

Program  
Evaluation  
Briefing  
Series

#1

**Juvenile Justice  
Program Evaluation  
An Overview  
Second Edition**



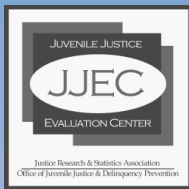
Juvenile Justice  
Evaluation Center

Justice Research and Statistics  
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Office of Juvenile Justice and  
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**The JJEC, which is supported by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, provides evaluation information, training, and technical assistance to enhance juvenile justice evaluation in the states. For more information about the JJEC project, visit our Web site at <http://www.jrsa.org/jjec>, or e-mail us at [jjec@jrsa.org](mailto:jjec@jrsa.org).**

# Juvenile Justice Program Evaluation An Overview

## Second Edition

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. This briefing was revised in June 2003 to reflect changes in the JJEC approach to evaluation. The purpose of the briefing series, which comprises six briefings to date, 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 program managers and others can use to analyze and assess the functioning of programs. These seven steps are as follows:

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

Each of these steps is discussed in detail below.

## Step 1

define

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implement

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# 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 the statewide average or that of neighboring communities.

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

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## Implement Evidence-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 11 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: <http://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. JJEC has begun to highlight exemplary programs with demonstrated efficacy on its Web site. Furthermore, as a part of this effort, publications with sound evaluation design and methodology are emphasized as well. (For more information, see <http://www.jrsa.org/jjec/programs>.)

## Develop Program Logic

**define****1**

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.

**implement****2****develop****3****identify****4****collect****5****report****6****reassess****7**

Goals should be expressed in a way that makes it clear that their fulfillment will lead to a solution to the problem. A goal is defined as a broad statement of what the program intends to accomplish. It is also the intended long-term outcome of the program. Here are some examples of goal statements:

- To reduce the number of serious and chronic juvenile offenders.
- To divert nonviolent juvenile offenders from state juvenile correctional institutions.
- To restore the losses suffered by the victims of 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 hopefully 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 conducting 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.

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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. Objectives should include three elements:

- 1) direction – the expected change or accomplishment (e.g., improve, maintain);
- 2) timeframe – when the objective will be achieved; and
- 3) target – who is affected by the objective.

For example, if one of the program's goals is to reduce school truancy rates, an objective might be to increase a parent's or legal guardian's awareness of a child's truancy during the program. 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:

- By the end of the program, young, drug-addicted juveniles will recognize the long-term consequences of drug use.
- To place eligible juveniles in an intensive supervision program within two weeks of adjudication to 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 by program completion.

Program implementation requires resources. Resources are the means available to achieve the program objectives. They may include items such as money, staff, and a space to operate the program. Program resources can also be included as part of the logic model and assessed during the evaluation of the program. If the program does not have adequate resources, it is unlikely to meet its objectives.

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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:

- hold one meeting with police officers, teachers and others to discuss criteria for identifying juveniles as serious and chronic offenders;
- training 30 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 may 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

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## Identify 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 measures include:

- the number of juveniles who received counseling services (compared to the number expected to receive services);
- the average caseload per probation officer throughout the year (compared to the average caseload expected);
- the number of interagency agreements entered into by the program (compared to the number planned).

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 measures are designed to answer

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the question: "What results did the program produce?" Examples of outcome 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.

Being able to attribute the outcomes revealed by the outcome measures to the program itself requires an evaluation design that controls for factors external to the program. We will not go into detail describing these evaluation designs here. A professional evaluator would be able to develop such an evaluation design for your program. Nevertheless, 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 anticipated results were achieved. If they were not, you need to think about changing your activities, assuming that the intended results are still desired.

## Step 5

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reassess

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## Collect and Analyze Data

Once measures have been identified, data must be collected to determine whether the program's objectives have been met. This will involve employing 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

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## 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 1
- implement 2
- develop 3
- identify 4
- collect 5
- report 6
- reassess 7**

### Reassess Program Logic

If the program manager has faithfully followed the steps explained above, 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.

## Summary

- define** 1
- implement** 2
- develop** 3
- identify** 4
- collect** 5
- report** 6
- reassess** 7

Program evaluation is a key element in program planning and management. As programs are implemented, managers must be sure that their activities are consistent with their intended outcomes, and that these outcomes will produce solutions to the problems being faced by the juveniles they serve. By following the seven steps described in this briefing, juvenile justice program managers will go a long way toward ensuring that their programs are effectively and efficiently moving toward solving the problem of delinquency in their communities.

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