



City of Saskatoon

Street Activity Baseline Study Update 2018



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City of
Saskatoon

Executive Summary

BACKGROUND & METHODOLOGY

The Street Activity Baseline Study Update 2018 is a follow-up to previous iterations of this research conducted in 2011, 2013 and 2015. The purpose of this research is to evaluate the status of street activity in Saskatoon and gather feedback on the Community Support Program (CSP).

Key objectives of this study focus on, but are not limited to, the following:

- Identifying changes since the 2011 baseline study
- Understanding perceptions of safety changes
- Measuring awareness levels and effectiveness of the CSP in the Business Improvement Districts of Downtown, Broadway and Riversdale

To meet the research objectives above, the Street Activity Baseline Study Update 2018 used a multi-phased approach. Through this approach, we surveyed and spoke with:

- A representative sample of Saskatoon residents
- Business owners and operators within the three Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)
- Vulnerable persons in Saskatoon
- A selection of service providers who work with vulnerable populations

A more detailed breakout of our approach can be found in the Methodology section of this report.

PERCEPTION-BASED STUDY

As with previous iterations of this study, it is important to note that this is a perception-based study, meaning that each of the groups examined provided answers based on their own perceptions rather than established facts. It is important to understand perceptions, as they form the basis of residents' beliefs regarding safety and the impact of the CSP in Saskatoon. Additionally, gaps between perception and reality can be identified and addressed appropriately.

QUANTITATIVE & QUALITATIVE

This study includes both quantitative and qualitative results. Where applicable, quotas have been set for quantitative studies in order to make the results as representative as possible of the specific groups examined. Qualitative results do not use quotas and are not intended to be numerically representative of the group examined; rather these results are intended to help flesh out the quantitative ones by adding additional information to the overall picture.

KEY THEMES

The following are the key themes that emerged from the research.

Public Safety Perceptions Remain Consistent

Overall public safety perceptions are consistent with previous research, with most respondents saying they feel safer during daytime hours, especially in Broadway and Downtown. Special events, such as festivals, community events, street vendors and busking, are seen to have a positive impact on general perceptions of safety in the City of Saskatoon.

- The general sense of safety in Saskatoon is consistent with levels noted in 2015 (87%).
- One half (51%) of Saskatoon residents report they feel about as safe in Saskatoon as they did three years ago, which is consistent with the findings of the 2015 study (53%).
- Broadway and Downtown continue to be the areas where residents feel the safest, specifically during day time hours.
 - Broadway: Day, 93%; Night, 60%
 - Downtown: Day, 86%; Night, 37%
 - Riversdale: Day, 74%; Night, 23%
- Types of positive street activities most commonly noted are: foot traffic; events, festivals and parades; street vendors; and busking. Residents feel these activities positively impact perceptions of safety in public areas in Saskatoon.

Negative Street Activities Are Perceived to Be Increasing

Select negative street activities, such as homelessness, public drunkenness, drug trafficking and people suffering from mental illness, have been witnessed

by more residents or are perceived to be on the rise since 2015. Encounters with panhandling are consistent with previous waves of research.

- The most common types of negative street activity witnessed in the past year are:
 - Homelessness: general population, 91%; businesses, 21%; service providers, 10%
 - Panhandling: general population, 89%; businesses, 28%; service providers, 24%
 - Public drunkenness or impairment from other drugs: general population, 84%; businesses, 33%; service providers, 34%
 - Loitering: general population, 82%; businesses, 15%; service providers, 34%
- The proportion of residents who claim to have witnessed public drunkenness or impairment from other drugs (84%), drug trafficking (39%), prostitution (43%) and street fights (35%) in the past year has increased in 2018 since the last iteration of research in 2015 (74%, 26%, 36%, 27% respectively).
- The proportion of residents who report having witnessed panhandling is consistent with that reported in 2015. However, the proportion of Saskatoon residents who say they have *frequently* witnessed or encountered panhandlers acting aggressively has doubled from 2015 (increasing from 5% to 10%), with only two in ten residents saying they never see panhandlers acting aggressively.
- Additionally, businesses report seeing an increase in people acting violently or aggressively (increasing from 9% in 2015 to 17% in 2018).

Awareness of Community Support Program Continues to Increase

Overall awareness of the CSP continues to increase over time.

