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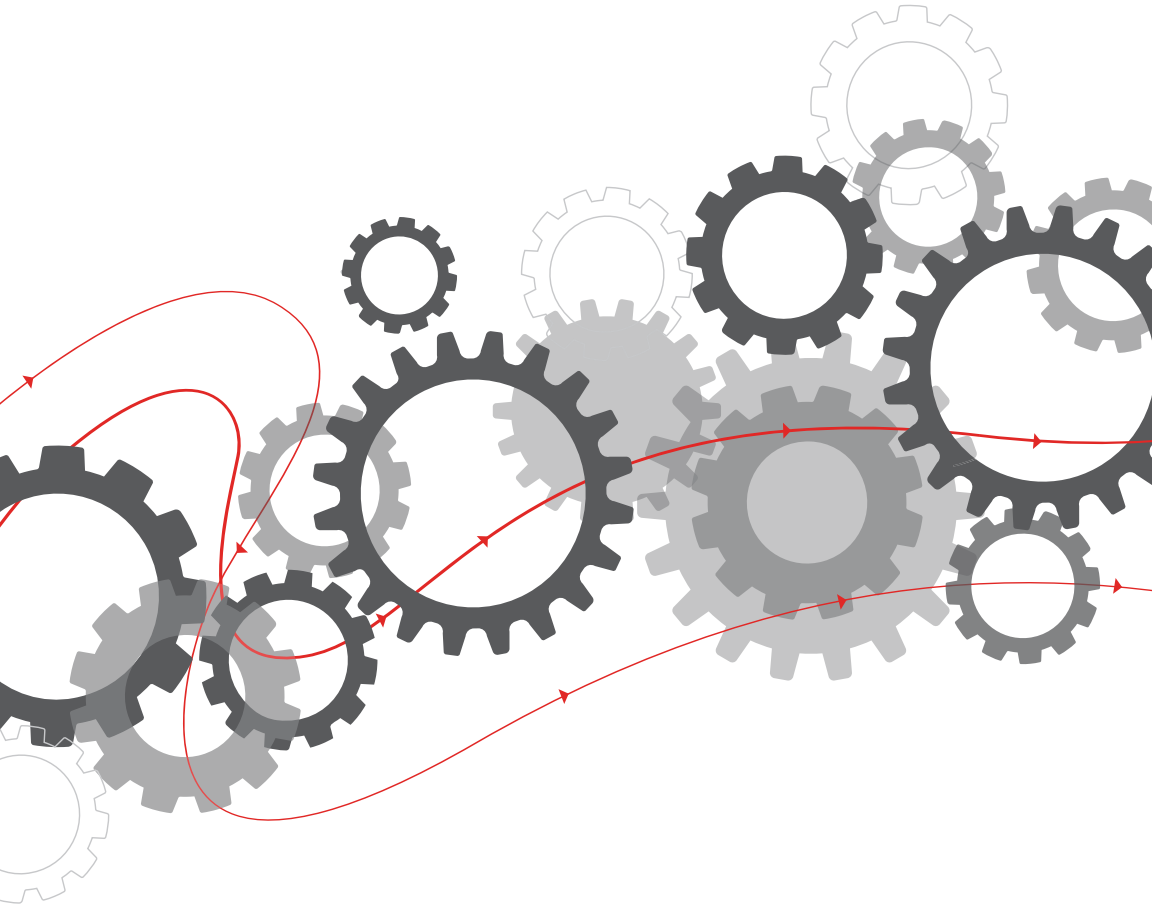
NOVEMBER 2015

PAVING THE WAY:
Lessons Learned in Sentinel Event Reviews



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PAVING THE WAY: Lessons Learned in Sentinel Event Reviews

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PAVING THE WAY:
LESSONS LEARNED IN SENTINEL EVENT REVIEWS

When bad things happen in a complex system, the cause is rarely a single act, event or slip-up. More often, bad outcomes are "sentinel events."

