# HIGH IMPACT ANTI-CRIME PROGRAM MONITORING PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION: PROBLEMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE LEAA





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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE ADMINISTRATION NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE



# NATIONAL-LEVEL EVALUATION MONITORING PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION: PROBLEMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE LEAA

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## ABSTRACT

This document describes some management problems encountered during MITRE's national-level evaluation of the High Impact Anti-Crime Program (undertaken jointly with LEAA's National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice), and provides suggested models for monitoring project implementation on a regular basis. Methods are proposed for intervening in the life of a project to insure timely and effective implementation.

MITRE Department and Project Approva

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### PREFACE

The High Impact Anti-Crime Program was designed by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) to demonstrate in eight large cities the effectiveness of comprehensive, crime-specific programs in reducing stranger-to-stranger crime and burglary.

The LEAA's National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice and The MITRE Corporation are engaged in an effort to conduct a national-level evaluation of the High Impact Anti-Crime Program. This evaluation provides for the examination of 3 separate but complementary questions:

- What happened at the city level in terms of planning, implementation and evaluation?
- What factors promoted or inhibited program success?
- What meaningful conclusions can be drawn from the overall experience?

This analysis is to be accomplished by means of 9 major tasks.

During the course of carrying out these analyses a major problem which has been observed is the lengthy delays encountered by projects in becoming implemented. We have noted that at the regional office and LEAA headquarters levels little project-level information is maintained on a regular basis to insure that timely intervention is facilitated. This document is intended to focus on problems associated with the implementation of projects and provides recommendations for an improved system of implementation monitoring.

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Recent LEAA-funded programs and projects have tended to emphasize the need for greater sophistication in the techniques and approaches utilized in building upon the criminal justice body of knowledge. These activities represent a commitment on the part of LEAA toward the accomplishment of two major goals:

- (1) Determining what implemented activities can reduce crime; and,
- (2) Professionalizing the skills, attributes, and endeavors of those working within the field of criminal justice.

The High Impact Anti-Crime Program, begun in 1972, was set forth by LEAA with its central theme focusing on the attainment of these two goals. However, an examination of the implementation of Impact projects reveals that a substantial lag has occurred between the delineation of these goals and the development of the means for achieving them.

Impact projects suffered significant slippage in the implementation of their respective activities and the expenditure of their funds from the original program timetable. Problems of delay and staff turnover served to slow project implementation and raise questions about the span of management oversight of the program and of the individual projects.

What is proposed here is the development of a project implementation status reporting system for regular and uniform monitoring and assessment of grant project implementation performance. The system suggested arises from the recognition of four major needs:

- (1) to provide current and consistent implementation status information on each project;
- (2) to identify and flag projects which are experiencing implementation problems on a rapid and regular basis;
- (3) to insure swift intervention in the life of a project so identified; and.
- (4) to make certain that the intervention has indeed occurred and has expedited the implementation of the project.

Two alternative models are recommended for operationalizing the system; both of these propose little actual change within the pattern of roles and responsibilities currently existing among the partners in the grant process: the projects, the state planning agencies, the regional offices, and LEAA headquarters.

Underlying the concept of the implementation status reporting system is the notion that a professional, business-like approach needs to be utilized in connection with the management of grant-funded projects. Those projects which have fallen behind in achieving implementation status would be identified as delinquent and the specific area or activity in delinquent status would be described. This assessment function would then provide the substantive basis for administrative intervention in the operation of the project at an early enough stage in the project's life to minimize slippage.

1.0 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION: THE PROBLEM LEAA has, of late, placed a great deal of emphasis upon the need for sophisticated planning techniques, evaluation strategies and general accountability in regard to grant-funded projects. Such techniques as crime-oriented planning, comprehensive state-wide planning, victimization surveys, automated data bases, prescriptive evaluation packages, and evaluative research to solidify the criminal justice body of knowledge have all been advocated and funded by LEAA with a view toward accomplishing two basic goals: (a) Determining what implemented activities can reduce crime; and, (b) Professionalizing the skills, attitudes, and endeavors of

those working within the field of criminal justice.

