



Multiagency Early Risk Intervention Tables (MERIT)

Background

One of the precursors to the development of the MERIT model was the establishment of the Ontario Working Group on Collaborative, Risk-Driven Community Safety. A number of their recommendations pointed to the need for a blended response to issues stemming from multiple causes.

Municipalities across the province have since begun to move towards this model, after seeing positive results in other cities. For example, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, has been a leader in this area with their community mobilization model and has witnessed reductions across a number of key indicators such as child protection cases, violent crime, and emergency room admissions.

We have engaged one of the principal architects behind this multi-agency collaboration approach, Norm Taylor, to assist with developing an Ottawa-based solution. He has worked extensively with agencies across the province and can offer much expertise to guide the development of the pilot.

There are currently 15 police services across the province who have worked with community partners to implement their own versions of this model including: Toronto, Waterloo, North Bay, Guelph, Halton, and Brantford.

Frequently Asked Questions

General questions re: MERIT

Q: What is MERIT?

A: MERIT stands for Multiagency Early Risk Intervention Tables.

It is a risk-driven problem solving group that focuses on risk management and preventative intervention.

Q: What are the benefits of this collaborative model?

A: The benefits of MERIT are:

- Reduced risk of harm, victimization, and criminality;
- Improved provision and prioritization of local community safety, social, and health related services;
- More effective mobilization and coordination of resources;
- Formalized information sharing based on risk;
- Increased knowledge and awareness of social needs and solutions; and,
- Decreased costs and demands for service.

Q: How are specific individuals and families brought to the attention of MERIT?

A: The participating agencies and organizations will bring forward individuals and families they encounter who they deem to have acutely elevated risk factors that require a multi-agency intervention in order to prevent harm or danger to the individual or family.

Q: What are ‘acutely elevated risks’?

A: The primary focus of the MERIT table is situations facing individuals, families, or the community where circumstances, as viewed from multiple human service perspectives, indicate there is a high probability of the occurrence of harm, victimization, or criminality. If left unattended these situations may require targeted enforcement, emergency response, or intensive support from health and social service providers. This can include people and families exhibiting signs of cumulative risk such as such as addictions and mental health issues, criminality and victimization, poor physical health and self care, lack of social and family support, poor parenting, truancy, inadequate housing, poverty, negative peer and family associations, poor social environment, unemployment or employment related stress, age and culture specific factors, etc.

Q: What is the difference between MERIT and current inter-agency collaboration that is taking place?

A: MERIT is unique in that it creates a formalized program for mobilizing multiagency resources and sharing information, to improve the provision of local community safety, social, and health related services.

This coordinated and integrated service delivery model assists in the development of immediate plans for multiagency interventions in situations where there is the presence of acutely elevated risk factors in individuals, families, or the community.

Current intervention and mobilization efforts focusing on high risk persons operate independently across specialty areas such as youth, partner assault, elder abuse, and mental health.

Q: Has this type of collaboration been institutionalized in other municipalities?

A: The City of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan implemented the *Community Mobilization Prince Albert Model* in 2011 and inspired 15 Ontario Police services and their community partners to implement their own initiatives. These currently include Toronto, Waterloo, North Bay, Guelph, Halton, Brantford, Sault Ste. Marie, Rama, Sudbury, Ottawa, Durham, Peel, North Grenville, Bancroft, and Kenora.

Q: In terms of sharing information between agencies, how is the privacy of individuals and families protected?

A: A specific process has been developed by privacy experts to address disclosure issues, minimize the identifiable personal information that is disclosed and recorded, and limit the agencies to which the information is disclosed.

Questions re: MERIT Pilot

Q: When and where is the MERIT Pilot launching?

A: The MERIT Pilot is scheduled to launch in the spring within the geographical boundary of the South East Ottawa Community Health Centre.

Q: How long will it run?

A: The MERIT Pilot does not have an assigned end date however an evaluation will be taking place six months into the pilot to assess

Q: How does MERIT work?

A: The process for MERIT is as follows:

1. Assigned representatives from professional and community based organizations meet weekly.
2. Agencies bring forward cases involving individuals and families (known as *Situations*) to the *Situation Table*, when deemed to have acutely elevated risk factors requiring a multiagency intervention.
3. If the *Table* agrees that risk threshold* has been met, limited private information is shared, and a decision is made on what agencies are required for intervention.
4. Subset of required agencies develop an intervention plan to be actioned within 24-48 hours.

**Situations brought forward must present acutely elevated risk factors across a range of service providers.*

Q: Why is the pilot taking place in the south end of Ottawa?

