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#1

Juvenile Justice Program Evaluation An Overview



Juvenile Justice
Evaluation Center

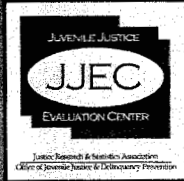
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Juvenile Justice Program Evaluation An Overview

This is the first in a series of briefings prepared by the Justice Research and Statistics Association under the Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center (JJEC) project. The purpose of this briefing series is to provide juvenile justice program managers with information that will help them evaluate their programs. Each briefing addresses a topic that is of particular interest to juvenile justice program managers who are trying to determine the effectiveness of the programs they operate.

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Introduction

Evaluation is a key component in the process of program development and management. Evaluation can be a useful tool for juvenile justice program managers to identify what results they are trying to produce and how the activities their staff members are engaged in are geared toward producing those results. The purpose of this briefing is to provide an overview of the program evaluation process as it might be implemented by a local juvenile justice program manager. Juvenile justice program managers need information about what their programs are trying to accomplish, how their programs are functioning, and what results they are producing. We propose a seven-step process that juvenile justice managers can use to analyze and assess the functioning of their programs. These seven steps are as follows:

- ① define the problem
- ② implement research-based programming
- ③ develop a program logic model
- ④ develop measures
- ⑤ collect and analyze data
- ⑥ report findings
- ⑦ reassess program logic

Each of these steps is discussed in greater detail below.

Step 1

define 1

implement

create

develop

collect

Define the Problem

Programs are developed to address particular problems or needs. In juvenile justice programming, these problems or needs are related to the prevention, reduction, and elimination of delinquent behavior. Juvenile justice programs are developed to reduce delinquency or to affect attitudes and behaviors that are related to delinquency. For example, a program's purpose might be to reduce risk factors believed to be associated with delinquency, such as poor school performance or lack of conflict resolution skills.

There are many ways in which problems related to juveniles and delinquency may come to the attention of the community. Local elected officials, other community leaders, judges, those working with juveniles in the community, and concerned parents and other individuals may identify problems that would benefit from juvenile justice programs. From the program manager's perspective, however, it is critical to collect data that demonstrate that there is a problem, and that describe the magnitude and nature of the problem. These data may come from a variety of sources, including law enforcement agencies (crime and arrest rates for specific offense types), schools (grades, drop-out rates), and community agencies (teenage pregnancy rates and proportion of children living in poverty). For example, if program managers or community leaders believe that programs to prevent truancy are needed, they should be able to point to school data that show a higher truancy rate than that of neighboring communities or than the statewide average.

As part of the problem identification process, program managers should also be able to identify the characteristics of the juveniles they are targeting for particular interventions. Some interventions may be more effective when aimed at particular groups of juveniles. For example, diversion programs may target young status offenders, while other programs target chronic and serious juvenile offenders. Programs that target specific populations but for one reason or another provide services to other types of juvenile offenders may find that their effectiveness is compromised. Programs that target first time juvenile offenders, for example, but end up serving more chronic offenders may discover that their clients need intensive supervision and psychological counseling, services that the program is not equipped to offer.

Step 2

define 1

implement 2

create 3

develop 4

collect 5

report 6

reassess 7

Implement Research-Based Programming

Once the problem has been identified, a solution, in the form of a program or policy initiative, needs to be implemented. Ideally, the proposed program should be demonstrated to be an effective solution to the identified problem. Research and evaluation studies of juvenile justice programs have produced a great deal of knowledge about what works to prevent and reduce delinquency. OJJDP's Blueprints Project, which has identified 10 effective programming initiatives for juvenile justice, is an example of how accumulated research and evaluation knowledge can be used to inform juvenile justice programming (for more information, see the *Blueprints for Violence Prevention Web site at: www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/index.html*). While it is certainly possible that a proposed program may be so innovative that there is little research related to the question of its effectiveness, this is not often the case. Program planners who can point to similar initiatives that have been demonstrated to be effective are much more likely to see successful results from the program they design.

