Problem Solving and
Demand Reduction

College of
Policing

Implementing and sustaining problem-oriented policing

A guide

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Foreword

The police are often perceived as society's safety net: constantly accessible, largely free at the point of delivery, and able to tackle all manner of crises. In recent years, spiralling demand coupled with reducing resources has put the police under considerable strain. To manage this challenge, whilst remaining true to a public service ethos, we must work differently. To this end, the case for prevention is compelling, both morally and economically as a means to reduce harm and police demand. However, whilst practitioners and academics worldwide find that a problem-solving methodology is an effective way to deliver preventive policing, they also point out that systematic implementation is difficult to achieve. What you will find in this document is a summary of all that is known about establishing and maintaining problem-solving within a police organisation. It provides relevant and practical information to assist you in these challenging times.

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About this guide

The police have always solved problems. The range of problems the police are expected to handle is immense, and increasingly so - from exploitation and cybercrime to missing persons and metal theft. This guide is about police problem-solving. More specifically, it is about implementing an organisational framework that puts problem-solving front and centre. The approach is called problem-oriented policing (POP), proposed by Herman Goldstein in 1979. POP provides a structured process for police problem-solving. It calls on the police to work with partners to devise permanent solutions to recurrent sources of demand – or 'problems' – that affect the community. This is what Goldstein viewed as the 'substance of policing'.

Readers of this guide will have likely heard of POP and problem-solving. It has a long history in England and Wales dating back to the 1980s and Sir Kenneth Newman's efforts to introduce POP into the Metropolitan Police. Many forces have since experimented with POP; some have excelled, winning national and international recognition. Over the same period, research into POP has identified two consistent findings. The first is that POP has been shown to be an effective means of reducing crime and police-related incidents, more so than many other police strategies. The second is that POP can be challenging to implement and sustain. Thus, despite extensive evidence for and endorsement of POP, it has not become the modus operandi of British policing.

There is currently a resurgence of interest in POP in England and Wales. It is prominent across Home Office and National Police Chiefs' Council thinking. It features in the curricula for new entrants into policing. POP is core to the Policing Vision 2025, the College of Policing's neighbourhood policing guidelines, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services inspection process, and Her Majesty's Government strategy on tackling serious and organised crime. 'Reducing demand through effective, sustainable problem-solving' is also a key deliverable in the 2015 National Policing Crime Prevention Strategy.

This guide is about embedding POP in your organisation. It is written primarily for senior officers and managers and is intended to complement a sister guide on problem-solving in practice. This guide is not a step-by-step manual - there is no single road to or recipe for implementing POP. Instead, what follows is a review of what is known about implementing and sustaining POP, with recommended resources provided at the end. The guide has three parts. The first part outlines the core features of POP. The second part makes the business case for POP as an operating model for contemporary policing. The third part discusses three conditions conducive to the successful implementation of POP – leadership, understanding and infrastructure – and provides examples of good and poor practice. The guide ends with a self-assessment tool to help you determine your organisation's readiness for and progress in implementing POP.

A Primer on POP and problem-solving

Herman Goldstein proposed POP in 1979. Through extensive fieldwork with police agencies in the United States, Goldstein came to recognise the complex range of demands the police are expected to handle, in an effective and equitable manner, often against a backdrop of limited resources, intense scrutiny, and public and political interference. Reforms designed to improve policing were, at the time, suffering what Goldstein termed the 'means-over-ends' syndrome. They were preoccupied with structure over substance, focussing on issues such as the amalgamation of departments or the use of technology and training, rather than on how to deal effectively with police-relevant issues affecting the community. What was being delivered was incident-driven policing, where calls for service were dealt with on a case-by-case basis using routine police tactics, typically rapid response and police patrols. These tactics generally produced only short-term effects, necessitating the police to return to the same locations time and time again.

POP emerged as a reaction to reactive, one-size-fits all policing. It called on the police to focus their efforts not on responding to isolated events but on dealing with clusters of related incidents, what Goldstein defined as 'problems'. POP put prevention first, emphasising effectiveness over efficiency with success determined by the resolution of persistent problems. More broadly, POP represented a framework for improving police effectiveness. It centred on the major purpose of policing – to deal effectively with problems that arise in the community and fall within the broad police remit.

Being problem-oriented required a systematic approach, later operationalised in the now-common SARA problem-solving model (scanning, analysis, response and assessment). The SARA process appears simple, but it is a marked departure from the standard police way of working. First, the police identify clusters of similar events affecting the community and ascertain the harm they cause. Second, they engage in structured efforts to better understand the underlying causes that generate these problems, using a wide range of relevant data, information sources and analytical techniques. Third, tailored responses are put in place to reduce the presenting problems. These, according to Goldstein, should concentrate on prevention, avoid dependency on the criminal justice system (i.e. arrest and prosecution), and involve partners who are affected by or responsible for the problem, including the local community. Fourth, the impact of implemented responses is assessed.

Goldstein envisaged that individual problem-solving efforts would help alleviate localised community problems. And, by systematically adhering to a problem-oriented approach, police agencies would develop a catalogue of evidence-based initiatives, which would both demonstrate the value of and foster new ways of working. Forty years on from Goldstein's initial ideas, extensive research evidence shows POP to be effective, portable and widely applicable. Despite this, the enduring obstacle to mainstreaming POP continues to be its implementation, the topic to which we turn after first laying out the business case for POP.

The business case for POP

Why should you consider adopting POP? Here are six good reasons.