A sentinel event is a negative outcome that:

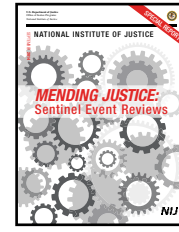
- Signals underlying weaknesses in a system or process.
- Is likely the result of compound errors.
- May, if properly understood, provide important keys to strengthening the system and preventing similar adverse outcomes in the future.

Sentinel event reviews (SER) were initially developed as a process for better understanding the causes of industrial accidents. They were later adapted in aviation and in medical environments. The SER process brings all stakeholders to the table on a regular basis to discuss, in a nonblaming way, why a negative outcome or event happened.

The overarching goal of SER is to mobilize a ***routine, culture-changing practice*** that can lead to increased system reliability and, hence, greater public confidence in a system's legitimacy.

This report reviews the lessons learned by three forward-leaning teams in their review of a negative criminal justice outcome ("sentinel event") in their jurisdiction. The project represents the next step in NIJ's exploration of the feasibility of using sentinel event reviews as a way to learn from errors in the criminal justice system.

In 2014, NIJ published *Mending Justice: Sentinel Event Reviews,* which discusses the concept of sentinel event reviews in depth.



Sentinel Event Reviews in the Criminal Justice System

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) — the scientific research arm of the Department of Justice — has, since 2011, been investigating the feasibility of using SER as a way to learn from errors in the criminal justice system. NIJ's Sentinel Events Initiative borrows extensively from medicine, aviation and other high-risk fields where a blame-placing, backward-looking review of errors is yielding to a more forward-thinking, nonblaming, problem-solving approach.

In criminal justice, a sentinel event might be a police shooting, the exoneration of a wrongly convicted person, the release from prison of a dangerous offender, or even a "near miss" that could have led to a bad outcome had it not been caught.

Although most criminal justice agencies already have error-detecting procedures in place — police internal affairs reviews, for example, or prosecutors' professional ethics boards — these often become "gotcha" processes that focus on assigning individual blame. This can drive the reporting of errors underground, making future errors even harder to detect and correct.

NIJ's Sentinel Events Initiative seeks to answer three empirical questions about using SER in the justice system:

- Can it be done?
- Does it provide a means to achieving desired outcomes, such as increased effectiveness or fewer errors or other public safety dividends, such as greater public perception of the integrity of the nation's justice system?
- Can it be sustained over time and incorporated into the routine activities of state and local justice processes?

NIJ's Sentinel Events Initiative Beta Project

In 2014, NIJ asked jurisdictions from around the country to volunteer for an experiment — or beta test — of the SER process. Through a competitive process, we selected three cities: Milwaukee, Philadelphia and Baltimore. NIJ provided very minor logistical support, but no funding, to the beta sites. We commend the people who served on the beta SER teams for their courage, innovation and commitment to improving the nation's criminal justice system. They are true pioneers.

In exchange for their willingness to experiment with us, we promised the beta SER teams as much anonymity as possible, including details of the sentinel event they chose to review. Therefore, this summary of lessons learned in the three beta sites does not attribute statements to any individual or jurisdiction.

Each of the three sites designed and conducted its own review of a justice error (a sentinel event) that had occurred in their jurisdiction. In their successful completion of an SER, the beta sites provided the first empirical evidence of the feasibility of adopting SER in the justice system — that is, an answer to NIJ's first research question: Can it be done? The answer is "yes," although each site emerged with important differences in how the SER team was structured and how they conducted their review. This demonstrated that, at least at this point, there is no single recipe for a successful SER in the criminal justice system. Therefore, we present this summary not as an implementation manual but, rather, as a guide to questions that jurisdictions should ask — and factors they should consider — in designing an SER. Subsequent research efforts will look at the second and third questions that NIJ is exploring regarding the sustainability of the SER process in criminal justice and the extent to which it achieves measurable public safety and system improvements.

The lessons learned presented in this report were derived in two ways:

- Interviews with individual team members at each site.
- A two-day discussion with all three sites in January 2015.

