If the paper's office is in your community, you can also drop by. Avoid visiting just before the paper's deadline.
- **Police.** The police often run crime prevention programs with community partners. They can help you get connected.
- **[The PEI Self-Help directory.](#)** This directory of community and self-help resources is put together by the PEI Mental Health Association each year. It lists many groups across P.E.I. including some working in crime prevention. You can buy the directory or download it for free.
- **The P.E.I. government website.** Search this using keywords or by program or community name. You can reach it through the [PEI library system](#)
- **Community Legal Information Association of PEI (CLIA)** Telephone: (902) 892-0853 or toll-free at 1-800-240-9798. CLIA's goal is to provide Islanders with understandable, useful information about our laws and justice system.

### Maybe You're Done

If your goal is to get connected in your community, this should get you started. If you want to find out about work that's already been done in crime prevention or you want to do some basic research of your own, read on.

## STEP THREE

### Learn From What's Already Been Done

This page introduces you to crime prevention on Prince Edward Island and internationally. At the community level you need to be more of a detective. The page will also help you use the PEI library system and find unpublished reports.

**Nationally and Internationally** - The International Centre for the Prevention of Crime in Montreal is a world leader in the field. Its publications section features the latest thinking in crime prevention from around the globe. [ICPC](#)

**Regionally** - The Atlantic Crime Prevention Resource Centre. [ACPRC](#) contains books, reports, pamphlets, and videos about crime prevention, restorative justice, community safety and related issues. Materials in the library are available through interlibrary loan at any public library in the Atlantic provinces. [Contact them](#) for information on borrowing materials.

### Provincially -

**The PEI Library System** - Libraries are scattered across P.E.I. Through the library [website](#) you can:

- Search every library in the provincial system
- Extend your search to include the U.P.E.I. and Holland College libraries
- Ask a reference librarian for help, and
- Search the government of PEI publications archive for relevant reports.

**Community Legal Information Association of PEI, (CLIA)**, Telephone: (902) 892-0853 or toll-free at 1-800-240-9798. CLIA's goal is to provide Islanders with understandable, useful information about our laws and justice system.

### Unpublished Reports

A library search will only find published reports such as “Strategies for Safer Communities in Prince Edward Island”. To find unpublished reports, your best strategy is personal contact. As you meet people working in community safety, ask them if they know of any studies which might be of interest. When you find a report, look to see who the author thanks and the sources they mention.

### Reports You May Find Helpful

*Strategies For Safer Communities in Prince Edward Island*, Dodd, J.D., [P.E.I. libraries](#) or [ACPRC](#).  
*Atlantic Canada: The Have Provinces? Health and Wellness & Crime and Safety*, May, Dr. Doug, Memorial University and Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency.

*Working Together for Community Safety*, Office of the Attorney General of P.E.I.

*An Approach to Safer Communities in Prince Edward Island*, Office of the Attorney General of P.E.I.

*Engaging the Community – Knowledge Translation as Transformation in the Lives of Children in Rural PEI*, U.P.E.I.

### Maybe You're Done

If you want to find out what's already been done, this should get you started. If you need new information, you'll need to do basic research. If that's your goal, please read on.

## STEP FOUR

### Find Out What Your Community Thinks: Focus Groups, Interviews and Surveys

This page describes basic research and provides links where you can learn more. Separate pages follow on **focus groups, interviews and surveys**.

#### Types of Research

There are two main types of research, **qualitative** and **quantitative**. In each, you ask questions of a few people from the larger population which interests you. In quantitative research, you then use statistics (a branch of mathematics) to estimate how widely this smaller group (or **sample**) reflects the views of the larger population. Quantitative researchers include statements of reliability such as “accurate to within plus or minus 5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20” within their reports. Quantitative research is beyond the scope of this booklet, but here are a couple of links to help the non-specialist get started:

**For an excellent, 2-page tip sheet go to:**

<http://www.volunteer.ca/volunteer/pdf/CSC/SurveyResearchTipSheet.pdf>

**For a free plain language overview of surveying by the American Statistical Association, go to:**

<http://www.whatisasurvey.info/>

Unlike quantitative research, **qualitative** research does not make mathematical predictions of accuracy. It is more subjective and depends heavily on the judgment of the researcher. One strength of this approach is that it allows the researcher to probe questions in depth and discover new viewpoints.

