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A National Evaluation of Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Training

Final Report

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Project Summary

The Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force Program was developed in 1988 to help state and local law enforcement agencies effectively respond to technology-related crimes against children. In fiscal year 2022, ICAC task forces were comprised of more than 5,230 personnel from federal, state, and local law enforcement and prosecutorial agencies throughout the 50 states. To support ICAC task force members and their affiliate agencies in the investigation of ICAC cases, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) manages the ICAC Training and Technical Assistance (TTA) Program. However, little is known about the quality, implementation fidelity, and outcomes associated with OJJDP-funded ICAC training. The *National Evaluation of ICAC Task Force Training* was funded to fill this gap.

Major Goals and Objectives

In October 2019, OJJDP awarded funding to three organizations to provide investigation focused training to ICAC task forces across the country[1] – Fox Valley Technical College (FVTC), the National White Collar Crime Center (NW3C), and SEARCH. The *National Evaluation of ICAC Task Force Training* was funded to evaluate this OJJDP-funded portfolio of training. Broadly, the goals and objectives of the study focused on developing an understanding of:

- the quality of OJJDP-funded ICAC trainings.
- fidelity of implementation for OJJDP-funded ICAC trainings.
- participant reactions to OJJDP-funded ICAC trainings including perceptions of trainings, changes in knowledge and skills, and perceived training results.
- training costs and, if possible, the association between costs and training outcomes.

This final report summarizes findings across courses, trainings, and TTA providers over the three years of the evaluation, to provide information on the portfolio of OJJDP-funded investigative trainings.

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[1] In addition to funding investigation-focused training, OJJDP also funds training focused on officer wellness. However, trainings funded via Category 3: Officer Wellness were not included in this evaluation.

Evaluation Questions

This study was designed to address six evaluation questions:

1. What is the quality of the ICAC task force training designs (i.e., curriculum development, curriculum content, tools, instructors, registration and waitlist processes, evaluations)?
2. To what extent are the trainings implemented with fidelity?
3. To what extent are training participants satisfied with the training they receive?
4. To what extent do training participants report growth in their knowledge and skills?
5. To what extent do training participants utilize what they learn in the field?
6. What are the costs of the trainings?

Methodology

This study used multiple data collection and analysis approaches to address the evaluation questions, including those that involved extant data collected by TTA providers and original data collected by the evaluation team.

Evaluation Design

This study used a descriptive design to examine OJJDP- funded ICAC trainings. Because TTA providers deliver a variety of courses each year through numerous training events, it was not possible for the evaluation to dive deeply into every course and training event each year. Thus, the evaluation was designed to gather some data for all courses and all training events each year but limited more in-depth data collection to a subset of courses. These courses for which we collected more in-depth data were designated as "focus courses." Focus courses were selected from TTA provider's course catalogues based on discussion between the evaluation team, TTA providers, and National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and OJJDP staff. For the purposes of this evaluation, Year 1 spanned from October 2019 – September 2020, Year 2 spanned from October 2020 – September 2021, and Year 3 spanned from October 2021 – September 2022.

Within our descriptive evaluation design, we also conducted a three-phase cost study component. The three phases of the cost study were 1) Identifying Ingredients, 2) Pricing Ingredients, and 3) Calculating Cost Estimates. The resulting cost estimates were then adjusted for inflation, adjusted for their time value[2], and analyzed descriptively. Results from the analysis reflect nationally normed program costs across settings and provide an estimate of the requisite resources necessary to offer this type of programming. The evaluation period of the

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[2] Time value of costs reflect the reality that cost in the future are less of a burden than costs today because of expected investment earnings over the period of time during which available funds are left unspent.

cost study component is aligned with the same three years of the descriptive evaluation, as defined above.

Methods

The evaluation team relied on a combination of extant and original data to address the evaluation questions.

Data Collection

This evaluation used multiple data collection strategies to gather a holistic description of ICAC task force training. Data collection included strategies to capture information about all trainings, as well as strategies to capture information about focus course trainings. Strategies related to all trainings included the collection of implementation logs, pre-post tests, end of course evaluation surveys, and cost data. Strategies related to focus courses included observations, follow-up surveys, and follow-up interviews.

Data to inform the cost study were collected from various sources spanning Years 1 through 3 of the evaluation. Data collection activities with TTA providers included the collection of their ICAC training grant budgets for each year and interviews with TTA provider staff, including finance staff, administrative staff, legal staff, and organization leaders. Interviews occurred in Year 1 and Year 3 and focused on gaining a better understanding of budgeted costs and budgetary changes that could influence total expenditures.