Where — and How — Do You Start?

It could be helpful to determine whether your jurisdiction has any other review systems already in place, such as a conviction integrity unit or homicide review group. If it does, explore what you might learn from them about facilitating discourse among agencies.

Consider how you're going to get key leadership buy-in; for example, a high-ranking official may be generally supportive of an idea but not supportive enough to properly staff and dedicate resources to executing it. To succeed, SER must come to be regarded as a good use of people's time. How will you gain the support of upper management in using the time and energy of personnel to participate on an SER team?

How Do You Choose the 'Right' Event for SER?

When it comes to picking an event to review, three overarching considerations emerged in the beta project:

- Mitigation of legal risk.
- "Age" of the event.
- Broad system participation.

Mitigation of legal risk. Are criminal and civil actions pending? Resolved? Is there any potential for appeals that would affect the SER process once it is started? This may be the single most important procedural question facing SER in the criminal

justice system. It doesn't mean an SER can't be done; it only means that actions may be needed to mitigate these risks.

"Age" of the event. The three beta sites chose noncurrent (older) events for their reviews. It should be noted, however, that some beta team members expressed the desire to review a more current event the next time, so that real-time recommendations could be developed and applied systemwide. Here are some pros and cons of selecting an older event:

Selecting an Older Sentinel Event for Review

Benefits	Challenges
Legal exposure is minimized if all civil and criminal legal proceedings have concluded.	Older records may be lost or otherwise not available. Older records may not be automated; review of paper files is more time-consuming.
Challenges of having to incorporate persons who were involved in the original event may be avoided if they are no longer part of the system.	Persons involved in the event may not be available to participate.
Luxury of having more, varied events to select from if recency is not a factor.	The review may not have obvious and immediate beneficial outcomes if system changes have already been made in the interval since the event occurred.
The perspective of hindsight regarding an older event/case may add some clarity to the review process.	Personal recall of the event by persons involved may dim over time, decreasing their utility for the review process.
The review dynamic may be easier and less tense if the event was "long ago and far away."	The older event may not have much current interest or traction among team members — or among policymakers or the public, who need to be engaged for change to take place.

Broad system participation. Choose an event/case in which multiple agencies have a stake so that the SER can have the broadest potential impact on the system.

Consider "high-frequency, low-impact" events, not just bigger, high-profile events. The beta sites were designed to conduct a single SER in order to test the fundamental question about feasibility: Can justice agencies successfully complete an SER? Lower-impact events that occur frequently — problems that everyone recognizes but has become inured to because they are so commonplace — can provide an opportunity for significant system improvement through an SER process.

Are there "bad outcomes" that are not amenable to an SER? Almost certainly. The goal of an SER is to discover — and address — underlying system flaws and

weaknesses. Many bad outcomes signal system flaws, and these events are ripe for SER. Other bad outcomes may be more limited in their system implications, such as events involving a single actor or a single cause. (Sometimes, a bad apple is simply a bad apple.) However, these distinctions regarding bad outcomes are not always easy to discern at the outset. Events where participants seem too quick to assert "whose fault this is" may be exactly the kinds of events that would benefit from an SER.

Who Should Be on the SER Team?

With respect to considering the composition of a sentinel event review team, the three beta sites offered this insight:

> "Members of the sentinel event review team bring with them their own biases to what is meant to be a non-biased process. Consider the impact of key factors like trauma, race and poverty on the actors in the system and on the persons who are the subject of the review." (Site A)