POP is effective. The College of Policing cite problem-solving as 'one of the best-evidenced policing strategies'. An evidence review by the Campbell Collaboration found POP produced significant reductions in crime and disorder. There are also thousands of localised case studies demonstrating POP to be effective in tackling a diverse array of problems. Put simply, in an era of evidence-based policing, few approaches can boast as rigorous and extensive an evidence base as POP.

POP is efficient. It provides a structured, tried-and-tested process to determine the causes of persistent problems, with analysis being undertaken only in so far as it guides action, thereby minimising excess time and money. Moreover, POP does not presuppose any one kind of intervention or tactic, but instead seeks to identify responses that are effective, sustainable and suitable to the local context. If a number of suitable solutions are suggested, POP would favour the most cost-effective intervention.

POP reduces demand. POP was originally conceived as a vehicle to reduce recurrent sources of police demand. By focussing attention on problems that generate repeat calls for service, sustainable resource savings can be expected.

POP fosters innovation. POP is a creative endeavour. It encourages practitioners to consider alternative ways in which patterned problems might best be resolved, emphasising non-enforcement options that engage and involve the public and affected partners. POP is thus sensitive to the ways in which standardised, enforcement-only responses can result in little long-term impact whilst also negatively affecting the community.

POP promotes public satisfaction. POP often involves working with partners. This can generate better community and partner understanding of what the police are realistically able to do when addressing problems. It also explores what others may need to do. Effective solutions are often co-produced and delivered, leading to greater public satisfaction and confidence in the police.

POP is good for morale. Those who do problem-solving tend to enjoy it. It provides meaning to their work and accords with why many enter policing. Evidence suggests that problem solvers report higher levels of job satisfaction compared with response officers. Job satisfaction is in turn associated with a positive police officer demeanour, well-being and commitment to fairness and equality.

Three conditions conducive to the successful implementation of problem oriented policing

'I have grown accustomed to viewing successful efforts to implement POP – when carried out in all of its full dimensions – as episodic rather than systematic; as the results of relatively isolated cells of initiative, energy and competence. I view these pockets of achievement as exciting and pointing the way but sprinkled among a vast sea of police operations that remain traditional and familiar.'

Herman Goldstein, 2018

Condition 1: Leadership

Create an enabling environment with a clear long-term vision and strategy for delivering POP in your organisation

Leadership and senior endorsement are consistently identified as critical factors in implementing POP. As police leaders, you play a key role in embedding POP. This can take two broad forms: (1) overseeing the practical task of introducing, resourcing and managing the shift to a problem-oriented way of working, and (2) cultivating an environment in which staff are empowered and equipped to do effective problem-solving. Neither will happen overnight. Nor will they happen without senior officer support. There are however several ways in which you as a police leader can set the stage for POP better to take root in your organisation, as we describe in this section.

Understand POP. Police leaders must understand POP. This amounts to more than knowing about or being aware of POP. It is important that leaders appreciate that POP: (1) can accommodate the complexities and challenges of contemporary policing, from serious crimes such as terrorism and homicide to relatively minor nuisances such as noise complaints and neighbour disputes, (2) is a long-term evidence-based organisational strategy able to reduce persistent crime and disorder, and (3) provides the means more effectively to both control potential offenders and to protect victims and crime-prone places. A thorough understanding of POP is needed to recognise how the approach can be aligned with other police strategies (such as intelligence-led or evidence-based policing) and, thus, helps guard against the risk of wasting organisational effort by abandoning POP in favour of other approaches that either: (1) cannot boast the same evidence-base as POP or, (2) are already compatible with POP.

Have a POP plan. Most efforts at police reform encounter challenges. Implementing POP is no different. Resistance rooted in the prevailing police culture is common, and to be expected (see Box 1). A plan for how you intend to implement POP is therefore vital. Without a plan POP often flounders, confined to the enthusiastic few in your organisation. In devising your POP implementation plan, you should view implementation as a process rather than an isolated event. Conducting an organisational audit when devising your implementation plan is recommended. The self-assessment tool on page 23 can help you do this, and will allow you to better judge your organisation's readiness for POP and identify any obstacles that might influence how it is implemented.

Decide on the penetration of POP. Is POP to be embedded force-wide or in specific departments? Problem-solving is most often observed in neighbourhood (or community) policing teams. But its application can be much broader; it is relevant in tackling serious and organised crime, public order incidents, road policing and so on. When considering the planned penetration of POP within your organisation, two general principles are important: (1) the ability to assign ownership of (and therefore accountability for) identified problems, and (2) empowering individuals to take ownership of problems, without having to always pass decision making upwards. Often policing problems are best addressed at the beat or district level, in an environment where decision-making authority and resources are delegated as close as possible to the presenting problem. However, for some more wide-scale problems, centralised skills and resources will need to be available in centralised units. For those units the same principles of ownership and empowerment apply.