Here are some websites where you can learn more about **qualitative** research:

<http://gsociology.icaap.org/methods/qual.htm>

<http://pweb.sophia.ac.jp/~t-oka/papers/2000/qrsw/qrsw.html>

<http://www.ryerson.ca/~mjoppe/ResearchProcess/QualitativeResearch.htm>

Whether you use a qualitative or a quantitative approach, your research will include these steps:

1. Decide which population you want to learn about
2. Select a small part (or sample) of that population to question
3. Design and test your questions
4. Ask your questions
5. Analyze your results, and
6. Report your results.

#### Ethical Considerations

Respect the wish of many people to keep their opinions anonymous. Here are some ways researchers protect the privacy of people they speak with:

**Confidentiality** – don't identify people by name in your report or include information which might allow them to be identified.

**Informed Consent** – tell people you speak with how you will use their comments. If the project changes or continues for a long time, re-confirm that you still have their consent. It is best to put this in writing.

For more information, consult the resources listed above.

## **What is a Focus Group?**

A focus group is a meeting of a few carefully chosen people, generally 6 – 12, who answer a small number of prepared questions on a particular topic.

## **Strengths**

If the participants and questions are well-chosen, a focus group can give you a solid grasp of the range of opinion on your topic.

## **Drawbacks**

If you only hold one focus group, you may not capture the full picture. Each person has less time to answer than in an interview. In a group discussion people may soften their opinions to “go with the flow”.

## **Using a Focus Group**

### **Before You Start**

- Ask people familiar with your topic to help you draw up your list of participants
- Choose people who will feel comfortable together. Consider age, income, gender, etc.
- Prepare 6 – 12 questions. Arrange them from general to specific.
- Test your questions with people familiar with the project. Are your questions clear? Neutral? Do they draw out useful answers?
- Pick a comfortable, quiet place to meet. A community group may loan you space for free.
- Organize food and drink. Eating together relaxes people and helps them enjoy the meeting.
- Make it easy for people to take part. Consider wheelchair access, childcare and transportation costs.

### **During the Focus Group**

- Introduce yourself, explain your project and how you will use the focus group findings
- Ask for introductions; Name tags will save people the embarrassment of forgetting names
- Have a colleague keep the minutes of the meeting, so you can lead the discussion
- Record ideas on a flip chart where everyone can see them
- Ensure each person has a chance to answer questions
- Make it easy for people to disagree by asking for other opinions
- Echo back answers to ensure accuracy. For example, “ so if I understand this right, you're saying...etc.”, and
- At the end of the session review key ideas and ask for confirmation and additions.

### **After the Focus Group**

- Summarize your notes while the session is fresh in your mind
- Note in general terms how much people agreed and disagreed on the issues
- Circulate your notes among the participants for comment and corrections, and
- The more people you hear from, the greater confidence you can have in your research. Consider using more focus groups, surveys, and/or interviews.

## **For More Information**

<http://www.volunteer.ca/volunteer/pdf/CSC/FocusGroupsTipSheet.pdf>

<http://www.managementhelp.org/evaluatn/focusgrp.htm>

## **Interviews**

In an interview you speak with one or two people, either by phone or in person. Generally you work from a prepared list of questions.

## **Strengths**

You can explore your topic in depth and pursue new lines of thought as they come up. You can reach a wide range of people and meet with them where they are comfortable. Each person has ample time to answer your questions. If you use a phone, you can conduct interviews from your home.

## **Drawbacks**

Interviews are time-consuming. It will take you much longer to interview ten people than to host them in a focus group.

## **Finding People to Interview**

**Key informants** are people with special knowledge of your area of interest. Professionals working in the field are a good place to start. They can often suggest other non-professionals for you to talk with. The more varied the perspectives of your key informants, the more rounded your findings will be.