- Decision makers who can help maximize the opportunity to make systemwide changes.
- Sharp-end-of-the-stick practitioners with front-line knowledge; sometimes executives don't have the boots-on-the-ground experience that is important to understanding the event and the various agencies' responses to it.
- Determine ahead of time how you will mediate situations where line staff feel constrained by having their bosses at the table. Consider recruiting line staff for the SER team in pairs, so they can support each other in what might be perceived as a "scary" process and empower them to contribute as individuals, both when leadership is present and when they are not.
- Think broadly, including beyond criminal justice. For example, does the event touch on public health or mental health stakeholders? The education or social service systems?
- Consider the pros and cons of including members of the community, who can ask the basic questions and help provide a larger community perspective. Would having representatives from grassroots organizations, faith-based groups, victim advocacy groups or other community organizations help make the SER process more sustainable in your jurisdiction? The medical model, for example, suggests that there are good reasons to include patients in a review of an error, including the principle that people don't sue because they are harmed; they sue when they are not included.
- Will you include people with firsthand knowledge of the event, including those whose decisions and actions at the time influenced the outcome of the event? If they are

not available, are there other ways to gain their perspectives? If they do participate, how will you make the review environment safe and comfortable for them?

- Who will *not* be on the review team? Families of victims or police officers or others who were involved in the actual event? Think about the pros and cons of making such individuals a part of the review team versus having them come and talk to the review team.
- Bottom-line desirable traits for SER team members: people who are engaged in the process and people who see themselves as change agents.
- The SER should be staffed with a notetaker who is responsible for taking minutes, compiling documentation, and tracking "homework" assigned to team members, but who does not participate in the review itself.
- Determine your "substitute" policy. Will you allow principals to send substitutes to meetings? What are the implications for the team environment if substitutes drop in and drop out? How will you mediate those implications if they arise?

> "People in the process are not interchangeable … you get to core issues because the relationships have been developed." (Site A)

- Is there "history" (contention) among SER team members before the process even starts? How will you manage that?
- Determine how you will operate if you need to consider expanding the SER team at some point. How will members of the team weigh in on the decision to include new members? What will happen if the team cannot agree?

Who Should Lead the Sentinel Event Review?

The leader — or facilitator — of the SER team acts like a project manager. Do you want an independent, neutral convener or someone from one of the stakeholder agencies? Either way, it will be a challenge to overcome the significant, but not surprising, reality that people are busy and it's difficult to meet regularly. Pick a facilitator who can (and wants to) make the time to lead the process.

The three beta sites agreed that the role of facilitator took significant time and energy (managing all the logistical details of setting up and planning the review meetings) and a commitment to and understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of the SER process. Where they differed was how they operationalized the leadership role.

At one of the sites, the facilitator was a member of the senior staff of a participating agency. In the two other sites, the facilitator was the research partner: One facilitator

was embedded in one of the participating agencies but was not an agency employee; the other researcher-facilitator was from a nongovernmental institution.

The facilitator should be someone who is intellectually curious and well-informed about the philosophy of SER. The facilitator's social capital, personal relationships with SER team members, personality and facilitation skills are important.

The facilitator must be someone the others can trust; he or she must also have the means to hold others accountable for their participation in the SER.

Be aware of any perception that the facilitator may be aligned with one agency or one point of view.

The beta project experience suggests that there are a variety of workable alternatives for selecting a facilitator, as long as she or he is capable, dedicated, and respected by team members and understands the leadership role.

What Is the Role of a Researcher in SER?

The role of a researcher on a sentinel event review team is not that of a traditional academic research partner. A researcher may be a valuable member of the team, not a passive observer or data collector but, rather, a fully participating member. The researcher should avoid being perceived as a process evaluator as that could have a dampening effect on the review.

Some of these roles would offer opportunities for a researcher to make a positive contribution to an SER:

- Serves as the empiricist who weighs the evidence and challenges the team on their thinking.
- Checks fidelity of the SER model as it unfolds.
- Operates as a neutral team member who is not aligned with any particular agency or perspective regarding the "facts."
- Could provide a neutral environment for the team by hosting the SER process in an academic environment.
- May be most useful if he or she has one foot in the practice world and one foot in the research world (an action-research model).
- Can help establish the credibility of the SER process within the criminal justice system and with community stakeholders.
- Brings qualitative research expertise, such as content analysis of documents, interviewing, and software applications for qualitative coding.

- Can help identify key lessons learned and recommendations, including possible suggestions regarding which recommendations should be addressed first.