Choose a label and problem-solving model. As senior officers you will be asked to name the approach you are advocating and endorse a specific model to make your

Box 1: Opposition to POP …. and ways of responding

Opposition	Response
POP won't work here	POP has been implemented in diverse settings both in the UK and internationally. It has been shown to be effective in city and rural locations.
POP is a fad - "been there done that"	Although the name might vary – 'problem-oriented policing', 'problem-oriented partnerships', 'problem-solving' – the core ideas that underpin POP have been advocated and applied for forty years, to a greater degree and for a longer period than most other approaches to policing.
Embracing POP means we won't be able to respond to calls for service	Responding to calls for service is a primary function of the police. POP acknowledges this – responsive policing and POP usually work in tandem. However, POP assumes that there is a more effective way to deal with persistent problems than to keep responding to the same incident time and time again. In POP, responding to a call for service is the first step in working out and delivering permanent solutions.
POP is "soft" - it gets in the way of real police work	This criticism speaks to the stereotypical view of community policing which is commonly associated with problem-solving. However, POP has successfully been applied to a wide range of crime types including youth homicide, armed robbery and child sexual exploitation. Moreover, there is no single POP response – responses are selected on the basis of a thorough analysis of the presenting problem and understanding the local context.
POP is too expensive – "it's a luxury not a necessity"	A problem-orientation costs nothing. It is a mindset for how the police operate. Whilst it is true that mainstreaming POP requires investments in infrastructure and training, on this point the evidence on the effectiveness of POP is clear - savings made in crimes averted should make POP self-sustaining.
POP is too demanding	POP is a departure from traditional ways of police working. It sometimes requires a different set of skills than are usually taught in police training. That said, POP is designed to equip the police to be better able to reduce repeat demands. Studies show officers prefer this type of work when they are supported in its approach.
POP is 'old hat' and incompatible with modern police priorities	The opposite is true. In an increasingly virtual world where crimes are committed online by offenders who live in different countries it is important to prevent such crimes. POP offers a methodology to do that. Problem-solving is a way of thinking. In this sense it is perpetually relevant.
POP is EBP by another name	POP and EBP are highly compatible. Both are concerned with how the police respond to demand. Both recognise the importance of drawing on research evidence (as well as experience and professional judgement) to inform police decision making. But EBP is the newer kid on the block, and in our view should be incorporated into the overall POP process particularly to provide direction in the assessment of chosen responses. This marriage would therefore maintain the problem-centric, partnership and innovation-focus that is characteristic of POP.
POP takes too long to produce results	Shifting to a force-wide problem-oriented way of working can take time. However, practicing problem-solving can start today, and the benefits of adopting a problem-solving approach to deal with specific problems can be immediate. Success in the latter builds momentum for and facilitates the former.
POP isn't relevant to me – I'm a detective	Some of the best problem-solving projects have been delivered by detectives. Their knowledge of how crimes are committed, even when not detected, is invaluable in understanding crime patterns and devising preventive strategies.

vision a reality. POP goes by numerous labels, including problem-solving policing and problem-oriented partnerships. Whilst it is a matter for police services to decide on their chosen label, the original and most common name is problem-oriented policing, as used in this guide. Whilst this label clearly doesn't indicate partner involvement, it should be highlighted that partnerships are a common feature of effective problem-solving – resolving problems is not the job of the police alone. Once decided on your label, you will then need to decide on a problem-solving model to deliver POP in practice. Based on the available evidence, we recommend SARA. Although not flawless, it is widely recognised in policing, is easily understandable, readily remembered, encompasses the main factors necessary for effective problem-solving, and is the format that submissions to the Tilley and Goldstein awards must adhere to. Although different problem-solving models exist, there is merit in using a common language, not least because it facilitates the spread of good practice.

Allocate resources in ways that support POP. Lack of time is cited as a major barrier to problem-solving. One reason why problem-solving is more commonly practiced by neighbourhood policing

teams is because their time tends to be protected from requests to respond to calls for service. Allowing officers time to do problem-solving is crucial but clearly challenging, especially in periods of austerity. To be able to effectively allocate resources to problem-solving, it is important that you can quantify the levels and sources of demand in your organisation. A review of repeat calls and repeat victimisation is critical and, based on this information, you can then consider: (1) the method, timing and effectiveness of police responses to calls for service across different types of incident, (2) whether specialised units are needed to tackle major sources of demand across areas of police business, and (3) whether time-consuming processes and activities which add little value to problem-solving could be streamlined. This latter point relates to a concept known as 'failure demand' which is particularly problematic for service organisations such as the police. This occurs when an organisation generates waste through ineffective and inefficient internal practices. To combat this, you should routinely ask whether a priority, system or process is making a significant contribution to reducing persistent problems. If not, can it be adapted or abandoned?

Recognise the organisational culture: commit and be faithful to POP. POP flourishes when those who are expected to do problem-solving understand and buy into a shared vision. Thus, once your POP plan has been agreed, the senior executives in your organisation should commit to and live by that plan, relentlessly communicating it throughout the organisation. Achieving mass buy-in will not be easy, as research shows the organisational culture of the police is resistant to change, typically valuing enforcement over prevention. To overcome this your chosen vision should focus squarely on the outcomes of policing not its internal workings. It should provide an unwavering focus on the impact of police (and partner) efforts in tackling recurrent sources of demand and associated harms. Never lose sight of this; it will prevent POP from being reduced to superficial rhetoric.

Get involved. Promoting your implementation plan is but one form of commitment. Another is by playing an active role in the problem-solving process. As a senior leader you can do this in several ways: by identifying strategic problems, forging alliances with researchers to assist in problem-solving efforts, working with partner agencies to share data and intelligence, and being the figurehead for problem-solving when engaging with the public. A particularly important role for senior officers relates to leveraging relevant partners to take part in, contribute resources to and help resolve problems. Involvement in problem-solving will likely enhance your understanding of POP, and your credibility as an advocate for it.

