

The NPSC aims to reduce crime and improve public safety by making data analytics and research evidence accessible to local community groups and change agents. Monthly meetings enable a variety of stakeholders to use NPSC's actionable information to craft ways in which they can share the burden of crime prevention at places in the city that need them most.

Art School, Businesses and the Police: A Case Study



The Backstory:

Newark was experiencing a rise in motor vehicle theft (MVT). For several months, the police department (PD) tried to control the problem. They identified the situational contexts (i.e. the modus operandi, or M.O.) as being mostly "cars left running" to heat-up on cold days or when drivers left cars during quick errands. The PD's initial response to this problem included educational campaigns via social media and written warnings to unattended idling vehicles that police officers observed while on patrol. When this was determined to have had little impact, the PD began issuing summonses to idling vehicles. After months of the unabated and growing problem of MVT, the PD presented the issue to the NPSC for additional support.

At the monthly NPSC meeting:

PD commanders explained to the group that their next course of action was to increase police patrols and write more summonses to idling vehicles as a means of deterrence. Local community stakeholders in attendance offered counterpoints to the planned ramping-up of ticketing. They commended the efforts and restraints that police had shown to-date. But they questioned the general deterrence effects and overall impact that ticketing some individuals would have on the larger problem. Another concern was that drivers would likely be unable to afford to pay the tickets, which could lead to warrants, arrests and other penalties that they felt were disproportionate to the offense committed, and disconnected from solving the underlying problem at-hand. They requested enhancements to the educational campaign based on NPSC analyses, and they offered to help the PD with this effort.

The NPSC staff presented its spatial-temporal analysis of MVT to the group. The temporal analysis found that most (59%) MVT incidents occurred at nighttime. The Risk Terrain Modeling (RTM) analysis found that MVTs were happening near particular features of the landscape at specific times of the day. During nighttime hours, liquor stores and gas stations had the greatest risk. During daytime hours, convenience stores/bodegas and pharmacies posed the greatest risk. The NPSC shared maps and other details of the highest-risk locations for MVT with the group. Everyone agreed that these risk factors fit the crime's M.O., whereby drivers were likely leaving cars running and unattended for quick errands at these particular businesses (probably on their ways to or from work).

- To address the nighttime risks, a representative from the public utility company reminded NPSC members about its free street-pole mounted floodlight program for merchants, and offered to increase outreach to the businesses at heightened risk of MVT.
- Two community nonprofit organizations offered to direct their resident-led business checks to the stores at greatest risk. They remind managers to remind their customers to turn off their cars and take their keys. They also mention the floodlight program.
- An art-focused charter school established a poster contest for its elementary school-aged students. With support from the PD, mercantile associations, and other local community organizations, the winning poster will be visibly affixed to the entrances of storefronts located in high-risk places, reminding patrons to "Turn off your car, Take your keys".
- The PD agreed to direct patrols at the highest-risk places, and promised to reconsider the ticketing of idling vehicles while exploring other options. They welcomed the charter school's poster contest as a complement to their community policing efforts, and offered to help distribute the winning posters to businesses within their newly optimized target areas.

Community stakeholders were willing and able to help police prevent crime. When given the opportunity, everyone realized they could coordinate responses to problems in ways that meet all of their expectations for fairness and effectiveness. Data informed the intervention strategy. The NPSC forum, centered on actionable analytics, offered transparency to a deliberate and impactful response to a pressing crime problem in the city. Now, more than just the PD was invested in the solution.