With respect to methods, the cost study is grounded in current best practice in economic evaluation to the extent possible given limitations on data and scope. In brief, this entails identifying all resources or ingredients reported by TTA providers and estimating the quantity of each in each of the three program years. A per unit value, or price, is then identified and applied to each resource, and the product of its estimated quantity and price is calculated as the estimated cost.

The WestEd evaluation team also collected national price data to allow for estimated costs to reflect the typical value of resources across specific state contexts. National price data came from a number of sources and were used to generate nationally representative cost estimates. The sources of national price data are listed below:

- Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics – Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)
- Annual U.S. Domestic Average Itinerary Fare – Bureau of Transportation Statistics
- Per Diem Rates – General Services Agency
- Other Sources (e.g., national retailers)

Whenever possible, national prices were applied to estimated resource quantities to calculate an estimated cost and identified using cost analysis databases such as the BLS wage data.

However, there were instances in which databases did not contain commensurate national prices for a given ingredient. In these instances, the evaluation team used "Other Sources" to collect nationally representative prices. Specifically, in instances in which national prices were not available in public databases, the team used digital marketplaces or commercial/retail websites to identify national prices. Finally, in a handful of cases, a market price could not be identified using a source external to the provided budgets. In these cases, prices reported in the TTA provider budgets were used to estimate the ingredient cost. Also, with respect to personnel prices, both base salary and benefits were included in the market price.

Data Analysis

Data analyses for this evaluation primarily relied on descriptive analyses and content analysis; inferential analyses were used when appropriate. Analyses of quantitative data focused on providing descriptive information, and identifying differences by training modality and level when possible. Analyses of qualitative data focused on identifying themes and exemplar quotes. Additionally, the evaluation team conducted a descriptive statistical analysis of the estimated costs. To reflect the total costs inclusive of the three TTA providers, total cost estimates are presented by year, and across years. Costs per trainee are reported similarly. Total program costs were also disaggregated and reported by category.

Expected Applicability of Findings

Findings from this study are intended to support OJJDP in its understanding of the ICAC task force training provided by FVTC, NW3C, and SEARCH, the three TTA providers funded during the evaluation period to develop and deliver investigative TTA to ICAC task forces. This fills an important gap; until this evaluation, little was known about the OJJDP-funded ICAC TTA Program.

Participants and Collaborating Organizations

This study relied on collaboration from both federal partners and TTA providers, as well as engagement from multiple participant groups including trainees and ICAC task force commanders.

Federal Partners

Because this study was structured as a cooperative agreement, the evaluation team collaborated with representatives from OJJDP and NIJ to inform the study design. This included collaboration during the planning year to develop an appropriate evaluation plan that reflects the ICAC context. Additionally, the evaluation team met each month with representatives from NIJ and OJJDP to discuss project progress and troubleshoot challenges.

Training and Technical Assistance Providers

To reduce burden on TTA providers and leverage existing data collection processes, the evaluation team worked closely with the three TTA providers included in the evaluation: FVTC, NW3C, and SEARCH. The evaluation team engaged in regular communication with staff from the three TTA providers including phone calls and emails. Partnership between the TTA providers and the evaluation team focused on ensuring the collection of complete and valid extant data, and the coordinating of original data collection.

Participants

This evaluation included three specific types of participants who contributed data—TTA staff, trainees, and commanders. In total, five TTA provider lead staff participated in interviews, two from FVTC, two from NW3C and one from SEARCH. A total of 13 instructors were interviewed, six from FVTC, four from NW3C, and three from SEARCH. Across trainee-focused data collection efforts, the evaluation team collected extant data for nearly 9,000 trainees and conducted original data collection (i.e., surveys or interviews) with more than 750 trainees. Additionally, 17 task force commanders participated in interviews.

