

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM EVALUATION CAPABILITY BUILDING:
A SYSTEM-WIDE APPLICATION AT THE COUNTY LEVEL

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I. INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The lot of the criminal justice planner is not a happy one, particularly if he is operating at the county or municipal level where it is difficult to justify his existence simply by devoting his time to the creation of a bureaucracy for the administration of federal funds. Chief executives, local legislators, and members of the public who pay his salary regularly confront him with questions he cannot answer.

The local planner is no better prepared to accurately predict who will commit crimes than was Lombroso. He is unable to state accurately the number of various types of offenders (e.g., first offenders, violent offenders) who are processed through various points in the criminal justice system. Nor is he able to accurately forecast the number of individuals who will be reprocessed by the local criminal justice system given what the system "does" to these offenders (e.g., will the rearrest rate or the reincarceration rate be more on the order of 25% or 75%). He cannot accurately predict the number of offenders eligible for and willing to participate in funded or fundable programs (e.g., he cannot assure questioners that a diversion program will not simply maintain individuals in the criminal justice system who would normally have been shuttled out of the system). Worst of all, in a time of economic crunch, he is unable to accurately estimate the relative monetary and social costs of different methods of responding to offenders.

The inability to answer such questions means that the local planner has difficulty in influencing the criminal justice philosophy of his locality. His success in suggesting and participating in the

enforcement of standards and goals for the criminal justice system and in making recommendations about the development, implementation and institutionalization of criminal justice programming is limited by his lack of knowledge. In fact, to the degree that the local planner can provide neither information nor knowledge about his local criminal justice system or about criminal justice in general, he has little to contribute over and above his own political clout and charisma.

The inability of local planners to answer questions about the operations of the criminal justice system and to recommend authoritatively changes and additions which will improve its operations is rather astonishing. In the past decade, more programs have been monitored, audited, performance evaluated, intensively evaluated and judged exemplary than at any other point in American criminal justice history. In addition, numerous information systems of all levels of complexity, computerization and contents have become operational. In spite of all the trappings of scientific information gathering and data collecting there has been an astonishing lack of knowledge accumulation.

II. THE RESPONSE AND ITS RATIONALE

Having experienced the problems associated with the absence of a sound knowledge base, the lack of cost effectiveness of the project by project approach, the utilization of experimental research which provides no definitive answers concerning the system wide cost effectiveness of specific projects, Onondaga County has decided to try a different approach. The County has decided to attempt to implement steps which will, over time, lead to the development of a reliable and valid knowledge base which will describe the work load of the local criminal justice system

and the system's reprocessing rate (i.e., how many of those processed by the system return to any part of the system). It is believed that this descriptive data base can provide increasingly (over time) accurate baseline data against which system performance can be compared when change is introduced.

This response is based upon the willingness to engage in certain heresies which include:

- * The assumption that criminal justice activities constitute a natural system and the belief that to characterize the inter-relations of these activities as a non-system is to underestimate the knowledge, effort and activities required to alter current activities and outcomes;
- * The belief that a "project by project" approach to solving criminal justice problems and evaluating the outcomes of criminal justice projects and programs does not constitute a reliable or valid source of information for the construction of a criminal justice knowledge base, particularly when the cost of such an approach is taken into consideration;
- * The idea that the implementation of classical experimental designs may be premature at our current level of knowledge about the operation of the criminal justice system;
- * The assumption that monitoring compliance to project contracts, drawn without full knowledge of system operations, is not the be-all and end-all of criminal justice planning.

Each one of these assumptions could be discussed in a separate paper. Since it is the aim here to suggest an alternative approach to that currently in vogue, it is sufficient to note several justifications for these assumptions.

For example, unless it is assumed that criminal justice operations constitute a system, actions taken at various points (e.g., at point of sentencing) will not be reviewed in terms of their potential functional or dysfunctional impacts upon operations at earlier or later points (e.g., victim willingness to cooperate with the police, workloads of probation officers). Unless the project by project approach is

broached and research made cumulative, more information will be collected about project idiosyncrasies, ex post facto speculations explaining project outcomes will abound, and generally anecdotal project details will be circulated with the generation of virtually no reliable and valid information about what could be expected if similar projects were implemented in other settings.

