How to use data and intelligence when delivering focused deterrence

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Introduction

This tool details best practice for how focused deterrence programmes should use data.

Every version of focused deterrence (FD) will differ slightly, but there are some common ways in which data should be used. This tool provides advice on how to:

- Use data and intelligence to generate a robust, reproducible pool of eligible individuals for FD
- Capture high-quality insights about individuals involved in violence
- Operate a legitimate and transparent referral and selection process

Effectively using data and intelligence also supports high-quality implementation and prepares FD to be delivered sustainably over the long term.

The tool is presented in roughly chronological order. It starts with the **Preparation** phase (approximately 12 months before project launch). This is followed by **Identification**, **Implementation** and **Monitoring**, which, once the programme is up and running, will continue to happen in parallel as new individuals enter the programme.

Data and intelligence

In any targeted violence intervention, it is essential that the information used to identify individuals for the programme is **valid** (i.e. that it is a true indicator of who should be targeted), **reliable** (i.e. that it consistently identifies the right targets) and **accessible** (i.e. that the people who need to access and use the information can view it and interpret it).

Much of the data used in an FD programme is routinely collected or secondary data (i.e. not explicitly collected for the FD programme), so selecting data from what already exists is an important process.

Almost certainly, your project will involve police records on violent offending, but the type of violent offences or the nature of those offences may vary. Police records on crime may not necessarily be your central data source for identifying suitable individuals. For example, if your strategic needs assessment shows organised crime or group-based offending, you may choose an approach such as social network analysis (see Box 1, page 11), which begins from a single violent incident to build a network of connected individuals. Police records may be used to verify the suitability of an individual for inclusion in FD, but a wide range of other data sources may be just as relevant and will provide important context to their involvement in violence, so these sources should be included.

Using data critically

All routinely collected data are affected by individual, organisational and structural biases that can result in discrimination, including inequities in identification, assessment and safeguarding, meaning that individuals can be unfairly represented or absent from data relating to violence.

Taking a critical view of data, such as considering who may be absent or underrepresented due to being overlooked, disengaged or excluded because of privilege, will ensure a more equitable use of data and intelligence. For example, Black men are much more likely to appear in stop and search data than White individuals,[1] which means that using these data sources uncritically to identify eligible individuals can reinforce this racial discrimination. Without a critical approach, there is a risk that existing biases in data will shape who is included in an FD programme.

1. GOV.UK. (2024). Stop and search: Ethnicity facts and figures. Ethnicity Facts and Figures. https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/crime-justice-and-the-law/policing/stop-and-search/latest/

How was this tool developed?

This tool was developed by Professor Iain Brennan and Dr Tia Simanovic. It draws on their expertise in the use of data in violence prevention, their experience and insights from research on FD, and insights from crime analysts with experience of FD. It offers practical advice based on real-world experience of delivering FD across different contexts.

Summary of actions

Preparation

Actions

I. Identify existing strategic needs assessments, problem profiles or asset mapping.

II. Use local evidence to help define the violence problem you wish to tackle.

III. Recruit a crime analyst at the earliest opportunity.

IV. Ensure the crime analyst has access to individual crime records.

V. Recruit a police officer who can facilitate access to various forms of police intelligence on violence.

VI. Ensure that you have partners from beyond policing who are willing to share individual-level data and insights with the programme.

VII. Review local data-sharing protocols and develop information-sharing agreements and consent procedures where required.

VIII. Complete a data protection impact assessment.

IX. Develop a data governance protocol.

X. Identify an information-sharing platform.

Identification

Actions

I. Define quantifiable and reproducible eligibility criteria and make these accessible to partners.

II. Test the identification process and refine eligibility criteria.

III. Develop a procedure for a multi-agency team to routinely review individual eligibility.

Implementation

Actions

I. Record background information about an individual and ensure it is accessible to those who need it.

II. Develop a way to ensure that an individual's involvement in FD will not conflict with other activities.

III. Critically reflect on the data and intelligence used when selecting individuals.

IV. When an individual is identified as eligible, discuss effective strategies for approaching that individual.

Monitoring

Actions

I. Develop a robust case management system to monitor information about an individual's offending, related factors and their involvement in the programme. Ensure that this information is accessible to the relevant team members.

II. Share success stories across organisations highlighting the use of shared information and responsibility.

Preparation

This section lists the data activities required to prepare for an FD programme. Many of the points should be considered and actioned months before the programme begins, and many of the resources will already be present in your organisation.