The use of increasingly sophisticated skills in criminal justice and the assessment of the utility of these skills are thus significant ends to be sought by any grant-disbursing criminal justice agency. The accomplishment of these goals should in the long run, promote both public confidence in criminal justice and the control of a priority social problem.

The High Impact Anti-Crime Program, initiated by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration in January 1972, was designed to specifically address these two issues of crime reduction and professionalization. The program, which was to provide some \$20 million to each of eight large cities, had as its central purpose, the reduction of specific crimes across these cities by five percent in two years and twenty percent in five years. Further, the program was intended to demonstrate the utility of the crime-oriented planning process as well as to show how stringent evaluation requirements, methods, and techniques could be applied to the assessment of project performance. Thus, the program focused both on determining what project activities could be linked to reducing crime and what kinds

of professional skills and strategies needed to be employed a) in planning the particular mix of projects to be implemented and b) in measuring the accomplishments of projects once implemented.

As will be pointed out later, Impact program difficulties and slippages clearly show that a lag has occurred between the statement of these ends and the development of the means for achieving them. The value of sophisticated planning and evaluation strategies is unmeasurable if projects fail to become implemented or are so riddled with problems that the provision of some desired services is mere happenstance. The management task in program implementation, as demonstrated by the Impact program, is as important as planning and evaluation tasks and all three should be considered complimentary. Where skills are improved in one, the others require enhancement.

The problem of implementation management is that it has been considered the step-child of planning and evaluation and efforts to improve it have suffered thereby; both resources and priority attention have been lacking. It is, however, the critical link which lends meaning to the other two activities.

It seems reasonable, then, that a more sophisticated focus should be placed on the solution of management problems. To do this it is necessary both to flag key implementation problems experienced by projects and to identify projects experiencing these problems. Effort needs to be expended upon the development of a systematic, regularized implementation status-reporting scheme for pinpointing problems and intervening, in rapid fashion, in the life of projects to minimize the extensive delays and re-tooling such as those encountered under the Impact program. Without such a systematic intervention capability, it is clear that the goals of both crime reduction and professionalization can remain unmet needs.

### 2.0 IMPACT LESSONS LEARNED

As noted earlier, the Impact program represents a case in point. The \$160 million program was originally slated to operate over a short time period (two years) beginning in January, 1972. In looking at the program at its most basic level, some three years later, we ask ourselves several questions:

- (a) Where did the money go?
- (b) Did the projects provide all the services slated to be purchased with the grant funds?
- (c) If they didn't, why not?

With respect to the first question, based upon manually generated reports by the eight Regional Offices, we know that as of 30 September 1974, about \$128.7 million had been awarded (out of the potential \$160 million) across the cities and only about \$52.6 million had been expended across the cities, some 33 percent of the funds potentially available. The program, as a whole, thus experienced severe slippage from its original projected timetable in terms of simple fund flow. (See Figure 1).

The answer to the second question, that of service provision, also demonstrates significant slippage. Obviously, if only a third of the potential funds have been expended after nearly three years on a two-year program, service provision must have experienced a marked reduction over what had been projected. (Portland's adult corrections projects present the most dramatic example of a failure to fully operationalize and provide services having spent less than 1 percent of their grant funds as of the September 1974 date).

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<sup>1</sup>IN MILLIONS

<sup>2</sup>AS OF 30 SEPTEMBER 1974

FIGURE 1 AVAILABLE, AWARDED, AND EXPENDED IMPACT FUNDS ACROSS THE EIGHT CITIES<sup>2</sup> The third question asks why this slippage occurred. Clearly, the time and effort involved in the grant process, in the achievement of crime-oriented planning, implementation, and evaluation requirements, and the tenuousness of short-term programs are linked to the explanation. In terms of time, the average Impact project required some 7.5 months to complete the process from grant application submission to initial provision of services. In addition, the average project submitted its grant application some 12.9 months into the program and began providing services nearly 20-1/2 months after the program was initiated. Thus, nearly 1-2/3 years passed before the average project was in a position to provide services.