- Awareness of the CSP is steadily increasing:
 - General population awareness: 2013, 41%; 2015, 49%; 2018, 54%
 - Businesses awareness 2018, 79%; service provider awareness 2018, 100% (with 42% stating their clients are aware of the CSP)

Community Support Program Visibility Increasing

Overall perceived visibility of Community Support Officers (CSOs) is higher than previously reported, with officer interactions holding relatively steady.

- Overall visibility of CSOs to the public has increased in all three Business Improvement Districts (BIDs):
 - General population Downtown: 2013, 42%; 2015, 43%; 2018, 67%
 - General population Riversdale: 2013, 20%; 2015, 17%; 2018, 32%
 - General population Broadway: 2013, 15%; 2015, 17%; 2018, 21%
- Proportion who have had interactions with CSOs:
 - General population (intercept interviews, no trended data available): 2018, 21%
 - Businesses: 2015, 40%; 2018, 41%
 - Service providers: 2015: 86%; 2018, 83%

Fluctuations in Perceived Program Effectiveness

The general population perceptions of CSP effectiveness continue to climb, while business perceptions soften and service provider perceptions remain the same.

- Trended perceived effectiveness by population:
 - General population: 2015, 35%; 2018, 39%
 - Business: 2015, 55%; 2018, 51%
 - Service provider: 2015, 61%; 2018, 62%
- More businesses in the Broadway BID rate the program to be effective (7 out of 10 on average) than in the Downtown and Riversdale BIDs (6 out of 10 on average). The general population feels the CSP has had the greatest safety impact in the Downtown area (48% - increasing 10% since 2015).
- Overall suggestions to the CSP from the general population differ by Business Improvement District: panhandlers being the top priority for Downtown (30%), loitering for Broadway (15%) and substance abusers for Riversdale (23%).

Strong Support for Program Continuation and Expansion

All populations see the value in having the CSP and are supportive in the continuation of the program. This includes expanding the program to include Monday services and extending hours on Friday and Saturday.

- There is strong support for the continuation of the CSP programs: business (88%), service providers (90%).
- There is strong support for extending the hours of operation for the program to include Monday services, and extended hours on Fridays and Saturdays.
 - 75% of businesses that have heard of the program and 83% of service providers say that it is important to have CSOs working on Mondays.
 - Service providers feel it is important to extend the program operating hours, particularly on Fridays (86%) and Saturdays (93%).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ **Continue to track program effectiveness and street activity perceptions in Saskatoon.**
 - Continue evaluating the perceptions of Street Activity and the CSP every two to three years.
 - With the new legislation regarding cannabis legalization scheduled to be implemented in the fall of 2018, it will be important to note any changes to the business environment and drug culture in Saskatoon and to any related street activity perceptions.

- ❖ **Continue to work on building awareness and visibility of the CSP.**
 - Seek ways to increase awareness and visibility of the CSP program, either through information sessions, promotional materials or through other public appearances and media coverage.
 - Specifically, seek to improve awareness of the role of CSOs and the types of services they can offer. This would be especially beneficial to the vulnerable in Saskatoon.

- ❖ **Consider extending operational hours of the program.**
 - Pursue ways to extend the program to include Monday and evening hours on Fridays and Saturdays - perhaps on a trial basis to determine the need and uptake of the services during these times.

- ❖ **Consider expanding the outreach activities of CSP.**
 - Look for ways to help CSOs broaden the services they provide.
 - Enhance lines of communication with social workers and staff at organizations such as Crocus Co-Op, The Lighthouse and Salvation Army, etc. Consideration should be given to reviewing confidentiality restrictions to better connect those in need with service providers that are already engaged.
 - Identifying additional interactive methods to distribute schedules and program updates, additions, and cancellations such as online forums and the ability to query specific items of need (i.e., free meal, open shelter beds, transportation options, etc.).

❖ **Consider Transportation Options for CSP**

- The response time of the CSOs is a common concern among those who require their services. Increasing the number of officers patrolling at a given time, or potentially shifting resources to the areas which need more attention in peak hours is proposed.
- Additionally, while a strong majority feels it is advantageous to have the officers patrolling on-foot, some recognize that the lack of reliable and timely transportation can hinder the CSOs' ability to respond to calls.
 - Dedicated transportation resources for the CSP to send people to the appropriate community resource could help the CSOs remain on the street while not having to spend valuable time arranging and waiting on transportation.
 - Arranging a contract with a taxi service to provide rides for situations that involve extenuating circumstances.