I. **Identify existing strategic needs assessments, problem profiles or asset mapping**

Most areas will periodically undertake a strategic needs assessment of violence and the provision to prevent violence. A strategic needs assessment or related violence problem profile is a very useful tool for understanding your local violence problem.

II. **Use local evidence to help define the violence problem you wish to tackle**

The best local evidence will use more than one data source and will break violence down into categories that have common features, such as timing, location and context. Taking a problem-solving approach like this can help identify common causes that can be addressed through an intervention. Use this and related products, such as resource maps, to understand what has been done in the past and to plan for how an FD programme can complement that provision and use it to define the target population for your intervention.

Consider key structural factors, such as poverty, and recognise their contribution to violence and broader inequalities. For example, teams might examine how poverty, race and limited access to resources influence violence within a specific community.

III. **Recruit a crime analyst at the earliest opportunity**

A crime analyst is essential to the success of FD, as the project will process and generate a large volume of data. It's also important that the analyst has expertise in race equity to ensure that biases in data are identified and addressed. The amount of analyst time required will depend on the scale and complexity of the violence problem.

IV. **Ensure the crime analyst has access to individual crime records**

It is likely that a main criterion you will use for identifying eligible individuals is their history of violence, but you will also want to have a good understanding of how individuals interact with each other and where, when and why these individuals are involved in violence. A common and necessary data source on violent offending is police records. Involving an analyst who has access to individual crime records is essential to ensure that the right individuals and circumstances of violence can be identified from the beginning.

V. **Recruit a police officer who can facilitate access to various forms of police intelligence on violence**

Crime records are just one source of information about violence that is held by police. Other formal information or intelligence can include Urban Street Gang mapping and Organised Crime intelligence, while informal intelligence collected through routine community policing and other intelligence sources can add much-needed context.

VI. Ensure that you have partners from beyond policing who are willing to share individual-level data and insights with the programme

Many of the individuals identified as having a history of violence will also have been in contact with other services. Partners such as other statutory services (social care, youth justice, probation, education, healthcare, etc.) and local community and voluntary sector organisations can offer valuable insight into the context of a person's violent offending.

Aim to collect high-quality data from multi-agency sources to enable an intersectional analysis of how structural factors such as poverty, race and access to resources intersect and impact individuals.

VII. Review local data-sharing protocols and develop information-sharing agreements and consent procedures where required

The use and flow of information about individuals from different sources is crucial to ensure that the programme is delivered well and that safeguarding responsibilities are met. Statutory services can share data within the terms of local agreements and protocols, and agreements can be made with voluntary and community organisations that should have robust data-sharing and management procedures in place. Individual consent to share information may be required, and this should be balanced against safeguarding responsibilities.

VIII. Complete a data protection impact assessment

FD programmes use special category data and will often involve the linkage of multiple sources of information about children and vulnerable adults. Therefore, these programmes can pose significant data protection risks, and, accordingly, a data protection impact assessment should be undertaken to help refine processes and inform programme protocols, terms of reference and programme governance. Some data sharing may already be covered by an impact assessment, but it is advisable to undertake the process specifically for FD.

IX. Develop a data governance protocol

The programme's terms of reference should outline how data and intelligence will be used. The programme should have explicit data governance procedures in place to regulate routine and strategic use of data and intelligence, as well as protocols for retaining and deleting data.

Establishing protocols for when and what data can be shared without an individual's consent will ensure that information about individuals is used appropriately, that the project activities can be delivered efficiently and that safeguarding responsibilities and the equality duty are not overlooked.

X. Identify an information-sharing platform

Having a user-friendly, efficient and secure environment for accessing and collating data is important for ensuring programme validity, reliability and sustainability. Depending on the volume of violent crime, eligibility criteria, data sources and intelligence-sharing procedures, the system being used will vary between programmes: it may be entirely digital (e.g. crime records trawled and individual eligibility information extracted), largely analogue (e.g. a meeting to collate multiple sources of formal and informal intelligence about a violence problem/individuals involved) or a combination of digital and analogue (e.g. the presentation of a social network analysis combined with multi-agency intelligence on the network members). Whatever the environment, it is important that all relevant information can be included, linked and easily interpreted and that data privacy can be maintained.

Identification

This section describes the data and intelligence activities that will be undertaken to identify the right individuals for an FD programme.