Secondly, the tenuous nature of a short-term grant.program, such as Impact, appears to have resulted in rather high turnover rates across the cities. With few guarantees of continued employment, Impact projects experienced high attrition rates, particularly at the professional staff level. In fact, nearly 3 out of 4 projects experienced staff and/or management turnover and 60 percent of the projects encountered professional staff turnover. Thus, it is likely that a good deal of implementation time was spent in simply searching out, hiring, training, and replacing staff, activities that neither expended funds nor provided direct services.

It is also apparent that this slippage in the program raises the issue of the span of management control of federal, state, and local bodies overseeing the implementation of the program. Such management control appears to have been lacking due to a failure, on the one hand, to recognize the need for such control, and an inability, on the other hand, to acquire (on a regular basis) information detailing the operational status of these projects (some 220 in number) and thus providing the substantive basis for ascertaining key problems and delay points in the life of each Impact project. The great

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difficulties encountered by the regional offices in simply generating data on awards and expenditures by grant, the inconsistency in project titles, award dates, award periods, size of awards, and even the number of proejcts existing in each city (for example, city crime analysis teams noted 182 Impact projects while regional offices identified 220 Impact projects) attest to this general weakness within the management of the program.

It would appear that a key set of implementation status monitoring variables needs to be defined to insure that program monitoring is uniformly and regularly carried out and to further insure that project problems can be flagged and addressed within reasonable time frames. Without standardized criteria, little can be consistently and reliably reported by program personnel about projects with respect to such factors as:

- expenditure rates
- levels of staffing
- levels of service provision
- lengths of time required to implement projects
- delay problems and reasons for delay experienced by projects from grant application to termination
- documentation of reasons for project modifications
- accountable personnel relating to the grant
- 🗉 etc.

Without basic information on these characteristics, reported in a consistent fashion on a regular basis, and immediately available for management purposes, many of the weaknesses noted in the implementation of the Impact program are likely to be repeated.

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3.0 REPORT TO THE LEAA: SOME RECOMMENDATIONS Based then on the MITRE experience with the Impact program, the following key requirements appear to exist:

- (a) A system is needed to provide current and consistent implementation status information on each project;
- (b) A mechanism is needed to identify and flag projects which are experiencing implementation problems on a rapid and regular basis;
- (c) Policies and procedures need to be developed to insure swift intervention in the life of a project so identified;
- (d) A management control and operational audit function needs to be developed to make certain that the intervention has indeed occurred and has expedited the implementation of the project.

These needs are not sophisticated requirements but instead reflect the most basic conditions under which individual projects might be effectively monitored for their implementation status. Additionally, such a strategy would provide for cumulative and composite ordering of implementation data so that total programs (for a city or a state, for example, or for a functional area) could be monitored, as well as specific projects with respect to their individual implementation histories. Such grant histories would provide the body of knowledge necessary to LEAA to modify aspects of the grant process which seem to result consistently in delays or related implementation problems.

## 3.1 The Implementation Status Reporting System

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The LEAA grant process operates much like the extension of credit in the business community. Monies or materials are advanced under specified conditions, to be utilized for specific purposes, thereby establishing accounts payable and receivable. Grants, in the same fashion, imply the creation of similar accounts, the only major difference being that what is receivable under a grant is not money

but services. Theoretically, it should be possible to develop an accounting system to determine whether the monies advanced on credit were truly repaid through the provision of some specified service. The grant itself implies a contractual obligation on the part of the grantee to provide such services, under specified conditions and within a specified time limit.

There are several different ways to develop this implementation status reporting system. Two alternative methods will be discussed here.

### Alternative 1

The Implementation Status Reporting System would provide project biographies for each project funded with LEAA grant funds. Virtually all projects specify, within their grant applications, specific milestones for the accomplishment of specific implementation tasks (i.e., acquisition of office space, personnel, etc.). These data would be taken from the grant application and a projected implementation curve would be plotted for each project (as shown in Figure 2 below). In many cases, the grant application forms would have to be modified so that these milestones could be similarly listed across projects from state to state. In addition, a spending curve would also be plotted for each project over the course of the award period.

A control card (as shown in Table I below) would be generated by the state planning agency at the time of grant application submission. This card would provide a unique project number which would remain with the project throughout its life. The number would identify the following:

- (a) Fiscal year funds sought;
- (b) Functional area; and
- (c) Date of submission.

