Youth Gang Prevention Pilot Project Proposal Summary

Issue:
As part of Community Development and Recreation Committee’s September 12, 2008 consideration of CD18.4 “Government of Canada Investment to Establish Youth Gang Prevention Project in Toronto”, Committee members requested Staff prepare a briefing note for Members of Council on the City’s successful application to the Federal Youth Gang Prevention Fund for funding to establish a youth gang prevention pilot project. This briefing note provides an overview of the key components of the City’s application and implementation plan.

Background:

- Council, at its meeting of March 1, 2 and 3, 2004 considered the Staff report “Community Safety Plan and Malvern Youth Initiative” and directed Staff to pursue the development of innovative programs to combat gun violence and gang involvement. A pilot project proposal was developed by the City of Toronto’s Community Safety Secretariat, in partnership with the Canadian Training Institute (CTI), Central Neighbourhood House, Hispanic Development Council, Native Child and Family Services, Promoting Economic Action and Community Health (PEACH), Centre of Criminology, University of Toronto, Toronto Police Service, Toronto Public Health, Toronto Community Housing Corporation, and the Toronto Youth Cabinet and submitted for consideration in March 2007.
- Council Directive #9 from EX21.2 directed staff “…to facilitate approval of the city’s applications for funding for a ‘gang exit’ wrap-around initiative, in keeping with the goals of the National Crime Prevention Strategy.”
- On September 3, 2008, Public Safety Canada announced that the proposal was approved, in the amount of $4,932,954 over a period of 3.5 years (2008-2012), to develop and implement an integrated, targeted and evidence-based community pilot project that prevents and reduces gang activity in three priority neighbourhoods: Jamestown-Rexdale, Kingston-Galloway-Orton Park, and Malvern.

Key Points:

- The City of Toronto, the University of Toronto, and the Project Advisory Committee will make in-kind contributions of approximately $1.6M for a total project cost of $6.5M.
- The pilot project’s three year implementation phase will operate in three Toronto priority neighbourhoods. The case management portion of the program will support approximately 100 youth aged 13-24, and their families, per year, that are at risk of, or engaged in, gang activity. The pilot project will also include a community education component that will reach approximately 500 community members to increase awareness about gangs and their prevention.
- The City of Toronto will provide overall coordination and oversight of the pilot project, but it will be delivered by a local community agency contracted through purchase of service agreements. The evaluation strategy will be developed and implemented by the University of Toronto’s Centre of Criminology and provide constant feedback to the program administrators that will enable program adjustments during the pilot project operating period.
A Project Advisory Committee comprising organizations that are the most knowledgeable about gang activity in Toronto will provide advice, direction and support to the pilot project. Project funding is contingent on the City continuing to meet financial and project reporting deadlines established by Public Safety Canada.

Pilot Project Model
The pilot project will include a set of complementary and integrated components designed to facilitate change among gang-involved youth, youth at risk of joining gangs, families of youth who are gang-involved or at risk of gang involvement, and the broader community in areas disposed to gun and gang violence. The project will take place in three phases: (1) development, (2) implementation and (3) evaluation.

(1) Development
An initial six-month project development phase will:
- convene the community partners consulted in the development of the project proposal and establish a Project Advisory Committee that will include representatives from a wide range of community, institutional and governmental stakeholders including the University of Toronto’s Centre of Criminology, Toronto Police Service, Toronto Public Health, the Toronto Community Housing Corporation, the Toronto Youth Cabinet, and the National Crime Prevention Centre;
- refine and shape the community delivery model and develop purchase of service agreements for community service delivery;
- further develop the pilot project’s management and administrative structure, including the hiring of project staff; and
- contract with the University of Toronto’s Centre of Criminology will develop the pilot project’s evaluation plan and logic model as it involves both pre- and post-implementation environmental scans, collection and analysis of local crime data and stakeholder interviews.

(2) Implementation
A three year implementation phase will include:
- An outreach and referral process that refers gang-involved youth from the Police, the criminal justice system, correction and detention systems, as well as teachers, community service providers, health professionals, and councillors as well as self-referrals and referrals from family members;
- An intake process that incorporates an in-depth needs assessment/analysis of referred youth;
- Individual case management plans for youth accepted into the project based on their assessed risk and preventative factors;
- Intensive, group-based training opportunities that support the development of pro-social skills for youth;
- The application and refinement of both practical and pro-social skills in community-identified projects that help strengthen affected neighbourhoods;
- Practical supports for the families of participating youth that will assist them in reducing risk factors and building preventative measures for youth; and
- Broader community education, engagement and evaluation activities that increase awareness about gangs and gang prevention.

(3) Evaluation
A six month evaluation phase will be conducted by the University of Toronto’s Centre of Criminology and will include:
an extensive analysis of the causes of gang violence, the reasons youth remain in gangs for extended periods of time, the positive and negative aspects of gang membership, the reasons youth decide to leave gangs and the difficulties youth face when they attempt to exit the gang lifestyle;

- comparative analysis of data collected at the pilot project outset, throughout the duration of the project and at its completion; and

- a longitudinal study to evaluate the overall success of the project in terms of the future life prospects of the participating youth.

The contribution agreement includes full funding for two Research Coordinators and two Graduate Research Assistants for the duration of the pilot project.

Pilot Project Sites

The pilot project will operate in three priority neighbourhoods: Jamestown-Rexdale, Kingston-Galloway-Orton Park, and Malvern. These neighbourhoods were identified based on an analysis of community-level risk factors associated with youth gang involvement, including:

- High levels of poverty and residential mobility;

- High rates of crime, particularly among youth;

- Presence of gangs in the neighbourhood;

- Presence or perceived availability of drugs in the neighbourhood;

- Presence and/or availability of guns in the neighbourhood; and

- Perceptions of lack of safety in the neighbourhoods.

As part of the initial project development phase, staff will work closely with community organizations and the Toronto Police Service to review the selection of the pilot project’s target sites to ensure the sites are the most appropriate, given the pilot project’s objectives.

Administration, Resources and Governance

The City of Toronto will provide overall project administration, oversight and full financial responsibility for the duration of the pilot project. To undertake these responsibilities, the Division will require three full-time staff to be hired for the duration of the project: a Project Manager, a Community Development Support Worker and an Administrative Assistant. These positions are fully funded through the project contribution agreement with Public Safety Canada.

Services and supports for youth and families participating in the pilot project will be delivered by a local community agency selected through a purchase of service agreement. The contribution agreement with Public Service Canada includes full federal funding for up to 13 staff positions — 3 will be operating in the City of Toronto and 10 will be operating in the community.

Reporting

The Executive Director of Social Development, Finance and Administration will report back to the Community Development and Recreation Committee in the first quarter of 2009 with a detailed project model and implementation plan. Thereafter, staff will report to Community Development and Recreation Committee annually on project implementation, results, and learnings. Following the completion of the project evaluation, staff will submit a final report with findings, as well as recommendations for applicability of the project model to additional neighbourhoods.