Unless more is known about system operations, rigorous experimental control of variables thought to have explanatory power (e.g., age, sex, social status) may simply disrupt "normal" system operations and therefore, experimental and control group comparisons will be made in artificial, non-replicable environments, or under conditions where the experimental and control group allocation procedures have broken down as a result of "normal" system operations.

Unless monitoring is based upon goal achievement rather than adherence to contract specifications, projects may be funded which are doomed to failure because the contractors learn after the contract is drawn that the project implementation plan or the goals set were inappropriate. Monitoring for fiscal accountability is of course an absolute necessity. However, the position taken here is that monitoring should focus on the degree to which project activities contribute to goal achievement rather than how closely they parallel contract specifications. Contract compliance is not always associated with goal achievement.

III. THE ONONDAGA COUNTY CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM SETTING.

The Onondaga County Criminal Justice Planning and Coordination Unit is charged with planning, administering, monitoring and evaluating LEAA projects within the County along with the Crime Control Coordinators of the City of Syracuse and the Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board. In addition, the Unit serves as policy staff to the Deputy County Administrator for Human Services. Onondaga County has a population of about 500,000 which includes the City of Syracuse. In FY 1976 more than \$23.7 million in locally budgeted money was expended on the criminal justice system. LEAA provided program funds totaling \$1.2 million.

In conjunction with its responsibilities, the Coordination Unit was asked to deal with an impending crisis surrounding the Onondaga County Correction Facility in 1975. The County Correctional Facility was built in the mid-nineteenth century and presented a number of serious problems to the County due to its advanced age. The County, faced with a number of difficult choices concerning the future structure of the local corrections system, found that an adequate knowledge base did not exist to answer several basic questions:

- * What alternatives to constructing a new correctional facility were available to the County?
- * What was the feasibility, cost, and potential impact of each of the alternatives?
- * How would the construction of a new facility influence criminal justice system activities at different points throughout the system?

The realization that the County lacked an adequate knowledge base led to the adoption of the evaluation approach discussed in this paper.¹

IV. IMPLEMENTING THE EVALUATION RESPONSE

This approach constitutes an evaluation framework. This framework calls for the establishment of base rates against which project outcomes can be compared and decisions made as to whether a project is continued or discontinued. These decisions will be made within a political economic context which defines the risk the decision maker is willing to take of rejecting successful and unsuccessful projects.

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1. In 1975, the Unit undertook a corrections study which made an initial attempt to both assemble baseline data on the flow and timing of alleged and convicted offenders through the CJS and to classify them according to their criminal risk. In addition, the corrections study proposed a CJS philosophy for the County and sought the development of policies which would avoid entanglement in the causes of criminal behavior, yet would allow the prescription of an operational focus for potentially modifying those CJS relationships contributing to criminal behavior, or using scarce public resources in unnecessary, redundant, or unjust and inhumane ways. The general philosophy emerging from the study was built around one goal--PUBLIC PROTECTION which could be met by:
(1) Reducing the number of persons who are either under the jurisdiction or have been released from the CJS who require reprocessing (e.g., rearrest, re-trial); (2) Protecting alleged and convicted offenders from unjust or inhumane experiences; and
(3) Assuring that CJS activities aimed at the above policies are administered at the lowest possible cost.

In implementing this framework, the following steps must be taken:

1. Base rates must be constructed for several time periods; past and present;
2. Hypotheses stating the expected relationship between selected base rates and project activities (of projects selected for evaluation) should be constructed;
3. A procedure for regularly collecting data concerning project activities should be developed and a procedure for feeding back information concerning periodic testing of the hypotheses developed in two (2) above to project personnel and decision makers should be instituted. The information fed back should have implications for improving project operations.
4. A decision making schedule should be established which would include specific dates for determining whether, when and under what conditions a project will be refunded.