Inputting the data from the control card to the system would result

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PROJECTED IMPLEMENTATION CURVE



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# FIGURE 2 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION CURVES

### TABLE I

### PROJECT CONTROL CARD

PROJECT NUMBER PROJECT TITLE SUBGRANTEE AGENCY ADDRESS PROJECT DIRECTOR PHONE NUMBER

### DATES

- 1. DATE OF SUBMISSION
- 2. DATE OF AWARD
- 3. PROJECT DATE OF START
- 4. PROJECT DATE OF FULL SERVICE PROVISION
- 5. PROJECT DATE OF FULL STAFFING
- 6. PROJECT DATES OF EACH IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITY
- 7. PROJECT DATES OF EVALUATION ACTIVITIES
- 8. SPECIAL CONDITIONS AND DATES OF COMPLIANCE

### FUNDS

1. SIZE OF AWARD - FEDERAL, CASH, IN-KIND AND TYPE OF MONEY

2. QUARTERLY SPENDING ESTIMATES

### EVALUATION

- 1. LIST OF OBJECTIVES
- 2. EVALUATION CHECKLIST DESCRIPTION

in the creation of a file for that project. Immediately after award, the project file would be updated with the following information;

- (a) Award date;
- (b) Size of award federal, state and/or local soft, and hard matches, type of funds;
- (c) Projected staffing and turnover;
- (d) Projected date for initial provision of services;
- (e) Projected date for full provision of services;
- Quarterly spending estimates throughout the award period; (f)
- (g) Project objectives;
- (h) Project activities and projected dates of each;
- (i) Special conditions and dates of compliance with each;
- (j) Evaluation checklist description; and
- (k) Projected dates of implementation activities (i.e., data collection, analysis, interim and final reports).

These projected activities would then be programmed within the project file. Project implementation status reports would be submitted monthly and the actual dates of implementation activities and spending rates would be compared to the projected implementation pace. The comparison process would result in the flagging of projects which are not progressing in a fashion consistent with their anticipated implementation rate. The system would operate much like a billing system where delinquent accounts are identified for some form of intervention. Once the problem is resolved, new implementation and spending curves would be generated to reflect the adjusted status of the project.

### Alternative 2

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The second possible approach revolves around the creation of an implementation status index or rating scale for all grant-funded projects. Initially, baseline data would be collected on projects by functional area and by state on the same variables noted under

Alternative 1. Experience tables would then be generated (by state, by functional area, by type of jurisdiction or by whatever grouping is deemed desirable) reflecting the mean performance of projects on each variable during each month of grant life. These experience tables would establish the performance norms for grant projects.

The experience tables and performance norms would be computerized as well as the standard deviation for each cell in the tables. Project implementation performance during each month of grant life could then be compared for each variable to its performance norms and the magnitude of deviation determined. Those projects which show less implementation performance than the norm would be given a negative score (determined by the number of standard deviation units) and those which reflect better performance than the norm would be given a positive score (again determined by the number of standard deviation units). The total index score would be computed by adding the individual scores for each variable (positive and negative) and obtaining a positive, negative, or zero index score. Those projects scoring negatively would be considered to reflect poor overall implementation performance and those with positive index scores would reflect good overall performance. Those identified as having negative scores would be placed on a delinquent listing and thus flagged for administrative intervention. Additionally, the various sub-scores for each variable would be available to show which areas of critical delinquency exist for delinquent projects.

For example, let us assume that the average adult corrections project has expended 15 percent of its grant funds by the end of the third month since grant award with a standard deviation of 2 percent. Project X has reached the end of its third month and has expended only 11 percent of its funds or a difference of 4 percent from the performance norm. This 4 percent difference would equal two standard deviation units below the norm. Thus, for the variable of spending, the project

would receive a score of -2. Each implementation variable would be similarly scored and a total score computed. If there were enough positive implementation features of the project, they would be sufficient to over-ride the negative spending score and the project would not be flagged as delinquent. If performance on the other variables was poor, then the project would be flagged as delinquent.

3.2 Implementation Problem Identification One of the key elements of each approach is the ability to flag and identify delinquent projects in terms of their implementation status. Projects for which status reports are not forthcoming, or which are underimplemented or unimplemented would be placed within a quarterly delinquent file of those projects requiring administrative intervention.