Support your problem-solvers. POP is not conventional police work. It calls for a different way of working, requires innovation and challenges taken-for-granted police tactics. Moreover, not all efforts at problem-solving will be successful. The problems with which the police have to contend are too dynamic and multifaceted for everything to work every time. As leaders, you must support problem-solvers in being creative, recognising that even well-intentioned and well-executed projects can sometimes fail to produce the desired results. Crucially, problem-solving 'failures' should be viewed as a way of learning lessons – not something to bury under the carpet. This perspective has parallels with the way engineers view 'failure': as a chance to figure out what happened with a view to preventing it from happening again. An unwillingness to acknowledge ineffective problem-solving is counterproductive; it acts as a deterrent to doing problem-solving, stifles innovation and gets in the way of learning lessons.

Think about your legacy from the start and avoid complacency. Commitment to POP is sometimes fleeting (see Box 2). A decline is often precipitated by the departure of those who once promoted and practiced problem-solving. Identifying future leaders who are proficient in problem-solving and capable of driving forward a problem-solving agenda can help ensure continuity in your organisation. Likewise, new employees as well as partners and the public should be made aware that your organisation values problem-solving – it is part and parcel of what you do. This commitment to problem-solving should be emphasised in your infrastructure and organisational materials – and repeatedly so. Alignment with the Police and Crime Plan of the Police and Crime Commissioner is also desirable. It is often the case that as the infrastructure for POP develops the process for doing problem-solving becomes more proficient. However, history shows that structures to support POP often wither where sustained senior support is lacking. Maintain your interest – there are always new problems and new ways of solving them.

Demand high standards of problem-solving. Despite strong evidence on the effectiveness of POP, research also shows serial weaknesses in the problem-solving process. A tendency to jump to a response and limited analysis and assessment are common. When trying to embed POP, routine reality testing is vital. Indeed, police forces with a successful track record of doing POP often monitor whether what was being done in an operational situation matched expectation. Pay close attention to whether what is being promised is being delivered on the ground. Where it isn't, and where standard ways of working are being passed off as problem-solving, call it out; rehearse the principles, process and purpose of POP; and take corrective action in the interests of continual improvement.

Box 2: When POP fades

POP has proven precarious. Here are some of the main threats to the longer-term wellbeing of POP, with suggestions for what you might do to mitigate them.

Threats	Suggestions for mitigation
Change in leadership philosophy and priorities	Choose leadership staff who are committed to and understand POP, make clear that POP is a requirement, and check they are delivering on their commitment.
Failure to celebrate/ reward POP successes	Use annual conferences, commendations, promotions, emails, news releases, appraisals, and formal and informal meetings to elicit, show an interest in and reinforce POP efforts to staff, partners and the community.
Supersession by new policing innovations	Take what is of value in new policing innovations and incorporate them into POP.
Confinement of POP to a few specialist enthusiasts in a few specialist departments	Ask all officers and staff about their contribution to POP in meetings, performance reviews etc.
Transfer of key POP staff to other parts of the organisation	Welcome their contributions to POP in their new roles and ensure that replacements maintain the established problem-oriented ways of working
Loss of problem-solving analytic capacity	Prioritise analytic services for POP and/or build capacity for analysis across the service.

Threats	Suggestions for mitigation
Lack of POP training/ CPD for new recruits/ existing staff	Make sure all new recruits are inducted into POP. Include POP in CPD training events. Provide regular refreshers to all staff and relevant partners
Diversion of POP resources to incident responses and detection	Tempting in periods of austerity but resist because ultimately it is counterproductive.
Bureaucratisation of POP discouraging staff from enthusiastic and innovative POP	Minimise bureaucratic requirements and form-filling and make POP as user-friendly as possible. Encourage creativity and allow for innovation.
Complacency over performance and problem-solving	Always ask about improvement and about new demands when discussing POP.
Cynicism of POP and subversion by unsympathetic staff	Listen to their gripes but remain firm to your vision. Make sure they know that their approach is unacceptable.
Political priorities inconsistent with POP	Don't take it lying down. Argue the case, present the evidence, pull levers.

Leadership and problem-oriented policing

Good practice

✓ Senior leaders hold workshops with all staff and relevant partners to articulate the agreed-upon vision for POP and invite challenge.

✓ Senior leaders understand POP and act as mentors to those doing problem-solving, including front line staff, openly enquiring about and congratulating staff on specific problem-solving initiatives.

✓ Senior leaders actively support and continually promote problem-solving, showing how small wins on local problems (e.g. shoplifting at a particular store or disorder at a licensed premise) can be scaled-up to address much wider areas.

✓ Senior leaders fully engage with the public and partner agencies in the interests of resolving identified problems, applying leverage to encourage partner involvement where necessary.

✓ Staff are supported when problem-solving, even when sound projects do not produce the sought-after outcomes. Creativity is fostered.

✓ Corporate literature, such as organisational strategy, plans, and policies explain POP in simple terms and highlight its importance to day-to-day business.

✓ Baselines are established of the extent and quality of problem-solving in practice. Good problem-solving is celebrated. Standard ways of working being passed off as problem-solving are called out and challenged.

Poor practice

✗ Staff and partners are unaware of, unclear about, and/or fail to buy into the POP strategy.

✗ Senior leaders do not understand POP. Policing-as-usual continues albeit under the guise of problem-solving. New policing fashions and innovations are allowed to displace evidence-based approaches such as POP.

