

U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice - NIJ.gov

MAPS: How Mapping Helps Reduce Crime and Improve Public Safety

"Place" is a term meant to convey a geographic area that consists of various social, economic and ecological similarities yet has subtle and distinct differences. Place is a scalable concept that delineates one area from another and allows for measurement of interactions within and between other areas. Places can be represented as buildings, street blocks, neighborhoods, sections of a city or county, metropolitan areas or regions of the country.

Place-based initiatives are becoming a prominent approach to solving problems of crime and the delivery of criminal justice services at all levels of government. The focus on place seeks to simultaneously address the interconnected relationship between people and their environments to which multiple social ills are connected. These relationships and connections form real problems in specific places. Place-based initiatives can be more effective in the delivery and leveraging of services when attention is more specifically directed to the particular context in which people live. Specific benefits delivered to a particular area often have diffusion affects to adjacent neighborhoods, compounding their positive effects.

Geographic analysis can help reveal crime patterns.

- Examining where past victims and offenders lived and where crimes occurred helps police determine which neighborhoods attract offenders and where unknown offenders may reside. [Read the full report \(pdf, 136 pages\)](#) [Exit Notice](#)
- Using GIS software helps researchers visualize data, assess human behavior over geographic space, follow spatial patterns and validate theories.

Geographic analysis uncovers differences between urban and rural environments.

- Rural areas must collect and examine regional data over a long period of time to collect sufficient data to understand local crime trends. [Read the full report.](#)
- Cities may experience a high volume of crime in hot spots. Police can target hot spots to reduce crime in these areas. [Read about hot spots.](#)
- Some rural areas do not have hot spots. Therefore, rural law enforcement must use other forms of geographic analysis (e.g., identifying the types of locations where crime occurs, assessing physical geography) to identify regional crime trends and develop specific prevention strategies. [Read the full report.](#)

Certain actions can reduce crime and improve public safety.

- Increasing homeownership may reduce victimization. [Read the full report.](#)
- Partnerships between community organizations and public works or drug code enforcement offices can ensure that urban planning includes crime prevention. [\[1\]](#)
- Public relations campaigns may increase residents' awareness of crime in their neighborhoods. [Read the full report.](#) [Exit Notice](#)
- Posting Neighborhood Watch or other crime prevention signs in low- and medium-income neighborhoods may cause residents to perceive that their neighborhoods have more crime and violence, making residents think they have a crime problem when they do not. Crime prevention practitioners should replace defaced or aged signs, because residents may think these signs indicate a lack of neighborhood crime prevention. [\[2\]](#)
- Limiting hours of alcohol sales or reducing the amount and types of alcohol sold can reduce crime and disorder. [Read the full report.](#) [Exit Notice](#)
- Working with managers of local businesses where people gather (e.g., bar owners, restaurant managers) helps reduce crime and disorder in local venues. In disadvantaged areas, law enforcement may wish to help owners fund staff and security efforts. [Read the full report.](#) [Exit Notice](#)

Notes

[1] Schultz, P. W., and J.T. Tabanico (in press). Criminal beware: A social norms perspective on posting public warning signs. *Criminology*.

[2] Schultz and Tabanico, see note 1.

Date Modified: March 27, 2013