



Solving Crime Problems With Research

The Office of Justice Programs' CrimeSolutions.gov offers practitioners and policymakers a practical tool for finding information about evidence-based criminal justice programs.

“We already know a great deal about what can be done to prevent and control crime,” then-University of Pennsylvania professor Laurie Robinson told Congress in 2007. “But we have done a poor job — especially at the federal level — in getting information out.” Robinson was testifying to encourage the development of a “what works clearinghouse,” a centralized repository of information on evidence-based criminal justice programs and practices that would be specifically designed to meet the needs of policymakers and practitioners.

Her vision became a reality in 2011, two years after she returned to the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) for her second stint as Assistant Attorney General, with the launch of CrimeSolutions.gov.

Policymakers and practitioners face a number of challenges when trying to find out what works in their field. First, the body of knowledge on any particular topic can be difficult to access. Information may be scattered across numerous publications, including academic journals found almost exclusively in university libraries. Second, most research articles are not written with practitioners or other non-researchers in mind. The structure, presentation and content of most research publications are designed for consumption by trained scientists. Thus, reading and understanding research can be a daunting task for the uninitiated. Third, most practitioners and policymakers are not trained as scientists, so they often cannot assess the scientific merits of one study relative to another.



A Tool for Practitioners and Policymakers

CrimeSolutions.gov organizes evidence on what works in criminal justice, juvenile justice and crime victim services in a way designed to help inform program and policy decisions. It is a central resource that policymakers and practitioners can turn to when they need to find an evidence-based program for their community or want to know if a program they are funding has been determined to be effective.

On CrimeSolutions.gov, users can find answers to essential questions, such as:

- Is there a program that meets my needs?
- Did the program work?
- How was the program designed and implemented?
- Where can I get more information about the program?

The site currently contains information about more than 150 programs, and it will be updated with additional programs as new research becomes available. All of the programs are listed under at least one of eight topic areas: Corrections & Reentry, Courts, Crime & Crime Prevention, Drugs & Substance Abuse, Juveniles, Law Enforcement, Technology & Forensics, and Victims & Victimization.

One of the primary goals of CrimeSolutions.gov is to encourage practitioners to replicate programs with a track record of success. Replicating programs that have been shown to work and that fit a community's needs can save valuable time and resources compared with implementing untested programs that

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may or may not address the same problems as effectively. In addition to helping practitioners find programs to replicate or adapt, the information in CrimeSolutions.gov can help guide funding priorities.

Determining What Works

Because many practitioners and policymakers are not trained to assess the scientific rigor of research, merely making information about

programs available on a website may not help them determine whether or not a program was effective. To do that, OJP decided to call in the experts — literally.

Each topic area is assigned a lead researcher who is an authority in the field, and every program in the CrimeSolutions.gov database goes through a rigorous, eight-step process that includes an expert review.

The review is conducted by two trained subject matter and research methods experts, assigned by the lead researcher, who analyze the most rigorous evaluation research available for the program and independently assess the program's effectiveness.

The reviewers then sort each study of the program into one of five classes based on the program's conceptual framework and the quality,

CrimeSolutions.gov at a Glance

At CrimeSolutions.gov, users will find:

- Research on program effectiveness reviewed and rated by expert reviewers.
- Easily understandable ratings based on the evidence that indicate whether a program achieves its goals:



Effective — Programs with strong evidence indicating they achieve their intended outcomes when implemented with fidelity.



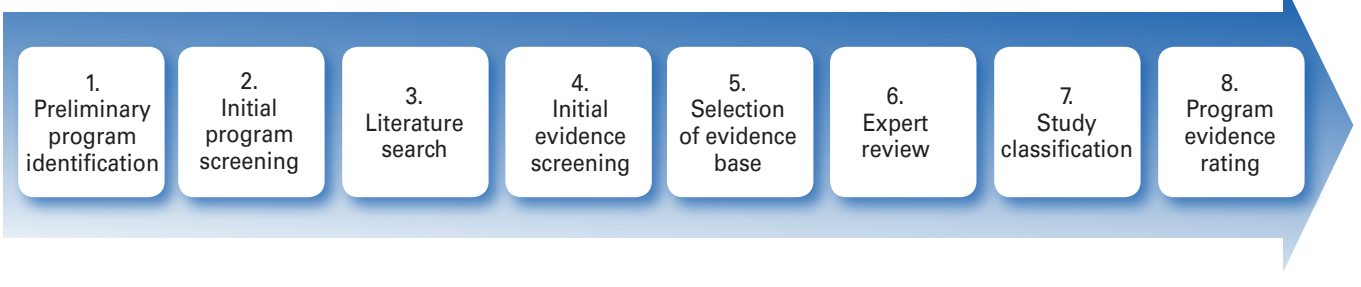
Promising — Programs with some evidence indicating they achieve their intended outcomes. Additional research is recommended.



No effects — Programs with strong evidence indicating they do not achieve their intended outcomes when implemented with fidelity.

- Key program details, including findings, contact information and, when available, information about program costs.

Figure 1: CrimeSolutions.gov Program Review and Rating Process



CrimeSolutions.gov presents the best evidence currently available for the programs listed and is meant to inform, not replace, decision-making.

outcomes and fidelity of the study. Finally, the program is assigned one of three evidence ratings:

- **Effective programs** have strong evidence that they achieve their intended outcomes when implemented with fidelity.
- **Promising programs** have some evidence that they achieve their intended outcomes.
- **No effects programs** have strong evidence indicating that they have no effects or harmful effects when implemented with fidelity.

Edward Latessa, professor and director of the School of Criminal Justice at the University of Cincinnati, is

the lead researcher for the Courts and the Corrections & Reentry topic areas. “Translating research into practice is not an easy process,” he said at the 2011 NIJ Conference. “The process for reviewing and rating programs will give the field more confidence in research.”

CrimeSolutions.gov is not a list of the only programs OJP will fund in the future or a definitive list of programs that work. New programs still need to be developed and tested. CrimeSolutions.gov presents the best evidence currently available for the programs listed and is meant to inform, not replace, decision-making.

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Visit CrimeSolutions.gov at <http://www.crimesolutions.gov>.



Watch Edward Latessa talk about the impact of CrimeSolutions.gov on NIJ.gov. Keyword: 2011 Latessa.