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Introduction

Program evaluation is often viewed as a highly complex, time-consuming and expensive process. Most published references to juvenile justice evaluation relate to large-scale intervention programs operating in urban centers and serving hundreds of youth. Often the program has multiple sites implemented simultaneously according to a research-based intervention model. The evaluation research undertaken to assess the effectiveness of a large juvenile justice program often employs experimental or quasi-experimental designs and takes place over an extended period of time. These sophisticated evaluation studies demand considerable resources, typically available only to large organizations, and the expertise of one or more experienced evaluators. As a result, these types of evaluation studies can cost from $80,000 into the millions.

Like large-scale programs, small juvenile justice programs are also required to demonstrate their effectiveness to funders, but generally with very limited resources. Small-scale program evaluations, that is, evaluation studies that seek to address questions about program implementation and outcomes in juvenile justice programs with total budgets of less than $100,000, have been conducted in urban and rural areas for well over 20 years.

This briefing presents a model for small program evaluation (SPE) that provides strategies for conducting evaluations of juvenile justice programs more efficiently. This information is useful for local program managers who are responsible for determining the effectiveness of the programs they operate and state- and local-level juvenile justice grant administrators who are responsible for providing guidance and assistance to local programs in their evaluation efforts. This approach to SPE requires the use of a local outside evaluator (not a member of the program staff). The model also calls for an agreement between the evaluator and the program staff that establishes a cooperative process requiring the staff to participate in the evaluation. The next

few pages will describe in detail the following strategies for implementing SPE to the benefit of the program, the community, and the funding agency:

- Identifying realistic expectations about what SPE can accomplish.

- Creating a well-developed program plan, which forms the basis of the evaluation plan.

- Developing a manageable evaluation plan that identifies key process and outcome measures in order to answer critical evaluation questions.

- Increasing the efficiency of data collection, analysis, and reporting efforts by involving program staff and using existing program documents.

- Identifying ways that state and local funding agencies can facilitate SPE.

What Are the Goals of Evaluation in a Small Program?

SPE seeks to establish the degree to which the juvenile justice program is operating efficiently, accomplishing its goals and objectives, and producing short-term change in participants. With the help of a qualified and experienced evaluator, SPE is capable of addressing the following types of questions that may be asked by juvenile justice programs:

- Is the program based on a theoretical or rational argument that links a problem or need to a set of activities and defines a target population to be served by the program?

- Did the program deliver activities specified in the funding contract?

- What type and frequency of services were provided?

- Was there sufficient organizational capacity to deliver the program activities such as: vision and leadership; collaboration across agencies; sufficient and qualified staff; appropriate policies and procedures to implement the program; and sufficient financial resources?

- Who was served by the program, and do the characteristics of these individuals match the target population?

- What resources, policies, or procedures changed or were developed as a result of the program?

- What benefits accrued for participants who were provided ongoing services, i.e.,

    How satisfied were participants with program activities? For example, did they complete the program and learn something?

    What changes in knowledge, skills, attitude, or behavior occurred among participants?

- What benefits accrued for the community as a result of the program?

- Do community stakeholders believe the program was beneficial? If so, in what way?

- What suggestions do stakeholders have to improve or strengthen the program?

Due to limited resources in terms of funding, personnel, and time, SPE cannot address a number of questions. It is important to be realistic and be aware of the limitations of SPE such as those listed below:

- SPE cannot address questions of cause and effect, such as: Did the program activities alone cause a reduction in delinquent behaviors?

- SPE cannot measure broader community impacts, such as: Was there a reduction in delinquency rates or in substance abuse among school-aged children in the community?

- SPE cannot measure program outcomes on a large number of individuals who were provided only "brief services" because the financial and human resources required to collect outcome data through follow-up surveying would exceed the capacity of most programs.

- SPE cannot scientifically test the program model to determine if it is a proven strategy that should be replicated in other locations.

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What Program Planning Activities Are Necessary?

In order to successfully implement an SPE, the program staff must perform a number of planning activities. First, they must develop a program plan that clearly states program goals and objectives. Equally important, they must hire an evaluator as early as possible so that the evaluator can collaborate with them on an evaluation plan. These planning activities are described more fully in the sections that follow.

Develop a Program Plan

SPE begins with a well-written program plan, often developed as part of a response to a Request for Proposals (RFP) from a funding source. A program plan should consist of the following components:

- A statement of the problems related to delinquency that are affecting the community.

- A statement of the resources available in the community to respond to these problems and any gaps in services/programs.

- A statement of the needs to be addressed by the program.

- A description of the target population to be served by the program.

- A statement of the program goals.