I. Define quantifiable and reproducible eligibility criteria and make these accessible to partners

Identifying who is and who is not suitable for FD is a crucial decision to be made before implementing the programme. Ideally, the inclusion and exclusion criteria are quantifiable (e.g. an individual must have x offences of type y in period z or must have been identified by n sources as being involved in group violence) and reproducible (i.e. the same eligibility criteria could be operationalised in another area in which similar data and intelligence were held).

Clear and robust eligibility criteria ensure the programme remains focused on the most suitable individuals while supporting consistent case-level decision-making and reducing the risk of net widening. Robust criteria provide transparency for those identified and help protect the programme against internal and external pressures to alter who is eligible. For example, as demand decreases, there may be pressure to expand eligibility, or leadership changes could create a risk of mission creep. Specific, well-defined criteria prevent misinterpretation and ensure the programme remains focused on its original purpose. Sharing clear and accessible criteria with partners and other service providers who may refer individuals helps them understand why certain individuals are not selected, which can reinforce trust in the selection process.

II. Test the identification process and refine eligibility criteria

Use the eligibility criteria to identify individuals suitable for FD. The first iteration of this activity is likely to yield a large number of people, and you may find it necessary to decrease the window for eligibility (e.g. reduce the period of eligibility from offending in the past year to offending in the past six months or adjust how central an individual needs to be in a social network). The eligibility criteria may need to be adjusted to balance the urgency of addressing a problem with the suitability of individuals and available resources, such as delivery staff.

III. Develop a procedure for a multi-agency team to routinely review individual eligibility

Eligibility criteria, no matter how robust or sophisticated, are likely to capture people for whom the programme may be inappropriate. For example, an individual may be unavailable (e.g. about to enter custody or has left the catchment area), the features of the intervention may be unsuitable for the individual (e.g. an injecting drug user may need to address drug-related needs before being responsive to deterrence or offers of support), an individual may have needs that are incompatible with the intervention (e.g. an individual with a profound learning disability may need specialist support) or an individual may already be on a path to desistance (e.g. older offences may not account for the quickly changing circumstances of adolescents who may already be disengaging from offending). This type of information may not be available to police but may be held by partner organisations. Therefore, it is good practice to review cases in a forum that will allow as much relevant information as possible about an individual to be considered critically and to have a protocol in place for when parties are unable to reach an agreement on a decision.

Implementation

This section describes the data and intelligence activities that will be undertaken routinely to plan and coordinate engagement strategies, and ensure effective programme implementation.

I. **Record background information about an individual and ensure it is accessible to those who need it**

In addition to combining information about eligibility and engagement strategies, panel reviews can provide valuable information that can support both deterrence and support activities. These can include social networks, familial experience of services, school experiences, personal interests and needs. Recording this information and making it accessible to team members is valuable as a source of information for approaching and engaging with individuals and monitoring their involvement in FD. These data should be governed by the same data management, usage and retention/deletion policies as all other programme data.

II. **Develop a way to ensure that an individual's involvement in FD will not conflict with other activities**

Many identified individuals will already be involved in existing interventions or may even be the subject of business as usual police operations. Overlapping interventions or operations can create difficulties and conflict within organisations and can potentially harm individuals. Effective communication between leaders of different programmes or operations or the use of intelligence markers can help manage and resolve potential conflicts.

III. **Critically reflect on the data and intelligence used when selecting individuals**

Data and intelligence contain biases that can influence who is included or excluded. A process that critically reflects on and addresses the data generation process can help a team recognise biases within organisational systems, processes, culture and individual interpretations of the data, as well as their selection of eligible and ineligible individuals. Using multiple data sources, establishing a process for identifying bias and creating mechanisms to challenge or reject data that may reinforce discrimination can help ensure more equitable decision-making.

IV. **When an individual is identified as eligible, discuss effective strategies for approaching that individual**

The initial approach to delivering the FD message can be a challenging task and requires information that is not readily available in administrative records. The task includes (1) knowing when and where to find a person, (2) understanding safeguarding risks for the individual, their family and the delivery team and (3) anticipating what factors will affect their listening to the deterrence message and/or engaging with the support offer. An effective intervention requires a discussion of who, when and how a person should be approached and what information the delivery team will need.

Monitoring

It is of vital importance to the effective delivery of FD that individuals' involvement in offending and their engagement in the support component of the programme are monitored carefully. This will require the programme delivery team to monitor arrest and crime logs daily, respond to continued offending and maintain excellent record-keeping to ensure that the support offered effectively promotes desistance from violence.