In effect, tolerance thresholds and parameters would be defined based on the experience tables developed or the projected timetables specified by the project directors. Those projects which, during any phase of the project's life, vary significantly from the tolerance level would automatically be identified and the type of implementation problem reported.

This procedure would permit the establishment of a management control capability over the implementation of LEAA-funded projects. Early problem identification is thus felt to be a critical component of an effective grants management function.

3.3 Delineation of Key Responsibilities The implementation status reporting approaches suggested rely upon the preservation of existing roles and functions for the various partners in the grant process. It is envisioned that projects,

state planning agencies, regional offices and central LEAA would continue to have the type of flexibility and autonomy which allows for creative and individualized program development activities. The only difference which would take place under the suggested status reporting scheme would relate to the greater availability of project-level information and an improved concept of accountability for timely and effective project implementation.

It is envisioned that projects would be responsible for reporting on the pace of their implementation activities to the SPA's through the use of a monthly implementation status reporting form. The SPA's would be responsible for checking these forms to make certain that they are correctly and fully completed. The SPA could duplicate the form for their own monitoring and evaluation purposes, if desired. Within ten days of receipt, the SPA's would forward the original report form to the RO. The RO would be the storehouse of these source documents and could perform whatever monitoring and evaluation analyses they desired on individual projects or total programs (e.g., Impact) representing aggregations of projects.

The report forms would be duplicated by the RO and forwarded to the LEAA data center for input to the Implementation Status Reporting System. It is felt that, in this regard, the LEAA data center would act as a service bureau for the RO's and SPA's - producing the delinquent project listing for each RO and SPA. The delinquent project listing would be forwarded to each RO and SPA on a quarterly basis for action.

LEAA headquarters would be responsible for maintaining several audit teams. These teams would consist of programmatic and fiscal auditors, and would be responsible for conducting random operational audits of projects, as well as audits of any projects which appear on the delinquent project listing three times within any one year. The data center would be responsible for insuring that project listings were forwarded to the audit teams after projects surpass this threshold.

The data center would also be responsible for generating standard management and fiscal reports as determined to be necessary for LEAA central or RO personnel. For example, award and spending activities, staffing levels, etc. could be generated across states and regions for purposes of examining total program status.

3.4 Implementation Problem Intervention

Once the project-specific implementation problems are identified, the need for swift administrative intervention is established. The LEAA, in conjunction with the SPA's would need to establish policies and procedures for conducting such interventions. In most cases, however, it is expected that the SPA would have initial responsibility for insuring the timely implementation of projects. The LEAA data center would provide the SPA, on a quarterly basis, with a listing of delinquent projects and the specific implementation biographies of those projects. Procedures could be established for prioritizing the types of problems experienced by each project (e.g., beyond the project's control versus result of project inaction, etc.). Those projects which failed to become implemented as a result of external causes would, for example, demand a different type of intervention than would projects which had experienced internal problems. For each project placed on the delinquent list, a plan for alleviating the problem would be developed by the SPA monitors within a specific time period and forwarded to the RO. All project report forms and plans of action would then be subject to LEAA operational audits.

Under Alternative 1, the plan of action would include a listing of new implementation benchmarks and expenditure projections. These anticipated implementation dates would then be added to the project biographies on file and an adjusted time schedule would be created. Future implementation status reports from projects would be compared to the adjusted schedule. Under Alternative 2, projects would file a new schedule of activities which would be monitored by the SPA and RO in the same fashion as noted under Alternative 1.

### 3.5 Operational Audits

The operational audit function, as noted earlier, would serve two purposes. Firstly, it would provide for random audits by LEAA central of the general accuracy of information submitted by projects. Secondly, it would serve as an additional intervention source for projects experiencing implementation difficulties. With respect to the latter type of audit, projects would be targeted for audit which appear to be behind the desired implementation pace for three fiscal quarters within any grant year. The audits would consist of both programmatic and fiscal review in an attempt to isolate the range of problems experienced by the project. In some cases, the audit team would recommend to the SPA and RO that the project be aborted, but it is envisioned that the audit team's primary responsibility would be to attempt to get the project back on track. The audit team's authority would simply be to prepare a recommendation and audit report for SPA and/or RO action. Report findings would also be filed with appropriate LEAA central personnel (such as the Director of the Office of Regional Operations).