- A list of objectives identifying what is to be accomplished.

- A description of activities to be implemented to meet the objectives.

- A description of staffing and any volunteer resources to be used to implement the program.

- An implementation timeline for all tasks.

It is important that each part of the program plan is logically linked; that is, activities are designed to meet objectives, and objectives are designed to fulfill goals. For example, if the program goal is to reduce school violence and one of the program objectives is to reduce the incidence of physical fights between students, the proposed activities should include efforts to develop nonviolent conflict resolution skills in program participants. A well-developed program plan is critical to SPE because the elements of a program plan serve as the basis for an effective evaluation plan. The evaluation plan will allow the evaluator

to determine whether activities were implemented as planned, and whether goals and objectives were attained. Having a solid program plan in place allows the evaluator to proceed with evaluation activities, rather than spend time helping the program define its goals and objectives. For more information on developing a program plan, see the first paper in the Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center's Program Evaluation Briefing Series, *Juvenile Justice Program Evaluation: An Overview*. It is available online at www.jrsa.org/jjec.

Hire an Evaluator

Once funding has been received, the next step is to hire a local evaluator. Because SPE requires the evaluator to be able to quickly put together an evaluation plan and develop simple data collection and measurement tools, experienced evaluators are often better candidates for this work. Experienced small program evaluators should have the following qualifications:

- Five to ten years of experience conducting evaluations of juvenile justice programs.

- Strong academic background in research methodology with emphasis in criminal justice, psychology, sociology, or education.

- Demonstrated ability to work in collaboration with program staff, participants, and community groups.

In addition to identifying the selection criteria that will be used to choose an evaluator, the program also needs to determine how the evaluation will be funded. Money to hire an evaluator could be earmarked in the program budget or the program could request additional funds from the granting agency. Soon after the program is notified that it has received the grant award, a local evaluator should be hired to ensure the early development of an evaluation plan (discussed in the next section). To find an experienced program evaluator in your area, the program could contact the following offices and organizations for recommendations:

- State juvenile justice specialist.

- State department of juvenile justice.

- State Statistical Analysis Center.

- Local juvenile court administrators.

- Directors of other youth-serving local agencies that receive federal funds who typically must evaluate their programs as part of the funding agreement.

- The American Evaluation Association: www.eval.org.

- Local college/university departments of criminal justice, sociology, psychology, social work, or education.

To begin the collaborative evaluation process, key program staff and the identified program stakeholders should meet with the local program evaluator to discuss the goals of the evaluation, how often the evaluator will meet with program staff, the division of data collection/ analysis responsibilities, and report due dates. It is important that people or organizations with an interest in the program's success be invited to participate in the development of the evaluation plan. For example, in Lansing, Michigan, a community organization received a grant to implement an after-school tutoring program, and the local school district agreed to cooperate with the program by identifying participants and providing a classroom for the sessions. The evaluator planned to assess changes in the program participants' academic performance by surveying the teachers. Since the school administration had to approve a request for teachers to complete a survey and youth from the school were in the program, it was important to invite a member of the school administration to be involved in the evaluation planning process. Therefore, in this example, the stakeholders who should participate in the development of the evaluation plan included the program staff, the evaluator, and the relevant school administrators.

Possible roles for the evaluator and the program coordinator (the program staff person responsible for coordinating the evaluation) are listed in the table below. Although these roles may vary depending on the skills and experience of the juvenile justice program staff and the evaluator, collaboration is essential to the SPE process. An agreement must be reached between the evaluator and the program staff that establishes a cooperative process that requires staff to participate in the evaluation. For example, the program staff may be able to identify an existing record-keeping form, which, with some modifications,

could be used as a data collection instrument. When staff share the responsibilities associated with the evaluation, the program is able to reduce the cost of the study, increase the knowledge of program staff, and increase the usefulness of the final report since staff participate in the development of the study design. For more information on hiring an evaluator, see the second paper in the Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center's Program Evaluation Briefing Series, *Hiring and Working With an Evaluator*. It is available online at www.jrsa.org/jjec.