Changes from the Original Design

Over the course of this project, there have been several changes from the original design. Although an evaluation plan was included in the project proposal, the first year of the cooperative agreement was a planning year focused on co-developing an appropriate plan for the project. Discussion with partners from NIJ and OJJDP and informational interviews with TTA providers provided critical insights into the ICAC landscape and the nuances of how ICAC training is provided. Through the year-long planning period, the following changes were incorporated into the revised evaluation plan:

- Refinement of evaluation questions

- Refinement of data collection activities

- Change in sequencing for data collection activities

- Introduction of a focus course approach in which a different set of courses serve as the primary emphasis for the evaluation each year

- Clarification of appropriate reporting and dissemination activities

In addition to the changes made before the project formally began, additional modifications were made due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to March 2020, TTA providers hosted the majority of ICAC trainings in person. When the COVID-19 pandemic stay at home orders began, training was indefinitely paused as TTA providers grappled with the best way to move forward given COVID-19 constraints. Once it became clear that in-person trainings would not be feasible for an extended period, TTA providers pivoted to online trainings. These circumstances impacted several aspects of the evaluation:

- The evaluation team did not conduct observations during the period when all trainings were paused.

- The evaluation team did not observe a subset of Year 2 focus courses as planned because TTA providers were unable to convert these courses to an online format before the end of the project year. These courses were observed in Year 3.

- Due to COVID-19 delays, the evaluation team was unable to carry out the full six-month follow-up period for Year 3 courses within the original project timeline. The team obtained a no-cost extension to allow for the full follow-up period as planned.

Outcomes

The *National Evaluation of ICAC Task Force Training* is the first study in this space, providing evaluation findings to help inform future decision making for the ICAC task force TTA grant program. Overall, ICAC investigative training was rated highly by both trainees and their ICAC commanders in terms of the quality of training delivery, expertise of instructors, knowledge gains, and applicability to on-the-job ICAC investigations.

Activities and Accomplishments

This study is the first evaluation of ICAC task force training. Significant activities and accomplishments over the study period include:

- Collaboration with NIJ and OJJDP liaisons throughout the planning and evaluation phases to ensure study alignment with federal partner priorities and attention to the ICAC context.

- Completion of an in-depth analysis of 17 focus courses.

- Coordination of effective data sharing processes with three TTA providers to streamline data submission processes while ensuring the collection of necessary data, which led to the collection of data for nearly 9,000 trainees.

- Collection of original data from a substantial sample of 768 ICAC law enforcement commanders and officers to inform understanding of their perspectives on ICAC training.

- Successful pivoting of focus course observations to account for the COVID-19 pandemic when trainings initially paused and then moved to an online environment.

Results and Findings

This section begins with an overview of the ICAC investigative training offered between October 2019 and September 2022 by FVTC, NW3C, and SEARCH. In the sections below 'course' refers to a specific curriculum, for which multiple 'trainings' may occur. For example, the "Cybercrimes" course may be offered across multiple training instances serving different audiences at different time periods via different modalities. This section then presents findings from the cost study component of the evaluation.
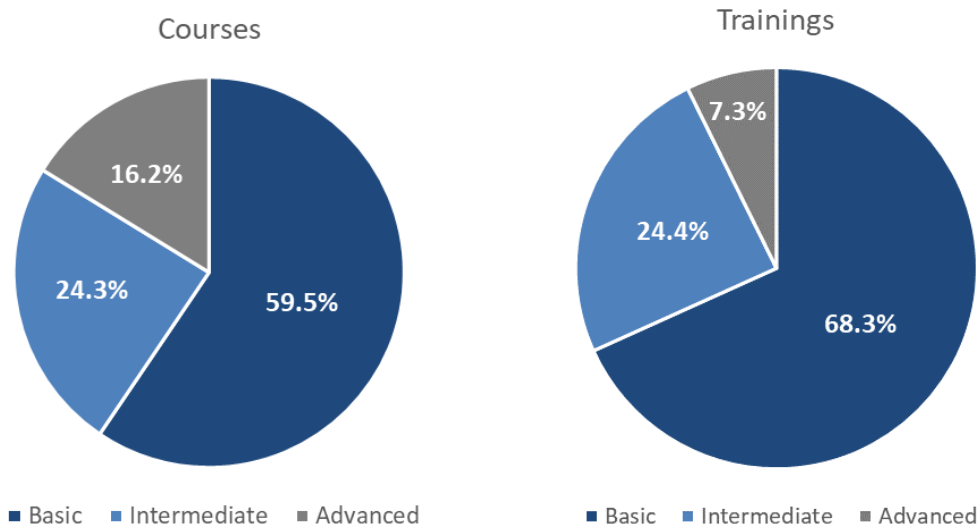
Course and Training Frequency