I. **Develop a robust case management system to monitor information about an individual's offending, related factors and their involvement in the programme. Ensure that this information is accessible to the relevant team members.**

Individuals in an FD programme require careful monitoring for:

- Any continued offending (which can trigger consequences)
- Engagement in a support offer
- Disengagement from support, which may require re-engagement efforts

Information about these factors comes from different parts of the programme and needs to be collated and stored in a case management system that is valid (the information is directly relevant to the programme), reliable (the information is collected consistently for each individual) and accessible (the people who need the information can access it).

II. **Share success stories across organisations highlighting the use of shared information and responsibility**

FD, as practised in the UK, is a cohesive experience for the agencies that collaborate in its delivery and can help demonstrate the value of sharing information and resources to prevent violence. These collaborations also help to normalise the shared responsibility for violence prevention across organisations.

Risk and mitigation

It is important to note that the use of data and intelligence in FD can yield unintended consequences that should be monitored and mitigated.

Risk	Mitigation
Biased intelligence and processes emphasise individuals most visible in data over those who are most suitable.	Carefully and frequently consider the process by which data and intelligence are generated and make a critical review of the data part of routine practice.
The availability of individual-level data often prioritises individual-level responses, but this can lead to a narrow focus on immediate personal circumstances without fully considering the broader context of the individual's environment and societal influences driving violence.	Consider factors that drive violence that may not be in a data set, such as family and neighbourhood factors; use a wide range of administrative data and intelligence about both the individual and their environment.
The ability to identify large numbers of individuals creates a need to justify resources, which can lead to mission creep and net widening.	Use available data to predict the demand for the project and the rate at which people will enter and exit it. These throughput rates should be audited regularly.

These problems are not inevitable, and the use of transparent data processes is the most legitimate approach to identifying suitable individuals. It simply requires that all partners understand the data-generating process, remember to look for what data are not available and think critically about what the data represent.

Useful resources

National Centre for Voluntary Organisations guidance on storing and sharing information:

https://www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/safeguarding/specialist-guides/certain-roles/designated-leads/storing-sharing-information/.

Information Commissioner's Office guidance on sharing information to safeguard children:

https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/data-sharing/a-10-step-guide-to-sharing-information-to-safeguard-children/.

Box 1: A social network seed approach to identifying individuals and groups connected to violence offending

Social network analysis is an established technique for identifying people who have offended together and who may be part of a criminal network, such as an organised crime group. It is a useful way to understand the connectedness of offending, providing insights into who may be influential within a network and who to prioritise for intervention.

Social network analysis can also be used to identify an entire pool of individuals for intervention at the beginning of the programme, but be aware that it can often identify a large number of individuals with varying frequency of offending and suitability for the intervention. A social network should not be accepted uncritically. Further steps should be taken to assess the membership of the network, such as cross-referencing names with other data sources.

A typical social network analysis would use the following steps:

1. An incident or collection of incidents of serious violence is identified.
2. The individual or individuals (A) suspected or proven to have committed that crime are identified.
3. A group consisting of project team members, a crime analyst and relevant, informed stakeholders collate information about offending and the criminal associations of people in group A. Relevant stakeholders can include local/neighbourhood police officers, police officers with knowledge of local organised crime and urban street gang activity, prevention officers, probation staff and youth justice staff. If data protection protocols permit, non-statutory agencies, such as community and voluntary sector organisations, can provide valuable insight into social networks.
4. The data and intelligence that the stakeholders have are used to identify any individuals (B) who are linked to group A through co-offending or known involvement in violence.
5. Similarly, following the same process, connections between B and a further group (C) could be identified. This iteration would yield a very large group, and it should be informed by available resources.
6. Using these connections, a social network is visualised using software (e.g. Crime De-Coder, Gephi or UCINET). Unit 13 of the College of Policing's Problem Solving Violent Crime guidance provides an overview of the social network process.
7. The members of the group critically examine the derived network, considering the coherence and credibility of the network against professional and local knowledge of violence in the area.
8. The programme team assesses each individual against the programme eligibility criteria and prepares a file on each eligible individual for consideration by a multi-agency panel that makes recommendations on inclusion or exclusion from the programme and identifies intervention strategies for each included individual.
9. The identified social network forms the basis of future data exploration via a dashboard that is linked to the local police data system. New individuals connected to identified groups are considered for programme eligibility in the future.

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