In selecting base rates the following criteria should be employed:

- * They should reflect system wide and specific agency workloads and operations;
- * They should describe caseflow from one agency to another;
- * They should reflect agency outcomes;
- * They should be related to system costs;
- * They should be constructed of data that is readily available on a regular basis (e.g., monthly) and for some period of time in the past; and
- * The base rates should be free to vary (i.e., certain rates such as number of personnel may be constrained by contracts, seniority rules, etc).

In general, the base rates selected should be inexpensive to gather and representative of as many points and operations in the criminal justice system as possible. In addition, base rates selected for testing hypotheses about project outcomes should be subject to combination into operationally meaningful ratios which could be posited to vary in systematic and pre-

dictable directions if desired changes in criminal justice operations occur. The advantage of carefully selected ratios is that they may lead to further hypotheses which could explain project outcomes. For example, if it is postulated that a pre-trial release program is expected to reduce the ratio of detained to arrested, it will be possible to determine whether a disproportionate and possibly unexpected increase in arrests has led to the reported decline in the ratio or whether the decline is a result of reduction in the number detained or some combination of these two.

The aim should be to develop a number of interrelated hypotheses. These hypotheses should relate as many base rates as possible to a variety of project activities. The more interrelated hypotheses subject to test, the greater the opportunity to explain project success or failure.

The development and testing of sets of interrelated hypotheses provides a gross method for evaluation of project outcome. This approach may lead to decisions to terminate programs which more refined analyses might fail to reject. That is, application of experimental research methods which control for history, maturation, instability of measurement and other threats to the validity of information and knowledge might indicate project success, other things being equal. However, it is contended here that rejection of a project that works is less problematic in a time of fiscal crisis combined with rising crime rates than in periods of fiscal prosperity and declining or rising rates.

In times of fiscal crisis, no policy maker can afford to fail to reject unsuccessful programs even if the cost of assuring the rejection of failing programs leads to the demise of programs which would be found to be successful if more controlled research were employed in decision

making. Of course, as more knowledge about system operations is obtained, particularly concerning the interrelationships of work load figures and system outcomes, decision makers will be in a better position to alter the risks they are willing to take in rejecting successful or unsuccessful projects.

V. SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION APPROACH

In Onondaga County, the initial scope of our evaluation effort was limited to five LEAA funded projects. However, the ultimate aim was to establish an evaluation capability which could eventually handle all major criminal justice activities within the County. Our approach was selected for its flexibility and potential for system-wide application. Budgetary constraints kept the size of the initial evaluation effort to a minimum. The first year grant for the evaluation project was only \$20,000, less than 3% of total LEAA project funding.

The underlying premise of the evaluation effort is that criminal justice system activities are intervention efforts directed toward having intended societal impact. The ultimate goal of evaluation is to assure, to the maximum extent possible, that overall system performance is in accordance with the County's desire for "community protection". Given this, projects or intervention strategies can be viewed as series of successive social intervention hypotheses.¹ For example, if program resources are applied and managed efficiently, then criminal cases will be processed in an expected manner. And if processing occurs as expected, then certain system-wide changes will potentially occur. These hypotheses can be articulated during program planning, monitored during program implementation, and assessed for accuracy and relevance during evaluation.

1. For a practical application of this approach see Jack Rothman, Planning and Organizing for Social Change: Action Principles from Social Science Research, New York: Columbia University Press, 1974

Another premise is that evaluation, to be worthwhile, must be based on a systems approach.¹ Conceptually, the systems approach forces program evaluators to assure that different levels of objectives and strategies for achieving objectives have been specified before the evaluation stage. It has the advantage of being flexible enough to accommodate existing economic, social, and political factors while it presents ideas in relatively precise forms. In this manner it enhances the opportunities for communication and cooperation among legislative, administrative, and private groups, and