Could the researcher serve as the leader or facilitator of the SER process? Yes. Because the researcher can be more neutral, she or he may be better able to bring the criminal justice professionals from various agencies together.

How Do You Structure the SER and Set Ground Rules?

At this stage in the development of an SER process within criminal justice, it is important to distinguish between the "local ground rules" that each jurisdiction's SER team can set and the more requisite components — a 'Model A' template, as it were — that are emerging as NIJ continues its exploration of using this innovative process to learn from errors. Just as the first Model A automobile had key, necessary components such as an engine and tires, it is becoming clear that certain Model A features are necessary to a successful SER in the criminal justice system: There must, for example, be a nonblaming atmosphere, a trusted facilitator, shared information, protected deliberations, and all stakeholders at the table, striving toward consensus, and no substitutes for the team members during reviews. (See the next section, "What Does a 'Nonblaming' Review *Really* Mean?")

> "The process can't work if people come in late to the process and don't have the history and don't know the ground rules." (Site A)

In addition to the necessary components of SER, the beta sites' experiences revealed local ground rules that should be addressed:

- Decide where and how often the SER team will meet. Will you use teleconferencing when face-to-face contact is not critical? Consider scheduling meetings over the lunch hour. Publish a meeting schedule in advance.
- Determine how long the SER will last. Take the time to map out how the review will unfold. Creating shared expectations around who will be responsible for delivering what information — and when — may help with follow-through and encourage team members to hold each other accountable for the process.
- Make setting ground rules a team-building exercise at the outset of the process. Have participants explicitly agree to ground rules and to hold each other accountable for following them. Ground rules should address issues like information sharing, confidentiality, shared goals, engagement and participation, accountability, respect, and other issues important to the team, such as ensuring that everyone's concerns get airtime.

- Establish clear expectations for the purpose of the SER and how members will participate.
- Be clear about the safety gauge. How will people communicate that they do not feel comfortable during the review process? Make sure individuals are willing to voice their misgivings about the process, and address those explicitly.
- Create a plan to work through conflicts or tension in the group. Guard against the process collapsing because participants choose to withdraw rather than work out their differences.
- Plan time for the SER team members to share information about their agency roles and processes. Even people who have worked in the criminal justice system for many years can be ignorant of (or have inaccurate assumptions about) how other agencies operate. Have each member of the review team describe his or her work to help SER members start thinking outside their own "silos."
- Devote time to building and reviewing a timeline to fill in gaps in individual knowledge of what happened and when, even if all or most of the SER team members have firsthand knowledge of the event — or even if the event was widely covered in the media.
- Allow for periodic check-ins between individual team members and the facilitator to discuss how the process is going.
- Decide whether you will seek the perspectives of people who do not participate on the team — for example, through interviews.
- Try to ensure that the SER team stays intact and that the same people attend each meeting (that is, no "substitutes"); this will facilitate a mutual understanding of the ground rules.
- To be a constructive SER member, it may be necessary to be both a critical observer of the process and also a supporter of it.
- Based on the event, what expertise might the SER team need to consult or tap into? If, for example, the event being reviewed is the conviction of an innocent person and one of the factors in the wrongful conviction was a confession, an expert in false confessions may provide valuable input.
- Recognizing that one of the necessary features of the SER 'Model A' is striving for consensus in understanding the

> "Charting an accurate and understandable timeline for the events that stretched out over a couple of years and involved a lot of people in a lot of agencies was challenging." (Site C)

system weaknesses that may have contributed to the event, how will you determine when the review is complete if you can't reach a consensus? What provisions can be made for concluding a review when consensus isn't achieved?

- Decide as a group what the outputs and outcomes will be and the timeline for producing any work products, including final reports or recommendations. (See "What Happens When an SER Is Complete? Measuring 'Impact' and 'Outcomes'".)
- Be mindful of emotional consequences for the SER members. Don't forget you're human: Reviewing a high-impact event with a bad outcome can be emotionally difficult.