Potential Roles in SPE for the Evaluator and the Program Coordinator

Roles of the Evaluator

- Design the evaluation plan

- Develop data collection instruments and protocols

- Train staff on how to collect program data

- Review/monitor accuracy and completeness of data that have been collected by staff

- Meet with program staff during the year to review program activities and any organizational or service delivery barriers

- Consult with program staff on solutions to any barriers or weaknesses

- Conduct interviews with stakeholders or clients as specified in the evaluation plan

- Receive survey responses and perform appropriate content analysis

- Compile and analyze other program data

- Prepare draft report

- Finalize report and make recommendations

Roles of the Program Coordinator

- Provide input into the design of the evaluation plan

- Collect program data using the forms/ instruments designed by the evaluator

- Administer any participant satisfaction surveys to clients or other stakeholders who participate in training or other program events as specified in the evaluation plan

- Provide a list of stakeholders who will be administered mail surveys or contacted for interviews

- Mail stakeholder surveys with a cover letter that states that responses are confidential and should be mailed back to the evaluator

- Review draft report, make any corrections of facts, and discuss recommendations

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Develop an Evaluation Plan

The development of a realistic evaluation plan is another key component of an efficient evaluation. The most important activity associated with the plan is the development of process and outcome measures sufficient to answer critical evaluation questions. Process measures are concerned with the implementation or service delivery aspects of the program. In other words, they assess and describe the program activities. Any SPE should collect process measures as an ongoing component of program delivery. Process measures inform juvenile justice program stakeholders about:

- What types of intervention/services/activities were provided;

- How frequently they were provided;

- Over what time period they were provided; and

- To whom they were provided.

For example, a job-shadowing program for adolescent girls was designed to enrich the participants' knowledge about careers and their awareness of the skills required for specific jobs. Some of the activities associated with this program were: 1) to identify jobs that interest the participants; 2) to identify and recruit local women to participate as job-site mentors; and 3) to conduct weekly career development sessions with the participants. The process measures for these activities would be:

- Number and types of jobs identified by the participants.

- Number of female mentors recruited.

- Number of adolescent girls and their characteristics.

- Number and frequency of weekly career development sessions.

More difficult to identify are program outcome measures, which are concerned with substantive changes the program intends to produce in its target population. Program outcomes focus on change in an individual's attitudes, knowledge, skills, or behaviors. In this example, some of the intended outcomes could include: 1) an increase in participants' knowledge about career opportunities, including knowledge of school courses required to develop skills necessary for identified careers; and 2) development of a positive relationship between the

participants and adult female role models. Measuring program outcomes in SPE enables stakeholders to be informed about short-term changes relevant to the program goals. The outcome measures for the job-shadowing program could include:

- The number of careers participants have specific knowledge of after completing the program compared to their knowledge of careers prior to program involvement.

- The number of contacts (phone calls or personal visits) outside of the scheduled sessions that the participant has with an adult female mentor during the program.

It is important to measure only those outcomes that one can realistically expect to change as a result of the intervention. For example, programs often plan to assess changes in the community-wide juvenile crime rate as an outcome indicator. However, if the intervention provides only limited services over a limited period of time, and the number of juveniles participating is low, then it is not realistic to believe that the overall juvenile crime rate will be affected. Small programs that deal with relatively few youth need to be reasonable about what can be expected to change as a result of the program intervention.

It is also important to consider who has the most knowledge about participant change and would be able to accurately determine the change. Service providers are often capable of accurately assessing changes in youths' behaviors. To enhance service providers' ability to be consistent and objective in their assessment of participants, a standardized assessment tool, such as a survey or observation instrument, should be used. In some cases it may be practical to have program participants use a self-report assessment tool to evaluate changes in their own behavior, knowledge, or attitudes in specified areas.

Finally, it is possible to use only a limited number of key process and outcome measures, typically those that are obtained through assessments by program staff of existing documents and records. The process and outcome measures selected should inform the program and the funder about whether the program is operating efficiently, accomplishing objectives, and having positive effects on program participants.

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What Are Effective Strategies for Collecting, Analyzing, and Reporting Data Efficiently?

Efficiency in collecting, analyzing, and reporting results is a critical strategy of SPE. Evaluation studies become large when many questions are posed and too much data are collected. Extensive data analysis and time are then required to summarize the results. Instead, this model proposes asking only the most important questions and conducting simple analysis that provides information relevant to stakeholders.

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods are appropriate for SPE and are best used in combination. Quantitative data will tell juvenile justice program managers how much and what kind of services were provided to youth with specific characteristics (e.g., age and gender), but they lack the depth of information to answer "why" questions such as why do youth drop out of a treatment program, or why do parents believe that a parenting workshop has helped them cope with a troubled son or daughter. Qualitative, or "why," questions are critical to the goals of an SPE, since they provide information to support conclusions about the effectiveness of the program.

Through qualitative data, it is possible to better understand other factors that might influence the participants' success in the program. For example, teachers might observe a reduction in violent behavior (defined as verbal or physical conflicts in class) among a group of youth who have attended a program on anger management. Interviews with these youth might reveal that they still feel a lot of anger and still think violence is a solution to threats, but they have learned to hide these feelings around authority figures such as teachers. On the other hand, interviews might reinforce the teachers' observations and reveal that the youth learned skills for de-escalating conflict situations in the program and are practicing those skills in the classroom.