### 3.6 Brief Overview of the Implementation Status Reporting System

After grant application submission, the RO notifies LEAA central of new project applications via transmission of information contained on the project control card. Two files are then created, the biography file (master file) and the current grants information file. After award, additional information is placed on the project control card and forwarded to the LEAA data center for inclusion in the two files. This process is depicted in Figure 3 below.

As shown in Figure 4, each succeeding month, thereafter, projects will fill out a 30-day report reflecting project implementation performance during the month. This form would be forwarded to the SPA for checking and completion of missing items. The monthly project data form would then be sent to the RO for duplication and storage. A duplicate of the form would then be forwarded to the LEAA data center and input to both existing files, the biography and implementation status reporting files. The biography file would merely contain a dated entry of all the information contained on the project data form. The implementation status reporting file would undertake a comparison of the reported data to either the projected implementation curve for the project or the experience tables, depending upon which method is selected. Once the comparison is completed, numerous reports could be generated describing the implementation of grant projects during the month (i.e., total funds expended by state or region, awards, staffing, service provision, etc.). Most important, however, would be the production of a delinquent projects listing based upon the comparisons performed. This report would be generated quarterly.

The delinquent project listings would be broken out by regional office and by state. Each RO and SPA would receive a listing of delinquent projects within each state or within the region. LEAA central would have the capability to overview the performance of projects within and/or across states and regions and functional areas. In addition, new project data forms would automatically be addressed and forwarded to projects for the succeeding monthly update containing both year to date (YTD) information on project performance and the



**REPORTING SYSTEM** 

TO DATE)

AUDIT TEAM

STORAGE/

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FIGURE 4



--- OPTIONAL FEATURES

**REPORT FLOW WITHIN THE IMPLEMENTATION STATUS** 

requested items for updating. A delinquent listing would also be forwarded to the audit team after a project reaches its third delinquency.

The system proposed would provide the capability to overview both at general and at specific levels, the implementation performance of projects. The types of reports produced would clearly be linked to the management needs of RO and SPA staff concerned with project monitoring as well as those of LEAA central personnel.

### 3.7 Expediting the Implementation Process

The implementation problem areas documented by the system and the mechanism suggested for alleviating the problems form the critical components of the management process. Clearly, in light of the Impact experience, grants need to be examined with respect to a variety of implementation variables on a regular basis. The system should provide status information by project on such key items as:

- (a) Funding and spending;
- (b) Staffing;
- (c) Provision of services; and
- (d) Implementation activities.

Without such information, the management oversight function remains weak and haphazard. Without such information, significant problem areas demanding administrative involvement and resolution cannot be identified. Finally, without such a system, the operational life of grant-funded projects cannot be charted, implementation standards cannot be set, and the effects of management interventions cannot be assessed.

4.0 THE NEED FOR IMPLEMENTATION STATUS ASSESSMENT

As pointed out in the beginning of this paper, insufficient attention has been devoted to those issues associated with the implementation activities of programs and projects. This, in turn, has been at least partially responsible for the failure to provide full management overview of the project-level developmental process. As seen in the Impact program, this lack of management overview and control made it impossible to intervene usefully and rapidly toward problem-solution and expedited project implementation.

What is needed, then, is a system to apply a higher level of precision and control to the management of grant-funded projects. In essence, projects would be viewed as individual accounts with regularized monitoring of each account. Those projects which have fallen behind in achieving implementation status would be identified as delinquent and the specific area or activity in a delinquent status would be described. This assessment function would then provide the substantive basis for administrative intervention in the operation of the project at an early enough stage in the project's life to minimize slippage.

It is clear from the Impact experience that there is a need for improved administrative decision-making in the context of the grant process. Without a better implementation status reporting system, the necessary capability will be difficult to achieve, and the dual objectives of crime reduction and professionalization will continue to remain elusive due to the underdevelopment of the management function and the consequent gaps in management control of project-level implementation monitoring.

