U.S. Department of Justice
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Bureau of Justice Assistance

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BJA Bureau of Justice Assistance

IMPROVING THE CAPACITY TO IDENTIFY EFFECTIVE CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROGRAMS

Guidelines and Criteria for the Nomination of Effective Programs

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Identifying Effective Criminal Justice Programs: Guidelines and Criteria for the Nomination of Effective Programs

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) has created the Intensive Program Evaluation (IPE) Initiative to respond to the Attorney General's charge to "find out what works and spread the word." This new initiative establishes a mechanism to validate the effectiveness of criminal justice programs based on published criteria, including evaluation results, and to disseminate information about approved effective programs through Department of Justice networks directly to practitioners. The approval of effective programs for dissemination relies on the evaluations to be conducted by the Program Effectiveness Review Panel. This Panel will provide independence and rigor in its recommendations to the Director. In the development of the guidelines, BJA relied heavily upon the Panel, as well as upon past activities of the National Institute of Justice, to identify exemplary programs.

The program objectives are to:

- Enhance the ability of State and local agencies to generate and use evaluation results for strategy development, program improvement, and effective program identification.
- Identify and document useful approaches to designing and conducting evaluations at State and local levels.

BJA needs to identify effective State and local criminal justice programs, practices, and products as part of broader efforts at the national level to improve the criminal justice system by disseminating useful program information to policymakers and practitioners. It is an approach that might be called "leading by example." Through this approach, information on successful programs will be disseminated to the field in a credible and timely fashion. The products from this initiative are the results from the 56 laboratories (50 States and 6 territories) put in place under the Byrne Formula Grant Program.

Program effectiveness guidelines and criteria are presented here for use in submitting potential programs, as well as for the Program Effectiveness Review Panel in its review of nominated programs. The Panel reviews the programs and submits its recommendations to the Director. Once the effective programs have been approved, BJA bulletins will be published.

I. Abstract

The abstract should be a 1-page description (200–300 words) of the program that provides a concise statement of concrete, observable outcomes. The abstract should briefly describe the following aspects of the program: (1) goals, (2) purposes and needs addressed, (3) method of operation, (4) audience, and (5) expected result(s).

II. Basic Information

Basic information should be approximately one page.

A. Project Title
Location
Contact Person

Give the title of the project (including any acronym or abbreviation), the name of the applicant agency, and the address and a daytime telephone number of a contact person within the applicant agency.

B. Original Developer
Applicant Agency

Provide the name(s) and title(s) of those who originally developed the program. Describe the mission of the applicant agency.

C. Years of Project

Provide (1) date(s) developed, (2) date(s) operated, and (3) date(s) evaluated.

D. Source(s) and Level(s) of Development and Dissemination Funding

List sources of funding for the project and amounts by year. Categories of sources include Federal, State, local, and other.

III. Description of Program

Describe the program in approximately five to six pages.

A. Background, Foundation, and Theoretical Framework

Discuss briefly the history of how and why the program was developed. Present the theoretical or empirical framework upon which the program is based.

B. Purposes and Needs Addressed/Problem Statement

Describe the specific needs the program was designed to address. Needs should be linked to the target audience and special features of the program.

C. Goals

Provide a clear and concise statement of the program goals. Include only those goals that relate directly to claims of effectiveness. In the case of evaluation models designed to meet intermediate objectives, make the link to the ultimate purpose of the program.

D. Objectives

Objectives are the intermediate effects or results to be achieved by the program in pursuing its ultimate goal. Objectives measure the extent to which program goals are being accomplished. Identify appropriate objectives that logically flow from program goals. Objectives should be stated in terms of outcomes (expected effects or results). A distinction should be made between outputs (quantities produced) and effects/results.

E. Intended Audience

Identify the relevant demographic characteristics of the population for which the objectives are designed.

F. Features: How the Program Operates

Provide a complete description of how the program actually operates, identifying all features critical to its implementation. Include the following topics as they apply to the project: (1) scope (Does the project supplement or replace an existing program, or is it a component of a larger program?), (2) staff activities and staffing patterns, (3) staff development activities, (4) management activities, and (5) monitoring and evaluation procedures.

G. Significance of Program Design Compared with Design of Similar Programs

Describe the features of the program that distinguish it from similar programs. Discuss ways in which the program addresses special problems. Note innovative or unique features.

IV. Potential for Replication

Describe the potential for replicating the program in two to three pages.

A. Settings and Participants (Development and Evaluation Sites)

Briefly describe the community(ies) where the intervention was developed or field tested. Socioeconomic, ethnic, and geographic descriptions are appropriate.