"… holding each other accountable [for maintaining the nonblaming tone of the review] has a purpose so no one leaves the meeting feeling angry or struggling with the process." (Site A)

What Does a 'Nonblaming' Review *Really* Mean?

A number of the members of the beta teams noted that we seem to be in an era of organizational fatigue, which is a challenge to experimenting with any new review process. Therefore, it's crucial to understand — and demonstrate — that SER is different from other reviews of critical incidents, such as after-action reports, task forces, independent monitors, commissions, inspector general reports, internal affairs investigations and performance management systems like CompStat. One significant way in which SER is different: It is *not* about assigning blame.

Here are other lessons learned:

- SER is a process that promotes a culture of continual self-improvement.
- One of the greatest challenges is to get people who operate within a highly adversarial system to avoid reflexive defensiveness. What can you do to instill a culture of collaboration and nonblaming in an SER? How can SER team members "model" openness, especially when it means stepping outside of traditional adversarial roles? Consider volunteering/admitting errors as a way to overcome defensiveness.
- In an effort to not cast blame, one beta participant found it helpful to try to understand what the quarterback sees when he throws an interception. Others said it was helpful to refer to the event as a "problem" or "issue," rather than as a "mistake."
- Be aware that there may be trust issues among team members during the first SER, but this likely will improve with the second review, and onward, as people start

putting more trust in a blame-free approach to learning from error.

Here is some additional advice for achieving a nonblaming SER environment:

> "Remind team members that everyone [each agency] operated with what information they had at the time. This may help alleviate some blaming." (Site C)

- Make the meeting room a "safe space" where each participant has the freedom to discuss the event and share their information.
- Make sure individuals are willing to voice their misgivings about the process and address those explicitly.

How Do You Deal With Data-Sharing Issues?

With respect to records regarding the event being reviewed, a number of factors should be considered:

- What records are you likely to need? Are they still available? Where are they and who "owns" them? Will you need data specialists to access or retrieve them?
- Will SER team members be responsible for bringing their own agency's records to the table, or will there be a different arrangement for obtaining them?
- Is every SER team member able to see all of the records? What are the record-sharing implications if one of your review team members is not a public employee? If reviewing the event will require going through lots of records and files, consider splitting the work up among team members.
- How might public access and sunshine laws be triggered when data are shared among team members?
- Are some records more sensitive than others? If so, are separate data-handling procedures necessary? How will you address issues of disclosure? A signed confidentiality agreement may help, although it may not survive a subpoena. Consider whether a Memorandum of Agreement or a court order could be useful in facilitating data-sharing and maintaining protections for sensitive data.
- If you encounter a situation where data you need are unavailable, are there alternative sources or records?
- Do you need copies of records and files, or will you work with notes abstracted from the originals? Consider the cost of photocopying and scanning and who will be responsible for those costs.

> "One bad experience [with a sentinel event review] could derail this before people see the benefit of it." (Site C)

Where Will Challenges Likely Arise?

The following graphic summarizes the logistical, interactional and structural challenges that the beta sites most frequently reported in performing a sentinel event review.

Logistical Challenges Factors regarding the mechanics of implementing the SER process
Finding enough time to commit to the process, both the monthly meetings and the "homework" information-gathering, whether done by team members or assigned to staff.
Coordinating everyone's calendars to keep a consistent group coming to the meeting.
The amount of work involved in doing a thorough review.
Feeling as if the team is repeating the same discussions over and over, but with so much information (and with new players coming into the meetings), it is hard not to repeat.
Participants who come to the table because they are required to but do not have the time or will to devote to conducting a review the way it "should" be done.
Having the wrong people at the table could kill the process.
Withholding records or information.
Participants who are too busy to participate.

