

Targeting Cross-Border Drug-Related Violence in the San Diego Region

In a soon-to-be released CJ Bulletin, the Criminal Justice Research Division of SANDAG summarizes the results of a three-year evaluation effort, funded by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ)¹, to better understand how multi-jurisdictional task forces² in the San Diego region aimed at targeting cross-border drug-related violence operate, their short- and long-term benefits, and where opportunities for improvement may exist.

Criminal activity, especially as related to drugs and violence, often crosses jurisdictional boundaries and studies of strategies targeting these issues have shown that those involving inter-agency partnerships and collaboration are more effective than one agency operating in isolation. At the end of 2013, San Diego County had 20 task forces with a primary mission related to the issue of cross-border drug-related crime and violence in operation, illustrating how the region has effectively embraced formal partnerships and realized their benefits, including the ability to build stronger cases when both local and federal partners are involved, as well as ensuring better use of limited resources and officer safety (Table 1).

To Local Agencies	To Federal Agencies	To Both
Involvement in higher level case; more resources, training; & experience; access to seized assets	Knowledge of the community, access to confidential informants, access to uniformed staff	Better deconfliction, force multiplier, not limited by jurisdictional boundaries, build stronger cases

When considering the necessity of task forces, it is important to remember that these coordinated efforts target more serious offenders, many of whom are arrested after very lengthy and labor intensive investigations. To better understand the criminal histories of some of these targets, and how often and where they came into contact with law enforcement, data were collected for 110 task force targets who were arrested as part of a three-pronged take down on January 25, 2012. Analyses revealed that:

- These 110 individuals had a total of 2,456 contacts (roughly 22 per individual) with local law enforcement over the past seven years.
- The vast majority (86%) had contact with multiple law enforcement agencies, and for the majority of the agencies, the individuals they had contact with did not actually live in the agency's jurisdiction.
- Thirty-two percent (32%) had at least one prior arrest for a violent offense, 42 percent for a property offense, 34 percent for drug sales, 32 percent for drug use or possession, and 83 percent for some other type of offense (including failure to comply with court orders or resisting arrest).

Given the importance of task forces as a comprehensive public safety strategy, policy implications suggested as a result of this effort include exploring ways to more effectively bridge different agency cultures and informal ways to encourage collaboration if formal ways are not practical.

¹ Opinions or points of views expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

² For the purpose of this project, a task force was defined as any cooperative law enforcement effort involving two or more criminal justice agencies with jurisdiction over two or more areas, sharing the common goal of impacting one or more aspects of drug control and violent crime problems.