

# Evaluating Your Neighborhood Watch Program

## Endorsed by the Bloomington Police Department

(Adapted from National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) Web Document)

The benefit of periodically evaluating your neighborhood watch program is that it offers insight into whether the program is achieving its purpose and whether any changes are necessary. The following list provides suggestions to improve and enhance your program and efforts. It is very important that those performing an evaluation remain objective, not only in collecting information but also in asking and answering the necessary questions that will lead to improvement.

According to NCPC, there are seven steps that should be used when evaluating your program:

- 1. *Be sure it gets done.*** It is often easy to delay evaluation for a number of reasons. Don't delay. Take the time to evaluate, so necessary changes can be implemented in a timely manner.
- 2. *If possible, build it in from the start.*** This will identify shortcomings or important changes your program has generated. It will also help to more effectively evaluate goals and objectives.
- 3. *Examine the process and the results.*** Evaluations are more helpful if they include what was done, including both the process measures (establishment and initiating of program) and the outcome measures (crime rates before and after start of program).
- 4. *Measure consistently and accurately.*** Make sure that when you gather your data, you do it consistently and you measure the same kind of event each time. Be aware of external factors that may affect your numbers, such as changes in school boundaries, voting precincts, zoning, or seasonal differences in population. Check to make sure that figures are accurate and counting systems are reliable.
- 5. *Assess changes in feelings and perceptions.*** According to NCPC, studies show people base their actions on fear of crime rather than true crime statistics. Consider the power of news reporting in your area in distorting crime statistics. Evaluation is key here; it can be used as an opportunity to ascertain the perceptions of crime in your area

as well as an opportunity to learn how you can educate the citizens when it comes to true crime data and the necessary response.

**6. Measure only those factors that are useful.** Ask yourself at the start, “Am I asking questions that will provide insight into how we can adapt our program?” If the answer is no, what can be changed? The purpose of evaluation is to inform decisions and find helpful information about your program, such as what was successful, what was not, and what could be done to improve the program. By gathering too much information, you can unintentionally bury important findings among useless information.

**7. Use what is measured.** Not using an evaluation that has been done is a waste of time and energy. The evaluation can also help others who are trying to create similar neighborhood watch programs. The most important use of your evaluation should be to confirm that the program is meeting its goals and objectives and to point out needed changes. It can also help point out unexpected attitudes, events and results. These may relate to your goals or related issues or lead you to form new goals.

### **Putting These Keys to Work:**

In the beginning, spend a few minutes planning your evaluation. Figure out what information you will need, how you will collect it, and what data need to be gathered to start with for comparison purposes later. Also decide who will be responsible for gathering information. Consider the possibility of having a third party conduct the evaluation in order to remain as impartial as possible. This is an excellent opportunity to ask for assistance from local schools, universities, businesses or other organizations that have research capabilities. They may be willing to donate time and expertise to process and analyze information, especially if you have volunteers to communicate and facilitate the process.

### **Many Ways to Measure and Assess:**

Evaluation techniques can include interviews, key observations in the community, volunteers, analysis of existing data such as census information, crime reports, economic and social data, direct observations by the evaluator, reviews of program materials and reports, and survey of key groups. Feel free to make your evaluation as simple or as complex as you'd like. Evaluation is only meant to be a way to improve your neighborhood watch program and can be done on an as-needed basis. It is not intended to make a neighborhood watch program seem too complex or costly.