1. The "systems approach" focuses on the performance of various actors which share a high-degree of sustained interaction. For example, the Criminal Justice System (CJS) is a collection of crime control agencies that society has developed to enforce the penal sanctions of its criminal law. Individuals who demonstrate criminal behavior which threatens the general security must be restrained, and the controls that government employs to apprehend, inhibit, and reduce crime are activities of the system. These activities include the processes of: law enforcement, prosecution, defense, adjudication, containment, punishment and rehabilitation. The performance of the various agencies and the relationships between these agencies both have a profound influence on the degree of CJS success in restraining criminal behavior. In addition, other phenomenon outside the boundaries of the system impact on criminal behavior. Economic, political, social psychological, physical and other conditions undoubtedly affect both the nature and rate of crime in any locality. Taking a systems approach to the CJS focuses attention upon: interactions among operating CJS agencies and programs, the impact of these interactions upon criminal behavior, and the implications to both for the application of system-wide resources to promote community protection. For references on the system approach as it applies to the CJS see J. Van Gigch, Applied General Systems Theory, 1974 and R. Ackoff, Redesigning the Future: A Systems Approach to Societal Problems, Wiley-Interscience, 1974.

provides an analytical framework within which dialogue can occur. In summary, the systems approach focuses limited time and resources on critical aspects of goal-formulation, problem definition, action alternatives and the design of social change. It can help to limit uncertainty and act as a catalyst for a process of social learning as evaluation results emerge.

Given these premises, the primary objective of our evaluation approach is to allow an assessment of whether criminal justice program activities are doing what they were supposed to do as specified in the grant awards or other funding documents, and also whether what they are doing is worth doing. In other words, evaluation should provide operational and policy personnel with timely and appropriate information on whether projects "work" and whether they should be given "continuation priority" in light of scarce monetary resources.

This objective stresses our view that evaluation is a phase of the policy process which follows, but is nonetheless integrally linked to analysis, planning, and implementation.¹ Unless this is borne in mind, evaluation may be premature due to inadequate base-line data. Thus, an understanding of the pre-existing situation is required before accurate assessments of program impact can be made.²

1. A number of applied general systems techniques such as system flow models, the means-ends technique, operational support/scheduling formats linking the various policy phases are becoming popular. For a description of some techniques see J.P. Van Gigch, Applied General Systems Theory, Harper & Row, 1974.
2. For an explanation of this point see Judith Wilks and Robert Martinson, "The Search for Knowledge in Criminal Justice", Evaluation, 3: 1-2/1976, pp 149-154.

After the rationale for the County's evaluation approach was agreed upon, we began to implement the general evaluation steps referred to earlier. First, we identified system-wide base-rates and linked these to project indicators via a number of major intervention hypotheses. (An illustration of tentative base-rates, indicators, and hypotheses for the County's five LEAA funded projects is presented in TABLE 1.) Following that, we devised a standard project evaluation framework which can be used to summarize project design and facilitate data collection and processing.¹ This framework, with definitions, is presented in TABLE 2. The last task is to establish a decision making schedule based on when evaluation information is required to influence project continuation or termination. The type of information required at this stage may or may not require in-depth impact assessments.²

1. This technique was adapted from the logical framework matrix which the U.S. Agency for International Development uses to design and evaluate its program. See Leon Rosenberg and Molly Hageboeck, "Systems Approaches to Technical Cooperation Projects--The Logical Framework", International Development Review, 15 (June 1973). For an application of this framework in a criminal justice setting see G. Honadle and M. Ingle, "Probation Outreach Evaluation Design", Syracuse: Onondaga County Probation Department, December, 1975.
2. A comprehensive discussion of methodological considerations for conditioning impact assessments is found in H.W. Riecken and R. F. Boruch, Social Experimentation: A Method for Planning and Evaluation Social Experimentation, Academic Press, 1974. While experimental and quasi-experimental techniques are appropriate for fine-tuning a program when a large knowledge base already exists, we feel that application of these techniques is premature when so little is known of system-wide operations and relationships. Thus, we do not stress the use of this technique given the circumstances confronting most local government units at this time.