A: The area is recommended due to the existing capacity of partner organizations including SEOCHC and Community Based Organizations and programs such as No Communities Left Behind, and a Community Crime and Safety Project in the area of Cedarwood Sandalwood Baycrest. In addition, the area has recently suffered from the impact of gang related activity including gun related calls, shootings and home invasions. The OPS also have the support of two dedicated Community Police Officers active in the south east as well as a project in a priority at risk school at Ridgemont high school. Health and socioeconomic data also indicate higher than average levels of risk within specific south east neighbourhoods.

Q: Will this model impact the way services are delivered to others?

A: MERIT is risk driven as opposed to incident based and will align with existing community programs and social supports. Service will be enhanced and prioritized through early intervention prior to an escalation to more intensive case management and associated costs.

Q: Will this model increase costs/taxes to residents of Ottawa?

A: No, MERIT will utilize existing resources as well as funding and support from partner organizations. MERIT is also supported by the Ontario Provincial Working Group for Collaborative Risk Driven Community Safety and Wellness.

Q: What organizations are expected to participate in this collaboration?

A: Participating members will include professional and community based organizations responsible for the provision of local community safety, social and health related services. These include, but are not limited to, Police, Fire, Ambulance, Health (including Mental Health professionals), CAS, Addictions, Housing, Education, and Social Services.

Q: What is the primary focus of the participating membership?

A: The primary focus of the MERIT table is at-risk individuals and families within specific vulnerable neighbourhoods. This includes people and families exhibiting signs of cumulative risk such as addictions and mental health issues, criminality and victimization, poor physical health and self care, lack of social and family support, poor parenting, truancy, inadequate housing, poverty, negative peer and family associations, poor social environment, unemployment or employment related stress, age and culture specific factors, etc.

Q: Are you looking to expand MERIT citywide?

A: At this time, there are no plans to expand MERIT citywide.

Depending on the results of the evaluation of the pilot after the six month period, there is a possibility that more tables could be created based on community need.

Questions re: Resource Commitments

Q: Will MERIT participants be asked to make financial contributions for the pilot?

A: No. Administrative and Professional Services costs associated with the initial development, training and pilot of the MERIT model will be absorbed by The Ottawa Police Service – Service Initiative Program.

Q. Will a long-term financial contribution from partners be requested?

A. Not at this time – based on good practice provincially, no additional funding was required to operate a situation table in the pilot stage. The program is designed to integrate into existing process and resources. However, In kind support from partners may be required in the area of administrative support, room donations for meetings, etc. The OPS on behalf of MERIT will be submitting an application for Proceeds of Crime funding to support any potential long term administrative costs.

Q. Without membership on the MERIT Executive Committee, how can partners be assured that their concerns and questions are addressed?

A. Your participation in the Senior Management Committee will ensure that your views and service level interests are represented and communicated to the EC.

Q. With each agency providing one representative on the MERIT Senior Management Committee, what level of management is recommended?

A. Representation on SMC should be a senior officer within your organization with the authority to make strategic decisions, control resources, and to influence recommendations to the EC as required. The Ottawa Police Service will be appointing a Superintendent, which is equivalent to a Director or Senior Management level resource in many organizations.

Q. How often will the MERIT SMC group meet?

A. The SMC will meet quarterly to address any issues or program direction although more frequent meetings may be required during pilot implementation.

Q. The MERIT Situation Table committee is identified as meeting on a weekly basis. Is this really feasible?

A. The objective of the MERIT pilot is to review process, membership, etc including the frequency and level of effort by agencies. MERIT is flexible to meet local needs but will launch based on good practice models across Ontario and this involves weekly meetings of the Table committee.

Q. Who will be responsible for facilitating these meetings?

A. The first meeting of the SMC will involve a group decision to assign a MERIT Chair including tenure for rotation. The Chair will receive specific training by Norm Taylor and his team based on good practice models provincially while the OPS will maintain an advisory role.

Q. Each member group is to select “One sector specialist” to participate at the Table. Do you have a suggestion on who should be?

A. Representation at the table is specific to the resources and structure of each organization. The assigned resource should be a mid-level management member with authority to designate resources, knowledge of the organization, consistent availability and a sound knowledge of clients.

Questions re: Implementation

Q. Will the Ottawa Police Service take care of the media communiqué regarding the launch of the pilot?

A. Yes, the OPS Service Initiative program in collaboration with the MERIT Executive Committee will facilitate communications and media during the pilot implementation stage.

Q. Who will be the media relations contact for MERIT?

A. The Ottawa Police Service Initiative program will be the main contact for all media inquiries pertaining to the program. Any inquiries specific to your organization will be the responsibility of each service area to manage. A distribution list of media contacts will be established prior to the pilot launch to ensure all partners are aware of media releases in advance.