Over the evaluation period, TTA providers administered 37 courses via 315 live instructor-led trainings, 77 of which were administered in person and 235 online. The 77 in-person trainings took place in 43 cities across 28 states. The two states in which the most in-person trainings took place were Florida (15.6%) and California (12.9%). The length of the live instructor-led courses ranged from one to five days, averaging 2.5 days per training. TTA providers scheduled the majority of trainings (70.4%). Whether the training was scheduled by the TTA provider or requested by a task force varied by training modality; most in-person trainings were requested by a specific task force (70.1%), whereas most online trainings were scheduled by the TTA provider (82.4%).[3] When disaggregated by TTA provider, FVTC administered over half of the courses and trainings (51.4% and 61.0%, respectively). NW3C administered approximately a third of courses and trainings (37.8% and 30.5%, respectively), and the remaining courses and trainings were administered by SEARCH (10.8% and 8.6%, respectively). Additionally, FVTC administered eight online self-paced courses included in the evaluation.

Course and Training Level

Of the 37 live instructor-led courses, over half were at a basic level (59.5%), followed by intermediate (24.3%) and advanced levels (16.2%). TTA providers administered multiple trainings for each course. Trainings followed a similar distribution across the course level categories; the majority were basic level trainings (68.3%), followed by intermediate (24.4%) and advanced trainings (7.3%) (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1: Course level of Courses and Trainings

Courses

59.5% Basic
24.3% Intermediate
16.2% Advanced

Trainings

68.3% Basic
24.4% Intermediate
7.3% Advanced

■ Basic   ■ Intermediate   ■ Advanced
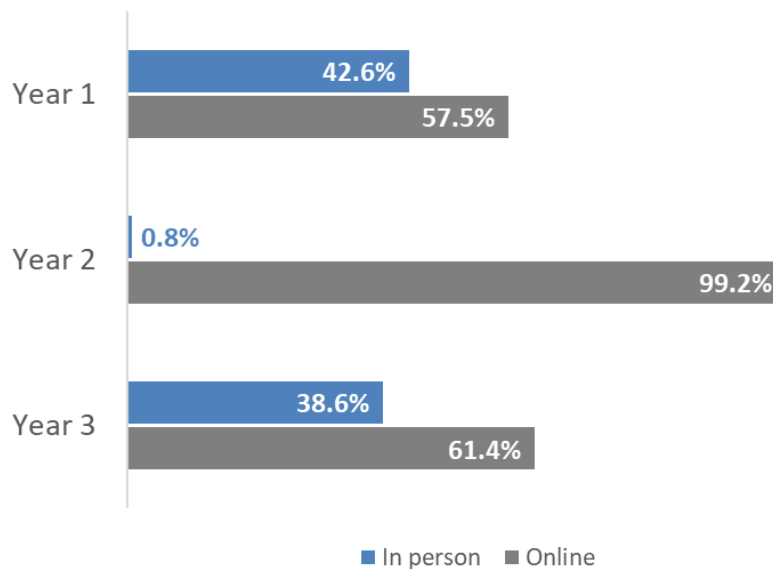
Note: Course n=37; Training n=312

[3] Data on whether the training was scheduled by a provider or requested by a specific task force was available for 294 trainings.

Course and Training Modality

Although some courses were available online prior to March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused TTA providers to shift from primarily conducting in-person trainings to relying heavily on online trainings. TTA providers administered nearly three-quarters of courses online at any point during the evaluation (73.0%). After in-person trainings resumed in November 2021, nearly half of the courses continued being administered solely online (45.9%). Over a quarter of courses were administered in person only (27.0%), and the same number were administered both online and in-person (27.0%). Over the evaluation period, TTA providers administered the majority of trainings online (75.3%), with the remaining quarter administered in person (24.7%).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, training modality varied by evaluation year (Exhibit 2).[4] In Year 1, nearly half of trainings were administered in person (42.6%) with all of these occurring early in the year before the stay-at-home orders began. After the COVID-19 pandemic began and into Year 2, TTA providers administered nearly all training online (99.2%). In Year 3, TTA providers continued delivering training online but resumed administering some training in person (38.6%).

Exhibit 2: Training Modality by Evaluation Year

Year 1: In person 42.6%, Online 57.5%
Year 2: In person 0.8%, Online 99.2%
Year 3: In person 38.6%, Online 61.4%

■ In person   ■ Online

Note: Year 1 training n = 47; Year 2 training n = 123; Year 3 training n = 145; percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

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[4] A one-way ANOVA indicated a statistically significant relationship between modality and evaluation year ($p < .001$; $\eta^2 = .19$).