Interactional Challenges Factors regarding how SER team members relate to each other during the process
Defensive or close-minded attitudes of participants who are resistant to considering their own agency's role in the circumstances that lead to the event.
Getting a consistent level of buy-in from all participants; ensuring everyone understands the importance of the SER process.
Convincing participants that the SER process is about trying to make things better, not about pointing fingers.
People who are only concerned about their own goals and what they want and are unable to value others' goals and viewpoints.
Lack of honesty among participants.
Breaches of group confidentiality.
Reluctance to be critiqued, scrutinized or exposed to civil liability.
Lack of teamwork or cooperation.

Structural Challenges Factors regarding the use of SER in a criminal justice context
The professions represented are natural adversaries in their "day jobs" and had to overcome that to work as a team.
Having to confront the lack of empirical evidence about an older event where the records are inadequate.
Getting all the information to the table because the event involves a lot of systems/agencies.
Understanding other agencies and systems and how they operate.
Facing legal barriers related to data confidentiality, which dictates what can be discussed by the SER team.
Elected officials may be unwilling to "stick their necks out" to participate in the process, but their buy-in is critical.
Creating a safe environment in which to conduct the SER.
Making decisions based on unique outlier events/cases; hard to draw larger conclusions from a single case- or event-specific example.
Recommendations may go beyond policy and practice changes that are within the scope of agency leadership to implement. Some change that comes from the SER may require legislative action.
Picking a high-profile event/case may make it difficult to ensure that people approach the SER as objectively as possible; they may already have opinions about what happened and why.
The inclusion of people who do not work within the criminal justice system may be a challenge because of confidentiality issues surrounding nonpublic data.

What Happens When an SER Is Complete? Measuring 'Impact' and 'Outcomes'

Although it's unlikely — especially in the review of a closed or older case — that critical new information will come to light, the SER team should think about how this would be handled if it occurs.

Even if the SER team agrees on desired outcomes, it is still important to think about outputs. What products, reports or recommendations will be produced? Who will be responsible for producing them? On what timeline? What process will be used to help ensure that the team achieves whatever level of group buy-in they deem necessary?

At the end of the process, when recommendations are being formulated, test the recommendations with the team to determine whether they address universal issues or are related only to anomalies in the event reviewed.

"You can do the process of sentinel event review well and not achieve its purpose at all if [no change] is implemented." (Site B)

As noted earlier, NIJ's third research question is whether the SER approach provides measurable outcomes in terms of system functioning, avoiding errors in the future, and achieving greater public safety dividends. It may be challenging to measure the success of an individual SER, let alone to measure the culture shift that may accrue over time, based on using the new learning-from-error process. That said, here are some possible metrics that the beta SER teams raised:

- Were recommendations for changes in policies or procedures made?
- Were the recommendations presented to decision makers?
- Did SER team participants value the process — as measured, for example, by surveys of team members regarding perceptions of the candor, information-sharing and participation of themselves and their fellow SER team members.
- Were similar "potential" sentinel events averted?

Do all (or any) SER recommendations have to be "revolutionary?" Consider that the process itself may be part of what's revolutionary … and publishing even nonrevolutionary recommendations will help improve accountability and transparency.

Will the SER recommendations be publicly released or kept confidential? Public dissemination may help SER achieve its goal of becoming an important tool in helping criminal justice professionals learn from errors in their own and other jurisdictions.

Consider what follow-up mechanisms are in place (or might be put in place) to help promote the adoption of any SER team recommendations or action items. Here is some guidance:

- Be strategic about how you present your findings or recommendations. Make sure decision makers are kept informed of your progress throughout the review so they don't lose sight of the end-goal.
- Be prepared to talk about the SER process as you present your findings to reinforce its utility (without violating confidentiality rules agreed to by the team).
- Build toward sustainability (see the next section, "How Can a Jurisdiction Sustain Sentinel Event Reviews?"). Conduct a review of your SER process to determine what lessons you learned. What would you do the same next time? What would you do differently?