✗ Senior leaders continue to support new initiatives without any assessment as to their impact, potentially generating wasted organisational effort.

✗ Leaders show no interest in engaging with or challenging the public or partners. Partner relations exist but only at a superficial level for partnerships sake – they are neither linked to specific problems nor to operational outcomes.

✗ Staff are not empowered and need constantly to refer interventions to supervisors for approval. Staff fears about not being supported should the intervention fail, deter them from adopting more creative solutions. Policing-as-usual ensues.

✗ There is no mention of POP in corporate strategy or plans.

✗ There are no checks on whether planned and promised activities match what happens in an operational situation. Much is done in the name of problem-solving that bears little resemblance to problem-solving as originally conceived.

Condition 2: develop staff to understand and implement the concept

Invest in and support staff to do effective problem-solving

Promoting POP is only part of the implementation process. Successfully embedding and sustaining POP requires staff who are sufficiently knowledgeable, skilled and motivated to break away from traditional ways of working and engage in problem-solving. Training and supervision are hence crucial. Without them, there is a tendency to revert to policing-as-usual.

How and who to train? Training in POP usually takes one of four forms: (1) online courses using a force intranet system, (2) residential training delivered by an in-force problem-solving expert, (3) residential training delivered by outside experts, and (4) stretched courses, typically facilitated by outside experts, which intersperse classroom input with gaps for operational practice. You will need to decide what type(s) of training works best for your organisation. Considerations include: (1) Who to train? This should be consistent with your POP implementation plan, in terms of who in your organisation receives training and when (for example are all staff to be trained or just some? Will relevant partners contribute to and/or participate

in training?), (2) Will training be general or tailored, focussing on specific problems (such as robbery) or specific areas of police business (such as safeguarding)?, and (3) who will deliver the training? Given the common resistance to POP, trainers must have credibility in the subject. In some forces in a bid to ensure officer buy-in, training has been delivered by a combination of police staff and operational personnel. The Learning and Development interim practice advice on problem-solving, published by the College of Policing in support of the Problem-Solving and Demand Reduction programme provides further information on training.

One-off training sessions are unlikely to produce lasting change. Decades of psychological research indicates that bursts of training can have positive effects on attitudes but rarely give rise to lasting changes in behaviour. In relation to POP, many existing police personnel will at some point have received training on problem-solving. All new recruits will, since problem-solving is now included in the curriculum for different entry routes into policing. While some degree of up-front training is

necessary to introduce the core principles and practices of problem-solving, one-off standalone training sessions of any kind are unlikely to produce the sought-after shift to sustained problem-oriented ways of working. In an effort to embed POP, initial training should be coupled with follow-up activities designed to cement, refresh and advance skills and knowledge. These activities could include: (1) routine refresher sessions and masterclasses, (2) bespoke training sessions informed by assessments of current problem-solving activities in your organisation. For example, if a review of recent problem-solving projects identified weaknesses in, say, assessment or partnership working, then tailored training sessions can be devised to remedy observed deficiencies.

Involve experts and invite critique. There is a large research literature on POP. The evidence base comprises several thousand localised problem-solving projects and is growing. To sharpen the problem-solving skills and knowledge within your organisation, consider forging strategic relationships with relevant universities and inviting outside experts to report on

the latest developments in POP. Local academics can usefully act as 'critical friends' appraising and contributing to the problem-solving going on in your organisation – many academics will be flattered by the invitation.

Establish a network of POP champions and cultivate peer support. Research shows that people are responsive to advice provided by peers whom they respect. Within your organisation, there will be individuals with an aptitude for or skills in problem-solving. Consider formally recognising them as 'POP champions'; they can help your vision spread and stick. Assign them responsibility for assisting and mentoring other problem-solvers, identifying and collating good practice, engaging with partners and the public, and delivering training. Beyond your organisation, there are regional problem-solving networks to exchange ideas and insights. The various problem-solving groups present on the online Knowledge Hub serve a similar purpose.

Align continuing professional development with POP. All staff have a responsibility for continuing professional development. Your organisation should consider how easy it is for your staff to improve their problem-solving knowledge and skills. This can include access to good practice databases, publications, POP champions, POP conferences and wider Higher Education programmes. A list of relevant resources is presented at the end of this guide.

Sustain POP through recognition and rewards. All police forces contain natural problem solvers. These individuals exhibit the habits of thinking set out formally in problem-solving models such as SARA. Yet not all problem solvers are visible in all police forces, nor are they supported. POP withers when effective problem-solving is hidden from view and not celebrated. Staff are much more capable of committing and adding value to POP when they know the organisation both values and rewards this approach. Sustaining POP thus requires that measures be put in place to recognise and reward effective problem-solving, thereby elevating its status across the organisation and promoting organisational learning. Annual POP conferences where staff (and non-police partners) engage in a competitive

award system can help showcase problem-solving efforts and ensure problem solvers receive formal recognition. Many police forces in England and Wales now hold such conferences. In addition, award systems (e.g. Chief Constable commendations) should incorporate problem-solving. Finally, individuals should be aware that problem-solving is a key competency for your organisation. Unless they understand and engage in this process, they will not be selected into specialist roles or be asked to lead others.

Developing staff to understand problem-oriented policing

Good practice

✓ POP training is provided for all staff (and relevant partners). Generic training is buttressed by bespoke training for specialist areas of police business. Refreshers and masterclasses are delivered by senior leaders and outside experts. Creative ways are sought to fund training, such as from investments by partner agencies or by using funds secured through the Proceeds of Crime Act.