Step 3

define

implement

create 3

Create a Program Logic Model

Programs are defined by their activities. These activities are carried out in an effort to solve the identified problem. Program managers must be able to document what they and their staffs are doing and how these activities will address the problem they are attempting to solve. This may be accomplished by identifying goals, which are broad statements of what the program hopes to accomplish, objectives, which spell out the specific strategies to be used to accomplish goals, and activities, which are the actions the program staff undertake to accomplish goals and objectives. By specifying the logical connections between goals, objectives, and activities, the program manager creates a logic model for the program.

Goals should be expressed in a way that makes it clear that their fulfillment will lead to a solution to the problem. Here are some examples of goal statements:

- The goal of the program is to reduce the number of serious and chronic juvenile offenders.
- The goal of the program is to divert nonviolent juvenile offenders from state juvenile correctional institutions.
- The goal of the program is to have eligible juvenile offenders make appropriate restitution for the losses suffered by the victims of their crimes.

Each goal has one or more objectives associated with it, and each objective has a set of activities with which it is associated. If the activities are carried out successfully, they will lead to the accomplishment of the program's objectives, which will in turn lead to the achievement of its goals. Program managers and staff should understand and be able to explain how each activity helps achieve a goal or objective, and how achieving these goals and objectives will help solve the problem. (For example, if we teach juveniles about the harmful effects of drugs, we will accomplish our goal of increasing knowledge about drugs and their effects, which will ultimately result in fewer juveniles abusing drugs.) If the program is doing a number of useful activities, but those activities cannot reasonably be expected to lead to the achievement of its goals and objectives, then the program will not be successful in solving the problem.

While goals are broad and general statements, objectives are more specific statements about what the program hopes to accomplish and therefore help to make the goals more concrete. For example, if one of the program's goals is to reduce school truancy rates, an objective might be to call the home of each child who is absent from school to be sure that a parent or legal guardian knows that the child was not in school that day. Note that in this example the program believes that making parents aware of their child's truant behavior will result in a reduction in the behavior. The program managers are probably assuming that the parent will take some action that will make it less likely that the juvenile will skip school again. The question of whether this assumption is warranted or not is one that can be addressed in the evaluation process; what is important here is that through identifying goals, objectives, and activities, the program managers have made that assumption explicit. Here are some other examples of juvenile justice program objectives:

- To develop a standard set of criteria to be used by law enforcement and other agencies to identify juveniles as serious and chronic offenders.
- To place eligible juveniles in an intensive supervision program that will ensure offender accountability and community safety.
- To ensure that juvenile offenders carry out all of the terms of the mediation agreements they have worked out with their victims.

Activities are the actions that the program staff undertake in order to accomplish the program's goals and meet the program's objectives. The program activities should be directly related to the accomplishment of goals and objectives, and each activity should be associated with one or more of these goals and objectives. Examples of activities include:

- meeting with police officers, teachers and others to discuss criteria for identifying juveniles as serious and chronic offenders;
- hiring and training probation officers and counselors to work in the intensive supervision program;
- meeting with juveniles and their guardians weekly to discuss progress toward fulfilling the conditions of the juveniles' mediation agreements.

There will be multiple activities for a given objective, just as there may be more than one objective corresponding to a single goal. Carrying out the activities should lead to accomplishment of the objective, which in turn should lead to fulfillment of the goal.

Step 4

define

implement

create

develop 4

collect

analyze

report

Develop Measures

Once the program's underlying relationships have been defined, the next step is to develop a set of measures or indicators that can be used to assess the degree to which goals and objectives have been achieved. In deciding what to measure and how to measure it, program managers must think objectively; that is, what data can be collected that will provide clear evidence that the objective has been met. Impartial observers must be able to look at the results of the measurement process and reach the same conclusions about what the measures show. For example, a program might want to measure how well it met its objective of contacting the parents of truant students by: (1) keeping a daily log of students who were absent, and (2) having a secretary or guidance counselor place their initials next to each student's name after the student's home has been contacted. In contrast, asking the school principal his or her opinion about how successful the program has been in addressing truancy is a less convincing measure of whether this objective has been addressed.