As for evaluation staffing and management, an early decision was made to integrate evaluation activities into the planning and monitoring role of the County Criminal Justice Planning and Coordinating Unit. It was felt that our evaluation approach was straightforward, and that every staff member could readily comprehend and apply it to one or more LEAA pilot evaluation projects. To facilitate learning and the development of an in-house evaluation capability, all staff became members of the evaluation team and were required to attend work sessions. In addition to project monitoring which involves collecting project indicators, each staff member was assigned responsibility for collecting some portion of the system information discussed earlier. The evaluation consultants assigned to the project only worked on a part-time basis.

By following this approach it was possible to gradually develop in-house evaluation capability without disrupting on-going operations or increasing staff size. Once the evaluation system is in place, permanent staff members should be able to expand the number and types of projects they can effectively evaluate with relative ease.

VI. CONCLUSION

The evaluation approach described here has widespread applicability for other units of local government. Experience to date demonstrates that system oriented evaluation is politically feasible, is useful to policy makers, program managers and planners, and perhaps most importantly can be rather quickly installed without major personnel and funding disruptions. The approach has the following positive features:

- * It provides baseline data, collected periodically, which can be used in project planning and design (e.g., establishment of reasonable goals, identification of relevant system events which may influence project implementation and operation). This same baseline data can be used to assess project impact at a later date.

- * The approach provides information necessary for making decisions to terminate failing programs, for redesigning and functioning partially successful programs, or continuing or expanding successful programs.
- * The approach does not preclude the application of conventional project specific evaluation approaches, and in fact, may assist in determining the point at which controlled experimentation may be most useful in testing the effectiveness of specifically identified project operations. In fact, the application of this approach may assist decision makers to avoid premature, often scantily planned "black box" experimentation which does not effectively contribute to building a knowledge base.
- * The use of existing personnel to carry out a new function reduces evaluation costs.

Of course, this approach is not without problems which will require constant attention. For example, most operational personnel take a very narrow and dim view of evaluation efforts. The approach suggested here is no exception. Second, as pointed out in the introduction, data accurately describing various system operations and outcomes is not always readily available. Thus, considerable effort must be devoted to systematizing and regularizing data collection before the approach introduced here can be made fully operational.

In conclusion, the feasibility of this evaluation approach will ultimately depend upon local conditions such as the stage(s) of Criminal Justice System program/project development, political/financial support for specific Criminal Justice System activities, and the demand for evaluative research results by the local government executive and legislative branches. Yet, in most situations an approach such as this would appear to be practical and worthwhile.



ONONDAGA COUNTY PILOT EVALUATION PROJECT:
 SYSTEM-WIDE IMPACT INDICATORS
 SERVICE VARIABLE(S) AND MAJOR INTERVENTION HYPOTHESES

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PROJECT NAME	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	SYSTEM INDICATORS	PROJECT INDICATORS (COLLECTED PERIODICALLY)	MAJOR INTERVENTION HYPOTHESES
<p>I. Pre-Trial Assessment and Supervised Release Project</p>	<p>The project will develop and use uniform criteria for making recommendations regarding eligibility for release for all detainees.</p>	<p>a. Number of arrestees who are detained. b. Number of pre-trial releasees who are eventually placed on probation.</p>	<p>a. Number of arrestees subject to assessment. b. Number of arrestees released in accordance with uniform criteria.</p>	<p>a. If arrestees are assessed using uniform criteria then the number of arrestees who are detained will decrease.</p>
<p>II. Victim-Witness Assistance Center</p>	<p>This project makes the CJS more responsive to the needs of victims of and witnesses of crime by: (1) integrating services through the District Attorney's Office; (2) providing crisis support to rape and sexual abuse victims through a Rape Crisis Center; and (3) improving prosecution screening and aserting victims/witnesses of case status.</p>	<p>a. Number of cases dismissed due to inappropriate charges. b. Number and quality of rape complaints. c. Number of court delays due to case postponement.</p>	<p>a. Number of cases screened in which charges are reduced. b. Number of rape victims contacted and referred. c. Number of witnesses notified of case times and dates.</p>	<p>a. If cases are screened, then number of dismissals due to inappropriate charges will decrease. b. If rape victims are contacted and referred, then the number and quality of rape complaints will increase. c. If witness case notification is timely and coordinated, then court delays will decrease.</p>