Given the variation in training modality over the evaluation period, it is helpful to understand how modality influenced the number of trainees served. The average number of trainees per training varied by modality. For in-person trainings, the number of trainees per training ranged from 9 to 43, averaging 24 participants. Online trainings supported larger numbers of participants per training, ranging from 4 to 153 and averaging 32 participants. Differences in average number of participants per training were statistically significant ($p < .04$; Hedges $g = -.40$) such that, on average, online trainings served a larger number of trainees than in-person trainings.

Training Costs

The cost study suggests a total cost of about $10.3 million to provide ICAC training over the three-year evaluation period, and that annual average costs ranged from $2.9 million to $4.3 million over this period. Costs varied over time, being lowest in Year 1 and highest in Year 2. This trend reflects that of training participation, with the number of trainees being lowest in Year 1 ($n = 1,984$) and higher in Year 2 ($n = 5,310$) and Year 3 ($n = 5,307$).

Personnel constituted the largest cost category, followed by travel. The largest number of Full Time Equivalencies (FTEs) were allocated to Program Specialists, Training Instructors, and Program Coordination Staff. The analysis also showed that costs varied widely across TTA providers. Although personnel costs were consistently the largest cost category, there were large differences in personnel as well as equipment and material costs across providers.

With all of this in mind, it is useful to turn to per-trainee costs. There was substantial variation in per-trainee costs by year, with costs being an average of ~$1,500 per trainee in Year 1, ~$800 in Year 2, and ~$550 in Year 3. The higher costs in Year 1 were likely driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, which required the cancellation of numerous trainings and forced TTA providers to adapt in-person trainings for online environments and create new trainings. One TTA provider in particular influenced the higher per-trainee price in Year 1 as they did not resume trainings again until Year 2 of the evaluation. Thus, the Year 1 per-trainee cost is likely not indicative of typical per-trainee costs and those from Year 2 or Year 3 may be more useful for understanding the costs associated with providing training to one individual.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations that should be considered when interpreting findings from this evaluation. These limitations centered around those related to the use of extant data, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the cost study.

Use of Extant Data

This evaluation aimed to reduce additional burden for TTA providers by relying on extant data whenever possible. Although this was helpful to ensure that providers were not asked to carry out additional work without compensation, it did result in several limitations to the larger evaluation study and limited the evaluation team's ability to aggregate data across TTA providers and data sources.

COVID-19 Pandemic

This evaluation was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Within a few months of data collection beginning, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a complete halt to in-person training. This pause was followed by a period in which TTA providers modified their trainings for an online environment. The evaluation team worked with our federal partners and TTA providers to sort out how to continue the evaluation in the face of these challenges. The original goal of observing focus courses in multiple modalities did not come to fruition as many courses were only provided online during the period in which they were considered a focus course. The COVID-19 pandemic also impacted the cost study. In particular, the estimates generated through the cost study are influenced by the COVID-19 context (e.g., limited participation due to stay at home orders).

Cost Study

There were several limitations of the cost study. First, some of the budget and programmatic documents that the TTA providers shared did not include detailed information on program ingredients. Thus, some costs are incorporated into the cost study even if they were not nested under a descriptive ingredients category (e.g., personnel). In these instances, costs had to be placed in the "Other" category.

Differences across TTA providers also decreased the precision of cost estimates. Different reporting norms and requirements across states and TTA providers resulted in differences in cost reporting. This made it more difficult to directly compare costs across TTA providers. The size of the TTA providers varied as well. This means direct cost comparisons and descriptive statistics may not fully account for differences in setting, capacity, and clientele; all of which have cost implications.

Several external factors influenced costs during the timeframe when the cost data were collected. One limitation of the study is that it relied on analyses of budgeted rather than actual costs. The costs described in this study reflect the best estimates of TTA providers at the time of their annual budgeting process. These cost estimates are less precise measures of costs than

actual expenditure records or more comprehensive qualitative descriptions of actual resource use year-over-year.

Lastly, TTA providers provided some ingredients for which it was difficult to identify a commensurate national cost. That is, some resources are so specialized to the TTA program that a suitable national market price is unavailable. In this event, the evaluation team relied on local price estimates or shadow prices because they represented the most reliable cost estimates for a particular ingredient. Shadow prices were calculated as the average of all prices reported by TTA providers for a given ingredient in a given year.