Program managers may undertake two different kinds of measures. The first tells the manager how well the program's activities have been implemented. These "process" measures, as they are often called, are designed to answer the question: "Did the program do what it said it was going to do?" Examples of process indicators or measures include:

- the number of juveniles who received counseling services;
- the average caseload per probation officer throughout the year;
- the number of interagency agreements entered into by the program.

The second set of measures, referred to as "outcome" measures, tells the program manager what effect the program's activities had on the juveniles it served. These outcome indicators are designed to answer

the question: "What results did the program produce?" Examples of outcome indicators or measures include:

- changes in the reading and math scores of juveniles who completed the program;
- changes in self-reported drug and alcohol use;
- the number of juveniles who have subsequent contacts with police after leaving the program.

It is important that managers examine both process and outcome measures. Process measures allow you to determine whether you did what you said you would. If you haven't, then you should not expect to achieve the anticipated outcomes. Outcome measures tell you whether your activities produced the results you anticipated. If they did not, you need to think about changing your activities, assuming that the intended results are still desired.

Step 5

define

implement

evaluate

monitor

collect 5

Collect and Analyze Data

Once measures have been decided upon, data must be collected to determine whether the program's objectives have been met. This will involve implementing the measures identified. For example, determining whether juveniles' attitudes toward authority became more positive as a result of program participation may involve administering questionnaires to juveniles and their parents; determining whether the program met its objective of providing support groups for all participants may involve recording attendance at weekly support group meetings. Data for assessing some program objectives, such as whether program participation resulted in fewer police contacts, may need to be obtained from existing databases or files, such as police or court records. Local programs may have to rely on state databases for some of their measures, or may have to develop their own databases to address others.

Once data have been collected, they must be analyzed. The analysis does not need to be complex, but it does need to present the data so that it will be clear whether each program objective has been fulfilled. The data must be summarized so the reader can quickly make this determination. Grouping data from individuals also maintains the confidentiality of the juveniles (and their parents or guardians) who received services from the program.

Since most juvenile justice programs are trying to change attitudes and/or behaviors, the analysis of evaluation data often centers around trying to determine what changed, how much change occurred, for which participants, and why. Change is most often determined by comparing the same juvenile's attitudes and behaviors prior to participating in the program and again afterwards, or by comparing juveniles who completed the program to similarly situated juveniles (similar in terms of age and offense, for example) who did not participate in the program.

Step 6

define 1

implement 2

create 3

develop 4

collect 5

report 6

reassess 7

Report Findings

Once data have been analyzed, the results of the analyses must be reported. Again, these reports do not have to be complex or extensive. Program managers can list their goals, objectives, and activities, and then present their data showing whether they met their objectives. In their reports, managers can take credit for their accomplishments and point out areas where there is room for improvement.

Step 7

define

implement

create

develop

collect

report

reassess 7

Reassess Program Logic

If the program manager has followed the steps explained above faithfully, he or she will have accumulated a vast amount of knowledge about his/her program's characteristics and operations. The evaluation process described here is a circular one, in which the data analysis leads to conclusions about how well the program has fulfilled its objectives. Once the analysis has been completed and summarized in a report, it is time to reassess the goals, objectives, and activities specified in the program logic model. Which objectives have been accomplished, and which have not? Are there data to suggest why certain objectives were not accomplished? Does the program need to modify certain activities, develop new objectives, or perhaps re-examine its goals? The answers to these questions will suggest a revised program model. Some goals and objectives may be changed, and some activities may be dropped and new ones added. This new program model may require the adoption of revised measures to assess its effectiveness, and this may in turn require new data collection techniques. This reassessment is the key to implementing evaluation as an ongoing process that includes program development, assessment, and revision.

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