Some general guidelines for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data efficiently that apply to either quantitative or qualitative research methods are as follows:

- Create an evaluation plan early in the program specifying what data are to be collected, at what time, and who is responsible for gathering the data.

- Be realistic about what can be done easily and accurately. Ask only those questions that àre of interest to most of the stakeholders.

- Choose a few key process and outcome measures that answer the evaluation questions.

- Design easy-to-use data collection instruments that can be used as both program and evaluation forms. The responses to questions should be predetermined choices with check-boxes that can be easily coded and entered into a computer for analysis.

- Have the evaluator train staff on how to use the data collection forms and verify that data collection is being done correctly.

- Staff closest to the participant population and the event are the most appropriate people to collect the data. They already have to be present at events with participants; therefore, it would take them less time than the evaluator to record basic information.

- The evaluator should be prudent about what events and meetings to attend, and only attend those that provide an opportunity to assess the progress of a program and/or to provide technical assistance/consultation on how to improve the program.

- After the initial development and implementation of the evaluation protocol, the evaluator should plan to meet with the program staff periodically to discuss the evaluation and offer guidance.

- The evaluator should compile program data as quickly as possible after the end of the specified evaluation period and provide a draft report to the program staff for verification.

- In general, the final report should be no more than 30 pages and take into consideration the technical level of the audience. A one- to two-page executive summary should be prepared for distribution to policymakers and other key stakeholders.

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How Can Funding Agencies Facilitate the Evaluation of Small Juvenile Justice Programs?

To facilitate the evaluation of small juvenile justice programs, state and local agencies responsible for administering grants must address some of the barriers to SPE. First, small programs often have limited financial and human resources. State and local funding agencies must therefore consider ways for small programs to pay for evaluation, such as requiring that a percentage of the overall budget be allocated to hire a local evaluator or making a separate grant award available specifically for evaluation.

Second, the SPE model discussed in this briefing depends on a cooperative approach to evaluation, which requires program staff to have a basic knowledge of evaluation. State and local funding agencies should provide technical assistance to help develop this knowledge. This assistance could include training and on-site consultations on topics such as: 1) how to write a grant proposal; 2) how to develop a program plan; 3) how to contract with an external evaluator; and 4) how to monitor the progress of the evaluation.

Finally, state and local funding agencies should implement reporting requirements that improve juvenile justice program delivery and directly benefit program administrators. For example, the grant application proposal process should contain clear guidelines on funder expectations related to evaluation. The grant application could require specific evaluation-related information, such as an evaluation plan, that is formally assessed as part of the award process.

Once a grant is awarded, additional evaluation-related policies and procedures could include:

- Requiring the program to hire a local external evaluator within a specified period of time.

- Requiring the program to submit a final program evaluation plan, subject to approval, to the funding agency within a reasonable time after the evaluator is hired.

- Requiring a representative from the funding agency to conduct an on-site visit to meet with the program director and the evaluator to clarify funder expectations, identify any delays or barriers to program delivery, and establish evaluation reporting requirements.

- Implementing quarterly program progress reports that require programs to provide information on the status of the evaluation, such as progress toward program objectives and goals, with details on quantity of services and numbers of persons served.

- Requiring the program to submit an evaluation report in addition to the final program report to the funding agency.

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Summary

With the growing expectation that juvenile justice programs, regardless of size, must demonstrate their effectiveness, and with the competitive nature of most grant awards, it is important that small programs consider strategies for efficient evaluation. The SPE model presented here provides an approach to implementing a small-scale evaluation that will benefit the program staff and the funding agency. Program staff should develop a program plan and hire a program evaluator as early in the planning process as possible and then work with the evaluator to develop an evaluation plan that includes the formulation of process and outcome measures to answer critical evaluation questions. They must also plan strategies for collecting, analyzing, and reporting results efficiently, so that information provided to stakeholders is most relevant to them. Finally, program funding agencies must do what they can to encourage small program evaluation by, for example, earmarking a certain percentage of program funds for evaluation and implementing reporting requirements. For more information to assist with the evaluation of small juvenile justice programs, see the Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center Web site: www.jrsa.org/jjec.

Juvenile justice programs, regardless of size, are increasingly expected to demonstrate their effectiveness.

Program Evaluation Briefing Series

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#1 Juvenile Justice Program Evaluation: An Overview

#2 Hiring and Working With an Evaluator

#3 Strategies for Evaluating Small Juvenile Justice Programs

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