B. Replicable Components and Documentation

Indicate which aspects of the program are appropriate for dissemination to other sites. If the program has developed support materials for dissemination, indicate the type of documentation available.

C. User Requirements

Describe the minimum requirements necessary for implementing the project at another site (e.g., special staff, facilities, staff training time).

D. Costs (for Implementation and Operation)

Present a brief explanation of the recurring and nonrecurring costs associated with adopting the project. Costs such as personnel costs, special equipment, and materials and supplies that are necessary for installing and/or maintaining the program at an adopting site should be discussed. Costs associated with the development of the original program should be excluded from this discussion.

V. Evidence

Provide evidence in approximately six to eight pages.

A. Impact Statement(s)

The specific evaluation methods used to determine the impact of the program should be explained.

Succinctly state the major accomplishments of the program and its activities. Include a brief description of the type of evidence used to support the fact that an impact was determined and a description of the nature of the change that was demonstrated.

Generally, an impact statement includes (1) the target group for which results are available, (2) the nature of the change, (3) the process used for measuring the impact of the program, and (4) the standards by which to judge whether the gains achieved are significant.

A clear impact statement is critical because the panel judges the adequacy of evidence based on the claim. Further, the statement identifies the project objectives/outcomes that will be approved for dissemination (i.e., only those objectives/outcomes that are reflected in the impact statement(s) and supported by convincing evidence will be approved).

B. Description of Methodology

1. Design

An evaluation design usually addresses three factors: (1) the timing of data collection (e.g., pretests and posttests or different points in a time series), (2) the groups involved (e.g., a group receiving the program and a comparison group receiving an alternative program), and (3) the way in which a standard of comparison will be determined (e.g., a treatment group's gain or change will be compared with national or State benchmarks).

Describe the type of design used for each claim and the reason for the choice. Address any assumptions or problems inherent in the research design that was used.

2. Sample

The discussion of sampling procedures should answer four questions: (1) Who participated in the study? (2) How was the sample selected? (3) How many participants were included in the final sample? (4) How representative is the sample of the target population and program participants as a whole?

3. Instruments and Procedures

This section should describe the instruments and/or procedures and how each assessment technique relates to the outcomes. Provide sufficient information so that a judgment can be made about the technical strength and appropriate use of the measure (e.g., validity, reliability, levels, subscales).

It is especially important to describe validity and reliability procedures for project-developed instruments; in such cases, the procedures for instrument development and field testing also should be explained.

4. Data Collection

Describe the procedures used to select and train testers and the actual strategies used to assure quality control during data collection. Indicate the periods of data collection, the persons responsible for supervising the data collection, and the scoring and data summary procedures. It is especially important to describe in detail the data collection and quality control procedures for qualitative evaluations.

5. Data Analysis

If data are quantitative in nature, indicate the statistical technique(s) and levels of significance used in the analysis.

If data are qualitative in nature, describe the procedures used to code and categorize or reduce information for summary purposes. Describe ways in which linkages were made across data elements to draw and verify conclusions.

C. Description of Results

Present detailed results of analyses in table or chart form, if appropriate. Sufficient detail should be provided for the reader to check conclusions independently. Also, summarize the results for the claims in narrative form, relating the specific outcomes to the accomplishment of goals.

D. **Summary of Supplementary Evidence**

Provide additional evidence that supports the results, including anecdotal information, perceptions of quality, and levels of satisfaction. Supplementary evidence can also be evidence of generalizability.

E. **Interpretation and Discussion of Results**

1. **Relationship Between Effect and Treatment**

Summarize the results of all data related to the claim that the treatment was effective. Link the results to specific features of the program design.

2. **Control of Rival Hypotheses**

Provide evidence of program attribution, i.e., evidence that suggests that the effects can be attributed to the program and not to some other equally plausible factor. As appropriate to the design, show how the following alternative explanations can be eliminated from consideration: maturation, other treatments, historical factors, statistical regression, attrition, differential selection of groups, and testing. (*Note*: Sound evaluation design can control most rival hypotheses; however, other data may be used to show attribution of effects.)

F. **Significance of Results**

1. **Relationship of Results to Needs**

Demonstrate how the results obtained are important: How do the results meet the needs for which the project was designed? Establish the importance of the needs, and demonstrate that the results are broad enough and powerful enough to be viewed as important.

2. **Comparison of Results With Results From Other Programs**

Compare the results with results of similar projects or national or statewide initiatives, if appropriate.