✓ Staff receive training in POP and provisions are put in place for them to apply what they have learnt in their daily activities.

✓ A network of POP champions is created. These champions are tasked with and expected to promote problem-solving and coach those doing it, engaging with their counterparts in other forces through regional problem-solving networks, the Knowledge Hub and related events.

✓ External researchers and practitioners regularly visit to report on POP-relevant developments and experiences. Critical comments are welcomed. Strategic relationships with universities are established. Processes and protocols are in place both to discuss promising avenues for research but also to share data.

✓ An annual award ceremony is held which invites staff to present and listen to other problem-solving practitioners.

✓ In promotion interviews applicants are asked for evidence of their involvement in problem-solving initiatives to show their understanding of and commitment to the approach.

Poor practice

✗ Training on POP is limited, disconnected from the force vision and makes no reference to wider skills. It focusses only on the delivery of knowledge and there is no acknowledgment of the skills/ challenges associated with implementing POP. Those who deliver training are inexperienced, uninspiring and uncommitted.

✗ Staff receive training in POP but then are returned to roles where there is no scope for or expectation of doing problem-solving. Enthusiasm for and willingness to carry out problem-solving thus fades.

✗ There are no POP champions. Those experimenting with the approach are unsure who to turn to for support and guidance.

✗ Engagement with external researchers and practitioners in the interests of improving POP is minimal and actively discouraged. Critique is automatically challenged. Defensiveness prevails. Academics are viewed with scepticism and deemed to be of little value to police improvement.

✗ There are no formal mechanisms to recognise and reward good problem-solving. Problem-solving that is happening is largely hidden from view.

✗ Whilst POP may be mentioned, an audit of awards and promotions shows no change in practice in relation to rewarding problem-solving initiatives. It is not mentioned in any promotion processes.

Condition 3: Infrastructure

Put structures in place to support, manage and sustain effective problem-solving

Senior endorsement, training and supervision are all critical steps in the implementation of POP, but a supportive infrastructure also needs to be in place for POP to stick, spread and survive. A supportive infrastructure can take various forms depending on the scale of planned implementation and the resources that are already in place. Here, we consider two broad categories of infrastructure. The first category relates to resources and processes relevant to doing problem-solving. The second category relates to the management and assessment of problem-solving in your organisation. Both are important for ensuring high-quality sustainable POP. In this section we discuss each category in turn.

Resources and processes relevant to problem-solving. SARA provides a useful framework to determine whether your existing infrastructure is sufficient to support effective problem-solving, and where improvements might be made. You should consider the ease with which individuals in your organisation can do the following elements of the problem-solving process.

Scanning (the identification and prioritisation of problems): Is information readily available and accessible so that staff can identify the frequency and nature of persistent problems, as well as the harms they generate, be the problem related to victims, offenders or places? Can officers assess information to help define problems precisely so that analyses and responses can be well-targeted? Are communication channels open so frontline officers can inform their seniors (as well as neighbourhood groups and partners) about identified problems?

Analysis (determining the underlying causes of problems): A common weakness of analysis is that it fails to identify the underlying causes of presenting problems. Analysis is descriptive rather than explanatory – indicating that there is a hotspot as opposed to identifying what it is that give rises to a hotspot. As leaders you should ask how staff in your organisation are developed to understand analysis, as well as the tools and processes that are in place to support it. The development of specialist analysts should be a key feature of a problem-oriented organisation. Ask whether

data are collected and accessible in ways that are amenable to analysis? For example, are important data missing and do partners hold relevant data that can improve your understanding of identified problems? Are analysts available to do effective analysis? Do staff know how to examine a problem and understand its underlying causes, rather than just describe its symptoms?

Response (choosing the most effective, efficient and sustainable solutions): Are staff able to find information on previous efforts in your organisation to tackle the problem of interest? Were lessons learned, and documented, that can usefully inform future responses? Do staff know where to find evidence from outside your organisation on the effectiveness of interventions targeted at the problem of interest? Evidence here is considered broadly, to include information on the effect of an intervention but also challenges of implementation, legitimacy and cost-effectiveness. The resources listed at the end of the guide can help here.

Response (Identify and involve partners): Partnership working is a common feature of POP. As a police leader, you have a critical

role to play in problem-oriented partnership working. First, you should look to cultivate an environment in which staff feel supported in forging relationships with those who can control or change the conditions that give rise to persistent problems. Part of this involves emphasising that partnerships be tailored according to the analysis of the presenting problem, rather than to sustain interpersonal relationships. It should be expected that supervisory and line staff actively manage external partnerships as core business. Second, agreements should be in place for what and how data and information can be shared across partners. Third, it is important that partners (citizens, businesses, public sector, voluntary sector, criminal justice agencies, elected and appointed government officials, research organisations, and the mass media) understand and value POP, hence the recommendation to include key partners in relevant POP training sessions. Finally, not all partners play ball all of the time. Whilst POP explicitly calls for the police to shift and share responsibility with relevant parties, where appropriate, at times police leaders may be required to encourage, cajole or persuade third parties to act in ways expected to reduce identified problems.

Assessment: Organisations should value and develop their ability to conduct assessments. Ask whether data are collected and accessible in ways that are amenable to evaluating responses put in place. Question whether staff are available and competent to perform assessments of efforts to reduce selected problems. More broadly, ask whether your organisation values and recognises the importance of assessment as a means of learning lessons.