The SER process is challenging because it is a major paradigm shift from how the criminal and juvenile justice systems typically operate. Therefore, it is important to have realistic expectations of this process. Instilling a nonblaming atmosphere with an emphasis on transparency and accountability (what other fields call a "culture of safety") takes work, and it does not happen with a single review of an event. Even one SER can be a very labor-intensive process, although this may decrease once the SER process becomes more routine. One beta participant put it this way: "It is very hard to step back and take a 30,000-foot view, but incredibly important that we do so." Said another: "These types of case studies are where the organizational learning takes place."

By its very nature, the criminal justice system is adversarial and the SER process provides an opportunity for people to get together on a regular basis outside of their usual roles.

SER can actually be *enjoyable.* It can provide the opportunity to take a break from the usual, generally overwhelming production pressures. It can provide a rare opportunity (that would become less rare if it produces measurable benefits and is institutionalized) to step back and take a 30,000-foot view of errors and discuss improvements.

> "The audience for the recommendations (agency leadership, political leadership, whomever it is) must see the credibility and objectivity in the process, so the process must be conducted in a way that undergirds that." (Site C)

SER can be a personally and professionally gratifying process that provides a chance to learn from other people in the criminal and juvenile justice bureaucracy and potentially other stakeholder agencies and organizations. Millions of people work in individual agencies — law enforcement, crime labs, the prosecution and defense bars, judges, corrections, victim advocates and service providers — and never have the opportunity to participate in this sort of review of error.

How Can a Jurisdiction Sustain Sentinel Event Review?

In an era of having to do more with less, the sustainability and institutionalization of SER requires demonstrable results — not only in policy and practice but eventually in the workplace and systemwide culture. That said, how SER is sustained and institutionalized will undoubtedly be unique in every jurisdiction — but the beta project suggests that it will require the political will from leadership to make it a part of the culture of the agencies involved.

Some members of the beta teams said that implementing SER would likely require resources (money and extra support staff) to permit already busy people to participate in what may be a time-consuming review process. Others expressed the sentiment that this should not be necessary if SER was considered just a part of their job. An investment in resources for team-building on the front end of the process could be helpful.

One challenge to the sustainability of SER is that the criminal justice system is not driven by the scientific method; it is driven by laws. Still, it is possible to examine causes of error and do some proactive prevention. This could argue for the role of an academic in representing the scientific method in this kind of nonblaming, all-stakeholder review process.

Routine, multiple reviews can help refine our response to persistent systemic problems. Sometimes, a recommendation does not "stick" the first time around — and, even when a recommendation is adopted, it may quickly come under attack in the form of workarounds that circumvent the recommended fix, often as a result of pressures to "keep up production" and not slow the process. A commitment to conducting multiple reviews may help to mitigate this.

Think about where the SER process will be "housed" — it could be housed in a university or other academic setting. Another option might be to house SER in a criminal justice advisory board (if a jurisdiction has this), which might have more "ownership" in reviewing public-agency errors.

Find SER champions or supporters — that is, agencies and people who are not members of the SER team but are supportive of the goals and the innovative process. Multiagency commissions or coordinating councils (such as local criminal justice commissions) could be champions or supporters.

Could risk managers play a crucial role? Could risk managers serve as the logical counterpart to medical insurance companies with respect to how the medical field adopted SER as a way to learn from errors? Could they serve as change agents if they believe that cost savings could accrue from SER over time? What challenges exist in making risk managers supporters? If they're change-averse or not interested in potential reform, how can they be encouraged to see their stake in the process? Is the mayor's office a possible supporter? Or a jurisdiction's office of management and budget?

The SER process must have clear goals, which may be unique to each jurisdiction. It's important for each stakeholder to understand what's in it for them and what they will gain from the review. It is crucial that leadership, balancing competing demands, develops confidence that SER is worth the investment.

To sustain and institutionalize SER, it will be necessary to convince the public — the ultimate stakeholders in the criminal justice system — of its value.

Learn more about NIJ's Sentinel Events Initiative — which aims to improve the administration of justice in our nation's criminal justice and juvenile justice systems — in *Mending Justice: Sentinel Event Reviews* (www.NIJ.gov, keyword: Mending Justice).

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