PROJECT NAME	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	SYSTEM INDICATORS	PROJECT INDICATORS (COLLECTED PERIODICALLY)	MAJOR INTERVENTION HYPOTHESES
III. Family Crisis Intervention-Deinstitutionalization of PINS	The project provides immediate and intensive crisis intervention to youths and their families including followup counseling and referrals to community agencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Number of PINS in pre-adjudicatory detention facility. b. Ratio of PINS to delinquency cases. c. Reappearance rate of PINS and delinquents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Timely intensive crisis intervention services to youths and their families indicated by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.) Number of PINS and delinquents served. 2.) Number of staff contacts with youths and their parents. 3.) Types and numbers of case dispositions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. If timely intervention services are provided to PINS and their families, then fewer children will be detained. b. If timely intervention occurs the ratio of PINS to delinquency cases will decline.
IV. Services Referral Unit 266	The project performs needs assessment on alleged and convicted offenders and refers clients to appropriate community agencies for services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. System reprocessing rates b. Number of absconsions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Number of needs assessments conducted and referrals made on basis of assessment. b. Number of needs identified which cannot be met by available referral sources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. If referrals are made to community service agencies then the number of persons reprocessed will decrease. b. The greater the number of needs that cannot be met community services the greater the number of absconsions.
V. Probation Outreach Project	This project uses a decentralized team management approach and para-professional staff to provide probation services in a high crime target area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Number of probationers reapprehended. b. Number of juveniles reprocessed by system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Number of probation contacts and referrals. b. Number provided with J.D. and PINS intake services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. If probation contacts and referrals for high risk clientele are community based, then number of probationers reapprehended will decrease b. If intake services are more responsive to client needs then proportion of J.D.'s and PINS will decrease.