Management and assessment of problem-solving activity. Once your POP plan is in place and problem-solving is underway, it is important to be able to record, monitor and assess what is being done and to what effect. There are three main reasons for this. First, standard performance measures such as the number of arrests or response times are inadequate indicators of the quality and impact of problem-oriented work. Focus instead should remain firmly on whether the harm and demand associated with specific problems has reduced because of your problem-solving activities. Monitoring levels of repeat victimisation (people and places) is extremely important in this regard. Second, routine assessments of the extent, nature and quality of problem-solving taking place in your organisation can provide insights

into necessary adaptations and refinements, or where increased energy might usefully be focussed in the interests of continual improvement. Third, a POP management system is that it creates organisational memory. This helps avoid the need to start afresh should commitment to POP decline over time. Police systems typically outstay police leaders, and so having an IT system that can support POP can both promote a problem-orientation and ensure continuity.

Managing projects. Change following investments in POP is much easier to identify if there is an effective POP project management system. Such a system would be designed to keep track of, coordinate, and document POP work. It would assign responsibility for addressing problems on a project-by-project basis to particular individuals and / or teams, thereby avoiding duplication of efforts and providing continuity across problem solvers. As problem-solving projects accumulate, it would provide a mechanism to cascade learning, create networks of problem solvers with shared interests and experiences and identify suitable POP champions. Such a project management system could also provide evidence to persuade key decision-makers to agree with a recommended response and reward officers for their

efforts. As above, it also helps develop organisational memory, which can provide a legacy for those going forward. Indeed, documenting POP projects enables an agency to learn from past efforts when addressing similar problems in the future.

A POP project-management system should be in place that can, at a minimum, record: (1) the nature of the problem, (2) the individuals and units responsible for dealing with the problem, (3) a unique project identifier, (4) the dates the project was opened and closed, and (5) the summary status of the project. Project management systems should focus on quality rather than quantity of information. It is important to keep bureaucracy to a minimum as this can hinder problem-solving or reward short-term activity that does not generate sustainable responses.

Managing people. If problem-solving is viewed as core to the organisation then, wherever possible, this problem-solving orientation should be reinforced individually and examined (to assist in reward or development). An obvious mechanism to achieve this is through the staff appraisal process. Problem-solving related activities could feature as part of an employee's annual priorities against

which their performance is judged. To facilitate this, you could consider setting problem-solving objectives to align with the SMART principles of Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely.

Managing teams. Team-based police performance management systems generally take place at monthly or quarterly intervals. Compstat is a well-known example from the US of a team-based police performance management process. However, a traditional Compstat-like review predominantly relies on police reports and short-term enforcement activity. A problem-solving team review needs to be more probing, focussed on identifying the underlying the causes of recurring problems, tailored evidence-based interventions, and evaluating selected interventions for impact and lessons to usefully inform future problem-solving efforts.

Box 3: Embedding POP: a case study

There is no single strategy for implementing problem-oriented policing. Indeed, what works in one setting might not work elsewhere. In this box, we list some of the ways in which one police service, which uses POP as their central operating philosophy, tried to embed the approach.

- Consistent and relentless senior endorsement

- The mantra, 'You come to work to solve problems', is applied to the entire organisation

- POP-related questions feature in all promotion processes

- Staff recruited and inducted into the organisation with POP in mind

- Internal POP awards and annual conference recognise and celebrate success

- Records kept of all POP projects using purpose-built, accessible management tools

- Quality of existing and ongoing POP projects routinely checked to identify weaknesses and take corrective action

- Problem-solving that falls short of expected standards is challenged

- All staff trained in problem-solving with annual refreshers and masterclasses delivered by senior leaders

- Investment in people: staff are expected, equipped and empowered to do effective problem-solving

- Encouragement to collaborate with outside experts facilitated through close links and data sharing agreements with universities and academic researchers

- Those dismissive of or seeking to derail the implementation of POP are listened to but challenged

- Time is ring-fenced for officers to problem solve

- Staff are expected to work in an area for as long as possible in order to facilitate effective problem-solving; routine movement of people is discouraged

- Problem-solving goes on simultaneously at regional/ force/ and local levels using independent evaluations when necessary

- Bureaucracy is kept to a minimum: fewer meetings, less paperwork, more action

- Innovation specifically encouraged

- Authority to take risks and act independently and creatively is encouraged across the constabulary

Infrastructure and problem-oriented policing

Good practice

✓ Demand is understood. Existing data infrastructure is assessed in terms of its contribution, realised or potential, to problem-solving.

✓ Senior Officers conduct performance reviews which are underpinned by in-depth analysis and challenge using the SARA process on a quarterly basis. Action plans are revisited at the following quarterly performance review to establish if the approach was implemented and whether it had the desired impact.

✓ IT systems are in place to store, track and make accessible problem-solving initiatives. Systems also provide information around repeat victims, offenders and locations. These are routinely passed to staff members who have responsibility for the location or theme and managers prioritise those which require action.

Poor practice

✗ Little is done to determine if current data infrastructure can and does play in role in advancing problem-solving

✗ No systematic process for performance review is followed, and a poor level of information is available. Performance reviews focus on short-term problems and generate short-term activity (e.g. high visibility patrols).

✗ Limited and inadequate resources are in place to support POP. Problems are identified subjectively by staff and more challenging problems are ignored. IT systems are difficult to engage with for the purposes of problem-solving. Problem solvers are provided little guidance on where relevant information can be located. Analysis and assessment is left to frontline officers to do in their spare time.