## **Before You Start**

- Use neutral wording in your questions
- Be prepared to take notes
- Recording devices ensure accuracy, but they make many people nervous. Ask before using one. They can also add work as you will still have to reduce the interview to notes afterwards, and
- Agree on the amount of time for the interview, perhaps 20 to 30 minutes.

## **During the Interview**

- Be on time and stay on schedule
- Your manner and tone should be engaged but unbiased
- Start with factual questions and move to more general ones
- Echo back what your informant tells you to ensure you understand them
- Ask follow up questions to draw out fuller answers, and
- Leave a card or contact number.

## **Afterwards**

Write up your notes soon after the interview. Note key points. Group the answers by category. Add key words to ease your search later. For example, if one topic is safety at night, marking “night” as a key word with your word processor's indexing feature will make the note easier to retrieve. Send your notes to your informant for review and approval.

## **For More Information**

This brief U.S. Aid publication gives tips on preparing and conducting [interviews](#).

## **Surveys**

Surveys are lists of questions asked of a portion of the population group you're interested in.

### **Strengths**

You can reach many people with a survey. If it's a paper or on line survey, you don't even have to be present when people complete it. Some organizations may be willing to include a short survey in a newsletter which reaches their membership.

### **Drawbacks**

Surveys often fit answers into narrow slots. Designing questions well is a skill. Many people will not answer a survey. You may be self-conscious about approaching people.

### **Before You Start**

- Decide which group you are interested in
- Choose how you will sample them. Samples may be random, or you may select a proportion that reflects your population. For example, if half your population is women, you may want half your sample to be women too. Other ways to choose people include from membership lists or the phone book, or by using the "snowball method." With the snowball method you find some people from your target group and then ask them for other people they know from the same group. This is a good way to find people who don't fall into easy categories.
- Write your questions. Stay neutral. It's easier to ask people for 5 minutes than for 30. Be brief.
- Have several people read over your questions to check that they're clear and neutral, and
- For further information on designing questions see:  
<http://www.volunteer.ca/volunteer/pdf/CSC/QuestionnaireDesignTipSheet.pdf>

### **Conducting the Survey**

- You can ask questions directly or leave surveys where people can fill them in. More people will fill in the survey if you ask questions in person.
- If you leave the survey somewhere, buy a box of golf pencils and leave some with the survey. Provide a box with a slot for completed surveys. Empty the box frequently.
- If you go door-to-door, ask for a grownup if a child answers the door. Introduce yourself and the purpose of your survey, explain that it will only take 5 or 10 minutes and ask them if they would participate.
- Read questions clearly and keep the conversation moving.
- The same rules apply over the phone. You will probably have a better reception if you explain that the survey is for a local cause.
- If you are shy about approaching strangers, see if someone from an organization will introduce you to their group and have them fill out the survey.

### **Afterwards**

Add up the answers for each question. You would need to understand some statistics to fully interpret the answers, so limit yourself to broad trends. Compare your results to what you're hearing from focus groups and interviews. If there's a sharp difference of opinion between them, look further to find the cause.

## STEP FIVE

### Sharing What You've Learned

#### Make Sense of What You've Heard

Your words will carry more weight if you can show that your methods are sound and your conclusions well-founded.

To describe your methods, tell your listeners and readers:

- What your research was trying to discover
- Who you chose to speak to and why
- The ways, such as surveys, focus groups and interviews, you spoke with them, and
- How many people you spoke with.

To show you've listened well, take these steps:

- Circulate your notes after meetings for correction
- Use more than one source of information
- Look for and report areas where there is near total agreement
- Include quotations from participants
- Note differences and contradictions, and
- Mention the findings of other reports which deal with your topic.

This [research guide](#) discusses analyzing your results.

### Present What You've Learned

#### Building a report

Reports are skimmed like newspapers, not read word-for-word like novels. If you build your report with skimming in mind your readers will appreciate it.