TABLE 2

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROJECTS

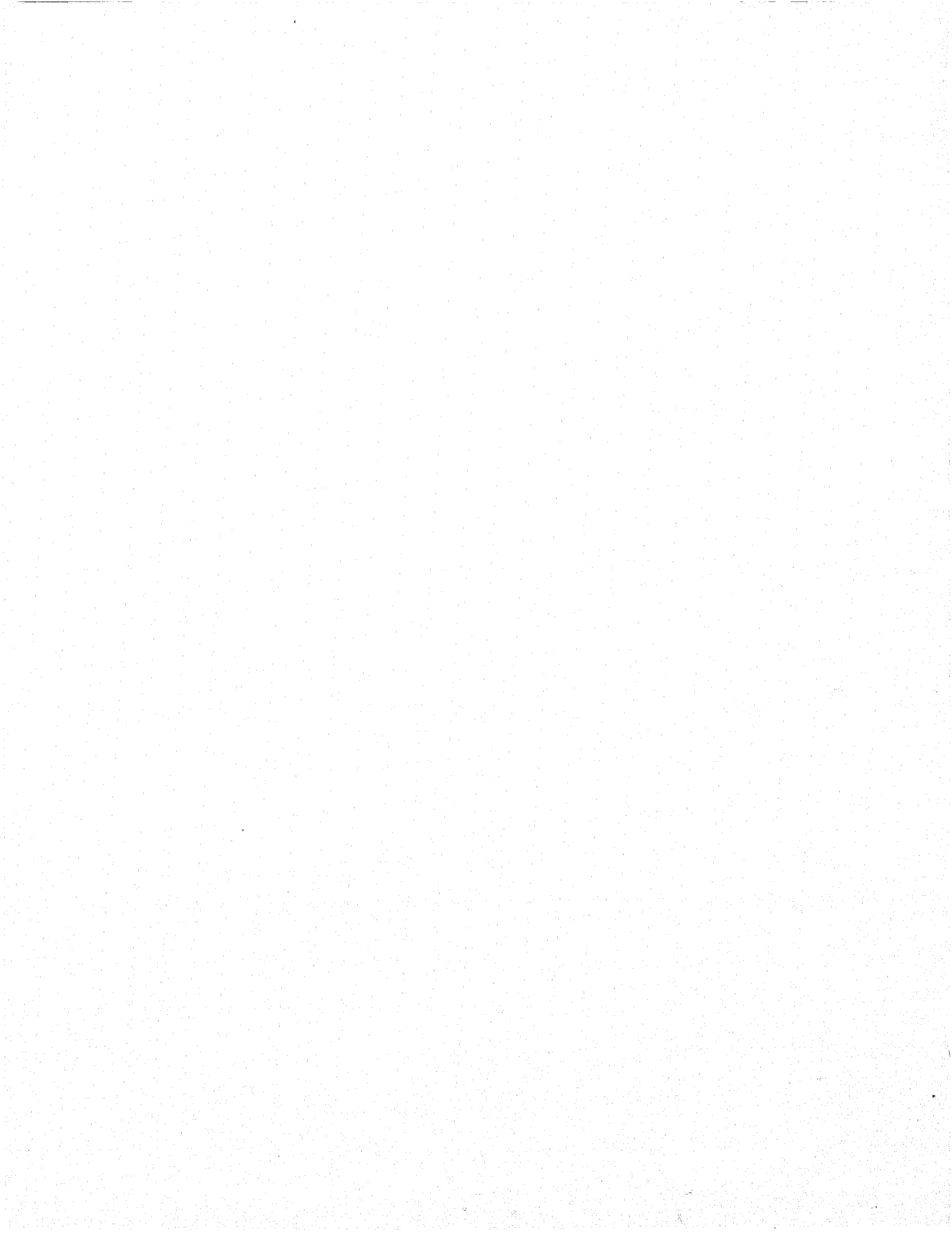
NARRATIVE	INDICATORS	MEANS OF DATA COLLECTION & MONITORING	CONDITIONS OR ASSUMPTIONS
<p><u>System-Wide Outcomes:</u> Description of the reason for the project; the desired CJS end toward which the project efforts are directed.</p>	<p><u>Measures of Outcome:</u> Itemized indicators of system-wide impact whose condition can be monitored and assessed.</p>	<p>Information sources, methods of data collection and work schedule.</p>	<p>Critical conditions within the CJS, over which the project team, has little control, which must be satisfied for the project activities to contribute to system-wide outcomes.</p>
<p><u>Project Activity Objectives.</u> Description of that which is expected to be achieved if the project is completed successfully and on time.</p>	<p><u>End of Project Status:</u> Itemized indicators which indicate the project activity objectives have been achieved.</p>	<p>Information sources, methods of data collection and work schedule.</p>	
<p><u>Resource Inputs:</u> Description of the resources (personnel, materials, budget) for the project activity.</p>	<p><u>Schedule/Work Standards:</u> Itemized resource levels and managerial criteria for monitoring day-by-day activities.</p>	<p>Information sources, methods of data collection and work schedule.</p>	<p>Critical conditions within the project and its immediate environment which must be satisfied in order for the project activities to be accomplished on time.</p>

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ABSTRACT

This report presents the findings of an extensive investigation of the relationship between geographic crime displacement and the High Impact Anti-Crime Program in the City of St. Louis during 1972 and 1973. Crime and arrest data were collected for the City of St. Louis plus 93 municipalities and unincorporated areas of St. Louis County to test empirically the major components of a hypothetical crime displacement scenario.

Crime data collected for several years before and for two years after the beginning of the Impact Program indicates that no substantial decrease in City-wide crime occurred in St. Louis during the first two years of the Impact Program. Significant crime increases were recorded in St. Louis County during both 1972 and 1973.



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