Preparedness for problem-oriented policing: a self-assessment tool

The checklist below is our attempt to distil the material covered in this guide into an easy-to-use self-assessment tool. Answering each question will allow you to better determine your organisation's readiness for and progress in implementing POP. Questions are organised according to the three conditions which structure this guide: leadership, developing staff to understand and implement POP, and infrastructure. Each question should be answered using a 5 point scale where 1 = not developed and 5 = fully developed, thereby generating a total score between 25 - 125. Routine assessments using this tool can help you determine change over time as well as aspects of the implementation process that require additional attention.

Leadership		Scale 1 (not dev) – 5 (fully dev).
1	Do senior officers in your organisation have a comprehensive and agreed understanding of the principles, practice and purpose of POP?	
2	Is there an organisational vision for POP? Do senior officers know and buy into it?	
3	Is there an implementation plan to make the POP vision a reality? If so, is it aligned with other strategic documents in your organisation and those of the Police and Crime Commissioner, where relevant? And, does the implementation plan set attainable goals and specify the sought-after speed and level of change (i.e. whether to implement POP force-wide or (initially) in specialist departments)?	
4	Has an organisational audit been conducted – using a tool such as this – to establish a baseline of problem-solving against which change can be assessed (including an assessment of the level of support for/opposition to change)?	

5	Have senior officers communicated to staff the proposed changes in relation to POP and the reasons for them? Has staff feedback/reaction been captured and considered?	
6	Have senior officers agreed on the level and allocation of resources needed to support the POP vision? Is this accounted for in your POP implementation plan?	
7	Do senior officers consistently and visibly show their commitment to POP?	
8	Do senior officers engage in problem-solving at a strategic level?	
9	Are processes in place in your organisation to identify future leaders of and advocates for POP?	
10	Has a problem-solving model been chosen (e.g. SARA)?	
11	Are staff empowered and supported to make decisions when working on problem-solving initiatives?	

Develop staff to understand and implement the concept		Scale 1 (not dev) – 5 (fully dev).
12	Do staff know their roles and responsibilities in a problem-oriented organisation (e.g. supervisors, patrol officers, detectives, call-handling staff, and support staff)?	
13	Have staff received appropriate training in POP in accordance with the speed and spread of your POP implementation plan? Does this training emphasise the importance of identifying and engaging with partners?	
14	Do you have a system in place to mentor and support problem solvers? Do you have a network of POP champions?	
15	Do you have systems within your organisation to identify and reward good problem-solving/ers?	
16	Are internal selection procedures in place to highlight the importance of problem-solving for specialist posts and for promotion candidates?	
17	Does your recruitment process advertise and sustain a POP philosophy? Has the recruitment process been reviewed so new applicants know that they are applying to a problem-oriented organisation, what this means, and that they will be assessed on this competency?	

Infrastructure		Scale 1 (not dev) – 5 (fully dev).
18	Are systems and processes in place to readily identify and prioritise suitable recurring problems?	
19	Are appropriate resources and skills in place to effectively analyse identified problems?	
20	Is there a focus on managing demand? Are processes being developed which resolve demand at the earliest opportunity? Is there an emphasis on facilitating time/resources/support for officers to engage in problem-solving?	
21	Is problem-oriented partnership working valued and routinely cultivated within your organisation?	
22	Does your organisation routinely assess the quality and impact of problem-solving initiatives, and take corrective action if necessary?	
23	Do you have a POP project-management system accessible to all staff where problem-solving projects are stored and monitored?	
24	Do you have a suitable accountability structure to identify those who are dealing with identified problems and to review problem-solving performance against your expectations?	
25	Would an audit of your organisation conclude that you have made POP a part of your legacy? Can you identify embedded POP-promoting systems or processes that would continue should the current senior leadership team move on?	

Relevant resources

Recommended readings

Clarke, R. V. & Eck, J. (2003). Become a Problem-Solving Crime Analyst in 55 Steps. London, Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science, University College London.

A popular guide on the steps required to do effective problem-solving, aimed primarily at analysts but with wider relevance.

Goldstein, H. (1990). Problem-Oriented Policing. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Goldstein's most comprehensive account of POP. Published in 1990 but still highly relevant to contemporary policing.

Goldstein, H. (2018). On problem-oriented policing: the Stockholm lecture. Crime Science, 7(1), 13.

Herman's Goldstein's lecture when awarded the Stockholm Prize in Criminology, in which he reflects on the meaning, application and future of POP.

Scott, M.S. & Kirby, S. (2012). Implementing POP: Leading, Structuring, and Managing a Problem-Oriented Police Agency. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice.

A comprehensive guide on implementing POP, with a particular focus on the US.

Scott, M. S. & Goldstein, H. (2005). Shifting and sharing responsibility for public safety problems. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice.

A guide on how the police can shift and share the responsibility for tackling problems.

Web resources

Center for Problem-Oriented Policing

An extensive library of problem guides, tools and resources relating to POP.

Crime Reduction Toolkit

Hosted by the College of Policing, this toolkit rates and summarises evidence relating to a wide range of crime prevention interventions.

Knowledge Hub

The Knowledge Hub is an online forum for the police and partners. Groups exist on both problem-solving as an approach and specific problems. Entries to the Tilley Award are also available here.

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How to cite this guide

Acknowledgements