- Ask yourself who your reader is and write with their needs in mind
- Write in plain language everyone can understand
- Use “newspaper” style. Put key facts and conclusions at the beginning of sections and expand on them in later paragraphs. This allows the reader to skim the essentials by reading the first paragraph of each section
- Build a report that flows naturally and logically
- Include a table of contents
- Include a one or two page summary. A general reader should be able to understand your main points just by reading your summary
- Headings and subheadings are signposts for the reader
- Lists make quick scanning easier
- Use short sentences and correct grammar and spelling, and
- Be concise.

This [link](#) describes the typical sections of a research report.

This [link](#) describes effective writing for the web, but many of its tips apply to paper as well.

### **Giving an electronic slide show**

Slide shows are an increasingly common way to present ideas. The equipment is getting cheaper and slides help the speaker put across their main ideas in a brief time. You don't need to buy expensive software either. [OpenOffice](#) is an open source office suite you can use for free.

Unlike the readers of a report, the audience at a slide show can't skim the material to reach the good parts, they have to sit through the whole thing. It will be easier to hold their interest and keep them listening if you use your presentation to tell a story. Fortunately, you have one ready-made. The mystery of how you answered your research question.

Here are few ideas for using your slide show to tell the story of your research:

- Start with your research question. Why is it important? Once you have your answer, what will it help you do?
- Don't jump ahead in your story, recreate your own sense of discovery
- Let your presentation breathe by mixing questions with statements on your slides
- Keep each slide to 4 or 5 points
- Don't just read out the points - face the audience and add new information
- Pictures enliven a presentation, but they take time to create. Get the basics in order first
- Practice your talk until you know its flow by heart
- Keep to your schedule - you probably need fewer slides than you think
- Summarize at the end and indicate work which remains to be done, and
- Use the show software to print notes for later review by audience members.

### **Other ways to reach an audience**

Many of the people you've spoken with during your research will want to hear what you've learned. Their organizations often have newsletters and websites where highlights of your findings can be posted. Your community council and local newspaper are also likely to be interested.

### **For more information**

The Volunteer Canada [website](#) has resources and links on all aspects of running a not-for-profit organization, including how to publicize your work.

## STEP SIX

### **Collaboration: Working With Other Organizations**

The questions below will help you and your organization understand your group's structure and its relations with others.

#### ***Origins: Why?***

- Who initiated the collaboration – government, grassroots, or joint? and
- What factor(s) led to the founding of the collaboration? (problem / opportunity)

#### ***Membership: Who?***

- Nature of membership: who is involved?
- Breadth of membership: focused and specialized or broad and general?
- Inclusiveness: to what extent is the consumer target group included?
- How determined: Who decides who gets to join? How permeable is the organization? and
- How does the entity recruit new members? Formality of processes? Openness of processes?

#### ***Mission, Mandate, Role(s): What?***

- Who defines the mandate?
- How narrow / broad is the target group to which the collaboration pertains?
- What elements does the mandate include?
  - Advisory
  - Advocacy and public policy development
  - Program planning
  - Program and service delivery
  - Communications, public education, and social marketing
  - Knowledge sharing, clearinghouse, and networking
  - Services to members (professional development, helping access funds, standards development), and
  - Celebration of achievements, recognition and awards.

#### ***Approaches: How?***

External:

- Direct delivery? (outwards – target group)
- Support for members' organizations? (downward – internal)
- Communications, public education, promotion? (outwards – at large) and
- Advocacy and advisory? (upward – decision-makers)

Internal - Operations:

- Processes to establish and renew mission and mandate?
- Planning processes?
- Monitoring processes?
- Staffing processes? and
- Communications processes?

Internal – Resources:

- Sources of funding?
- Stability and sustainability of funding? and
- Balance of core funding to project funding?

Internal – Structure and Governance:

- Governance structure?
- To whom is the organization accountable?
- What requirements and processes are there for evaluation and reporting?
- Leadership and succession processes? and
- Degree of reliance on volunteer effort; extent of resources and paid staff?

***History, Time frame, Status, Prospects: When?***

- When founded, how long in operation?
- Time-limited specific task, or ongoing mandate?
- Achievements?
- Difficulties and challenges?
- Current status? and
- Changes being considered or planned?